
INVESTIGATING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES



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About Us

Information for Development Trust (IDT) was registered as a non-profit organisation in 2015. It seeks to enhance transparency and accountability in private and public sector governance. It does that by promoting access to relevant information of public interest mainly by supporting the media to produce investigative journalistic content and conducting related research. In addition, IDT supports citizen advocacy around private-public accountability in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa. Our organisation also conducts research on investigative journalism, media freedom, corruption and public accountability.

Our Vision

A world whereby the public is informed on issues relating to governance, transparency and accountability in the private and public sectors.

Our Mission

To promote and advocate for transparency and accountability in public-private sector governance through the production of investigative content, undertaking evidence-based research and convening of citizen dialogues.

Our Values

Our organisation adheres to the following core values

- Integrity
- Accountability
- Professionalism
- Respect for diversity

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Foreword



I would like to heartily welcome you to this compendium of investigative stories that we have decided to run under the title, *“Investigating Social Accountability in Marginalised Communities”*.

This newsletter, which we hope you will enjoy just as much we are doing, is an electronic “spaza”, so to speak, that brings together a whopping 14 investigative stories produced by mostly young female and male Zimbabwean journalists working in and on seven out of the country’s 10 provinces and for different media houses. This translates, generally, to 70 percent investigative coverage of Zimbabwe.

That geographical spread was deliberate. The main focus of these investigations that were supported by Information for Development Trust (IDT) was the largely underreported, neglected and mostly voiceless marginalised communities, with the ultimate aim of unlocking hyper-local development through the production and wide sharing of credible, fact-checked and verifiable information relating to their vulnerabilities. Now, you can’t effectively report on these vulnerable communities from the comfort of an urban office. You need to be grounded, as it were, and the best way to do that is to partner with capable, keen and curious journalists who are willing to immerse themselves in such neglected communities.

The newsletter covers a whole gamut of themes, including: land ownership; human rights; democracy; environmental rights; socio-economic rights; health and service delivery. But all these themes are underpinned by an overarching subject—public accountability. In other words, the investigations that we carry in this aggregation all seek to hold power to account, and there is no better way of enhancing local development than that.

It is worthwhile noting, by the way, that all the stories have already been published elsewhere—be it on radio, on-

line platforms, television, mainstream print media or social media. That means that you may already be familiar with, at least, some of them. There is a good reason, though, to bring the stories under one folder. Through the newsletter, we are creating a repository that will jog memories, provide some relatively comprehensive library on investigative journalism focusing on local communities and act as a good reference for scholarly and other forms of research.

It must also provide inspiration to established and upcoming investigative journalists. This last wish on the list is particularly important. As you will notice, more than half of the stories produced encouraging impact that ranges from forcing public office holders to adopt corrective action, through recognition in terms of awards to participating journalists to palpable change within communities.

It is my hope—and that of IDT—that the Zimbabwean media will increase its keenness on investigatively reporting on marginalised communities, while relevant civil society must also step up to play an active role in the generation of credible information necessary to inform and influence desirable interventions so as to make local development a long-lasting reality.

Lastly, I would like to extend IDT’s sincere gratitude to International Media Support (IMS) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) for believing in us and offering us much-valued funding over the years, including the grant under which this newsletter was produced. IDT also cherishes the partnerships with the respective journalists, mentors, media houses and civil society organisations that it has been working with.

Tawanda Majoni
Director, IDT

Chinese cement manufacturer killing Redcliff residents slowly



BY BRENNA MATENDERE

AIR pollution caused by a Chinese cement manufacturer operating close to a residential area in the Midlands town of Redcliff could have contributed to the death of several persons due to silicosis.

The company, Livetouch (Pvt) Ltd, through its subsidiary Diamond Cement, is emitting huge amounts of dust that contain silica, which is common in sand, quartz and other types of rock.

Silicosis is a type of pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease caused by inhaling tiny bits of silica. Kwekwe General Hospital medical superintendent Dr Patricia Mapanda in March revealed that 20 people had succumbed to silicosis while some patients were hospitalised at the institution. Some of the victims are from Redcliff.

Investigations with support from Information for Development Trust (IDT) have established that residents of Stoneclair Park in Redcliff and Diamond Cement as well as nearby SteelMakers workers are suffering acute exposure to the harmful emissions.

A Kwekwe-based community-based organisation told *The NewsHawks* that the company's operations have directly led to deaths. The one identified fatality, a 32-yearold former employee of SteelMakers Aaron Tatenda Charinya, who died of silicosis early this year.

His family believes dust emissions from Diamond Cement

caused the silicosis. Besides SteelMakers, another company in the vicinity of Livetouch is called ParkStar while a bit distant further there is ZimBeef. There is also a preschool near the Livetouch plant. In addition, the pollution also goes towards Ridgeway, which is a farming area to the North of Livetouch.

Livetouch's directors are Dongning Wang and Feng Wang.

The company has a subsidiary, Diamond Cement, located at number 2713, Old Steelworks Road, Redcliff.

Redcliff Municipality allocated residential stands to Stoneclair Construction (Pvt) Ltd and allowed the development of a suburb registered as Grasslands Estate Extension High-Density Residential.

The development started in 2015. The area is commonly known as Stoneclair Park.

The local authority however also allocated Livetouch Investments land for the cement manufacturing plant in the same residential area.

An environmental impact assessment (EIA) done in 2016 said the company could minimise harm of its operations on the community.

An EIA is a tool used to assess the significant effects of a project or development proposal on the environment.

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EIAs make sure that project decision makers think about the likely effects on the environment at the earliest possible time and aim to avoid, reduce or offset those effects.

This ensures that proposals are understood properly before decisions are made.

In the case of Livetouch, the company promised to avert possible effects and was given the benefit of doubt by the Environmental Management Agency, but went on to renege on its commitments.

Observations carried out as well as reports from community-based organisations, interviews with Ema and the local authority show that the company has failed to contain dust emissions, resulting in massive pollution.

The pollution is caused by crushing of stones to produce cement as well as dust raised by trucks travelling to and from the company.

Roads leading to the company are not tarred.

During a visit to the area, this reporter observed the plant is only about 30 metres from the residential area.

We observed that there is an open space between the Diamond Cement offices manufacturing plant and the clinker shed.

The open space is used as a drying platform given that raw materials have to be moisture free for cement manufacturing process.

There is a lot of dust coming from the drying beds as dust particles are blown by wind.

There is also an ash dump about eight metres high and approximately 1.5 metres from the two-metre boundary wall of Diamond Cement, barely 30 metres from Grasslands residential area.

A crusher is used for rubble crushing before it enters the cement manufacturing process.

Dust is emitted from the crushed rubble as the conveyor empties into a bin.

A water bowser is used by the company to suppress dust around the premises but is largely ineffective.

There is a chimney about 15 metres from the ground at the cement packing area within the plant which is emitting fine dust, possibly cement.

Evidence of dust pollution can be seen on the dirty rooftops and tree leaves around the cement manufacturing plant. Houses as far as 100 metres away also show evidence of dust.

There are houses barely 35 metres away from the factory boundary walls with evidence of dust on the roofs and trees.

Silicosis on the rise:



Silicosis is generally on the increase in Kwekwe and surrounding areas, which are known for rampant gold mining.

In March this year, Midlands minister of Provincial Affairs and Devolution Owen Ncube toured Kwekwe General Hospital where the medical superintendent Dr Patricia Mapanda told delegates that there was an increase in cases of silicosis at the institution.

She revealed more than 20 people had died from the disease.

"Presently, we have six silicosis patients at our institution and we have so far recorded 22 deaths. It is a disease which causes chest infections mainly from mining activities. Of late, we have been receiving more of these cases," she said at the time.

When contacted by The NewsHawks during the investigation, she said she was not at liberty to give an update on the figures as that could trigger panic.

The media crew was able to zero-in on a specific case of silicosis during a snap survey in Redcliff to talk to people in the community.

Aaron Tatenda Charinya died of silicosis on 7 May.

He lived in Redcliff and worked at SteelMakers, a company that is adjacent to Livetouch plant in Redcliff.

Workers at SteelMakers say they often inhale dust whenever the wind blows in the company's direction.

Charinya was treated at Kwekwe General Hospital before he died. His funeral wake was held in Rutendo.

Tinashe Ndagaya, a cousin of the late Charinya, confirmed the death and said doctors confirmed it was silicosis.

"He (the late Charinya) ended up staying at Westend towards Amaveni with our sister. But the funeral was in Rutendo at my residence. He was working at SteelMakers in Redcliff for some years. Where he was working there was a lot of dust so he inhaled dust for too long, hence he contracted a disease called silicosis which led to his death," he said.

Health needs to be protected:

Rights lawyer Lawyer and human rights defender Arnold Tsunga told The NewsHawks that the community in Redcliff has asked his law firm to intervene over the crisis of silicosis emanating from Livetouch's dust emissions.

Tsunga is the principal managing partner of Tsunga Law International.

"We at Tsunga Law International have been asked to mediate between the Stonclaire community, Livetouch International (Pvt) Ltd and other critical stakeholders like Ema and Redcliff Municipality. This is to address sustained dust emissions that are resulting in air and water pollution. The air pollution has unfortunately resulted in emergence of widespread cases of silicosis and other severe respiratory illnesses for the community. Silicosis is incurable and kills people slowly but surely," he said.

"The community are now torn between welcoming investment and protecting their health. They believe that with rightful interventions and goodwill, it is possible to have investment that protects the health of people and the environment while giving the company a reasonable return on investment."

Tsunga said should mediation fail, his law firm has instructions to sue the Chinese company.

"Should mediation fail, we have instructions to sue for remedial action. So far, we sent a letter proposing mediation. Unfortunately, Livetouch have neither acknowledged nor responded to the community's gesture. We are now left with no option

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but to sue for several remedies to protect both the environment and the people," he said.

"Silicosis is one of the most dangerous and slow killing diseases when there is irresponsible dust emissions in the extractive sector. It's merciless in its attack of lungs, reducing lung capacity to levels that cannot sustain human life."

Tsungu pointed out that an investment that results in such disease that has been globally well researched is not worth it and potentially brings culpability to a range of actors from investors to officials who authorise such reckless investments.

"Livetouch Investment can easily take measures to contain dust emissions instead of putting profit ahead of lives from the community from which it is drawing value. It is our hope that the community's request for resolving the conflict through mediation will be answered to avoid service of court summonses," he said.

On 22 September 2023, the Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa (ACT-Southern Africa) wrote to Ema on behalf of residents, complaining about the health hazards emanating from the dust pollution from Livetouch Investments.

The trust requested that Ema conduct a thorough investigation into the dust emission sources, machinery and processes within the cement manufacturing plant to identify the root causes of the excessive dust output.

Part of the letter reads: "Diamond Cement (subsidiary of Livetouch) should implement effective dust control measures, including the installation of appropriate filtration systems, regular maintenance of equipment, and the use of proven dust suppression techniques.

"Ema and Diamond Cement conduct regular air monitoring within the vicinity of the plant and provide the community with transparent and timely reports on the results to ensure accountability.

"Establish a dedicated communication channel between the company and the affected residents to keep them informed about the progress in resolving the issue and to address any concerns or questions they may have."

Dust emissions from the dry rubble crusher being poured into a bin causing dust emissions at Livetouch

EMA confirms violation of the law

Ema spokesperson Amkela Sidange confirmed the development.

"A complaint was received through the Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa (ACT-SA), that there is excessive dust emissions coming from Diamond Cement plant. Concerns were rising among the residents of Stone Claire that the dust poses a significant health hazard and were requesting assistance in resolving the matter. An inspection was conducted on the 29th of September 2023," she said.

"There was indeed dust from the working areas of Livetouch. An order to put in place measures to stop the dust emission was served. A ticket for causing air pollution was issued. Livetouch Investments submitted two action plans. Follow-up inspections were done in November and December 2023. There was minimum progress in terms of implementation of the action plan. "Actions taken included planting gum trees on the boundary so that they will trap dust as well as installing dust traps within the system. However, the inspection done on 12 February 2024 showed that there is still the problem of dust from the roadways and little has been done to address the challenge."

Sidange revealed that a ticket and an order were served for the company to submit a new action plan and implement it.

"Further inspections will be conducted until the conditions of the served order are fully satisfied. All this is done in consideration of the health of the public and the environment," she said.

A report by ACT-SA released on 4 March this year titled "Money over Life: The Case of a Chinese Investor (Livetouch Investments (Pvt) Ltd) t/ as Diamond Cement) in the town of Redcliff in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe," the organisation complained of the same crisis of silicosis.

Part of the report reads: "While Livetouch contributes to the cement industry, grave concerns have arisen regarding allegations of air pollution through dust emissions affecting residents of Stone Clare residential suburb and surrounding areas. Dust emissions, especially from a cement manufacturing plant are a cause for grave concern since in March 2024, Kwekwe General Hospital recorded a spike in cases of silicosis, which is an incurable lung disease caused by inhalation of dust containing crystalline silica, found in stone, soil and sand. Several lives were lost in Kwekwe, where Livetouch is situated, due to silicosis."

Dust emissions from the dry rubble crusher being poured into a bin causing dust emissions at Livetouch

An email subsequently sent on 23 March to ACTSA by Li Xi, the Chinese embassy's commercial and economic secretary, sought to exonerate Livetouch. "I am Li Xi, representing the Chinese Embassy in Zimbabwe. We appreciate your communication regarding the dust emission concerns at Livetouch Investments.

"We consistently encourage Chinese enterprises to adhere to local laws, operate within legal boundaries, and actively fulfill their social responsibilities. We have reached out to Livetouch to discuss these issues. They have expressed their belief that many of the accusations in the reports are biased and without basis," reads part of Li's correspondence.

Livetouch is a private company but the embassy got hold of the copy of the ACT-SA report after having been emailed by the organisation leading to its involvement in the matter.

When contacted by this reporter, Li still maintained that Livetouch company was in any way committing wrong doing.

"As far as we know, the dust is not all caused by this company," he said. An email sent to Li by ACT-SA director Obert Chinhamo dated 2 April, shows that the organisation raised the issue of silicosis with him again.

"We are consulting with the victims of dust emissions arising from the operations of Livetouch Investments and other entities involved in creating conditions that are resulting in people in the area suffering from silicosis. As we have stated before in our email dated 20 March 2024, this matter and the issue of resultant incurable silicosis is serious as dust emissions cause lung function impairment, chronic obstructive lung disease, restrictive lung disease, pneumoconiosis and carcinoma of the lungs, stomach and colon".

"It therefore needs a deeper and not a superficial engagement as we cannot afford to have the desire for profits trump the need to protect human life," reads the email.

Li further said, that Livetouch above all will cooperate with orders to minimise dust emissions and that if it fails, relevant

authorities can keep writing to the Chinese embassy on the matter.

"The ministry (of Environment) should direct, guide and request the company to fulfill its pledge (of ending dust emissions). I believe the company will be happy to cooperate," he said.

We are addressing the problem:

Livetouch Livetouch public relations manager George Makonese acknowledged that there have been some complaints on dust emissions and claimed the company is working flat out to resolve the problem.

"Our plant is one of the best in the country. The crusher in the plant is emitting dust it's true, but we are trying to control it.

"We are aware that a complaint was made about dust emissions and Ema came to investigate. We are in the process of implementing our action plan to deal with the problem of dust.

"Eventually we need to surface the whole area to end dust emissions. It cannot be done overnight. It is done stage by stage. That is why Ema did not give us one day to implement our plan. We also want to grow gum trees that can trap the dust and make any other plans that can minimise the dust emissions," he said.

Makonese said he was not aware the problem has reached a stage where the dust is becoming a health hazard.

"We are not aware that there are people who have already fallen sick or got affected by the dust. We will investigate on our own to find out if the problem has reached that far," he said. Mahlupi Sithole, a resident of Stoneclair who owns two houses in the area, one close to Livetouch plant, said the problem of silicosis is real.

"The dust problem from Livetouch is huge and many people are getting sick as seen with coughing cases we see in the community. What I have seen is that many do not want to come open and say I have silicosis because of some threats people get to say if you reveal something like that your house may be seized or you may be victimised," he said.

Combined Redcliff Residents Association chairperson Govhati Govhati said he was aware of people suffering from silicosis due to dust pollution from Livetouch. "Due to issues of confidentiality, they have asked that we don't disclose their identities, but people are indeed suffering from silicosis due to the dust pollution from Livetouch. What is shocking is how a com-

pany was allocated space to produce cement in the middle of a suburb with people.

"Besides that, we noted that from the masterplan of Redcliff, the area occupied by that company was never meant for industries. It's for residential purposes. I have stayed in Redcliff from the '70s and I know what I am talking about," he said.

Redcliff mayor Vincent Masiwa said the local authority is aware of the Livetouch crisis.

"We engaged the company and they promised to put measures in place to deal with the dust pollution. Ema is helping us on that issue as well," he said.

The constitution of Zimbabwe, the supreme law of the land, enjoins everyone including investors to conform to the bill of rights that guarantees the right to life (section 48), and environmental rights (section 73), among other provisions.

In particular, section 73 of the constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees environmental rights as follows: "(1) Every person has the right — (a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and (b) to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that — (i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation; (ii) promote conservation; and (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting economic and social development."

ACT-SA director Chinhamo said the seriousness of pollution and ecological degradation by Livetouch operations poses a threat to the environmental rights of Zimbabweans.

"The increase in cases of silicosis illnesses including death in the area requires a thorough investigation and consultation with the affected communities so that acceptable remedial action can be taken to protect the right to life and the right to a safe environment as expected under the constitution of Zimbabwe.

"It is unhelpful to limit consultations to a selected few individuals and entities composed of regulatory authorities that have for many years been turning a blind eye to dust emissions at Livetouch. It is our considered opinion that genuine consultations and engagement requires the participation of the affected communities and other relevant stakeholders," he said.

- **The author of the story won an award from the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) under the Chairman's Award for Best Investigative Journalist of the Year. The Chinese cement manufacturer, Livetouch (Pvt) Ltd, that had been exposed for causing silicosis deaths due to intense air pollution in the Midlands town of Redcliff was forced to draw and implement a plan to reduce the pollution. It also immediately held a stakeholders' meeting with community, local authority and government representatives to chart the way forward. The office of the District Development Coordinator (DDC) started making weekly monitoring visits to Livetouch and the surrounding community, while the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) acknowledged its awareness of the issue following the publication of the story (<https://thenewshawks.com/chinese-polluter-changes-tack-but-concerns-remain/>).**



Dust emissions from the dry rubble crusher being poured into a bin causing dust emissions at Livetouch

Victims of Rhodesia's 'worst' massacre live in abject poverty



Vongai Mapfumo wants greater support from government

BY STANLEY GUTU

Winter had just arrived in mid-May 1978 as the war of liberation against the Ian Smith-led Rhodesian Front was intensifying to a crescendo.

A small group of Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA) fighters operating in the Dewure Native Purchase Area of Gutu district in Masvingo province cautiously slipped into the local farming area from their mountain hide-outs to instruct their mujibhas to spread the message that a pungwe was to be held at John Kamungoma's farm, one of the many farms owned by black Africans in the area.

Mujibhas were adolescent boys recruited to run errands on behalf of freedom fighters, and pungwes were deep-night political conscientisation vigils meant to mobilise the masses to support the liberation struggle.

The Kamungoma pungwe started at around 9pm on May 14 with one guerrilla known to this day only by his nom de guerre "Comrade Double Killer" leading the frenzied crowd into song and dance.

Then suddenly, and without warning, the Rhodesian soldiers fired into the gathering; triggering panic and pandemonium.

Survivors of the massacre say a detachment of the Rhodesian Army carrying out reconnaissance work in the area had gotten wind of the planned vigil.

The soldiers climbed a big tree in the vicinity and stealthily concealed themselves before launching their indiscriminate heavy machine gun attack on the crowd.

They then climbed down the tree and used a searchlight to track fleeing civilians before shooting them one by one.

By dawn, a ghastly horror of 104 bodies, including that of Comrade Double Killer, were found in streams of blood, all

mangled together with survivors that were writhing in pain.

Seventy-seven-year-old Patricia Mapfumo was part of the crowd that attended the pungwe where the massacre occurred.

She is one of the victims of the attack who are still alive, having survived what is known as the Kamungoma massacre, and has endured over four decades of trauma after suffering multiple injuries during the attack.

According to government records, there were over 100 injured survivors altogether, with 32 of them still alive.

An investigation, which was facilitated by the Information for Development Trust (IDT), a non-profit media organisation promoting investigative journalism in Zimbabwe and the SADC region, revealed that the victims such as Mapfumo have been largely neglected despite there being a law providing for their fair compensation.

Though some of the survivors receive a disablement pension in terms of section 8 of the War Victims Compensation Act [Chapter 11:16], they say the money is too little to make a difference investigations.

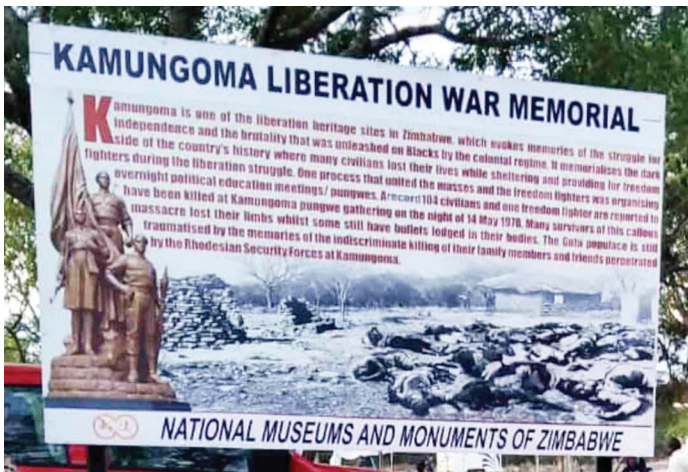
The investigation, which was prompted by pleas from concerned Kamungoma community members to shed light on the plight of the survivors, found that some of them receive monthly pensions of between US\$100 and US\$120.

However, those with less visible disabilities and scars are not receiving anything.

Mapfumo, who suffered gunshot wounds on the chin, palm, waist, leg and eventually had her right hand amputated while her lower jaw was reconstructed, also lost her baby in the attack.

Other victims of the massacre that are still alive include

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Joyce Nyandoro, Chipo Mukuze, Samuel Mukwembi, Simon Mukwembi, Patricia Machera, Papson Chiwara, Memory Zishate, Andrew Mapfumo, Davison Dedzera, Ratidzai Nikisi, Johannes Chikuvire, Ephraim Chikozho, Anna Mutikani and Farai Chikwiro.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa in April this year officially unveiled the Kamungoma Liberation War Memorial Site as part of efforts to memorialise the tragic events, but for the survivors it could be a case of too little too late.

Sources from the Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage ministry said about US\$120 000 was used to build the memorial site. They said the site was built under a memorialisation programme that saw government erecting similar structures in Lupane's Pupu area, Chinhoyi and Old Bulawayo.

The Kamungoma Liberation War Memorial Site was built at an estimated cost of US\$120 000.

'I will never heal'

"I will never heal," Mapfumo said as he lamented the fact that the survivors never received adequate socio-economic and psycho-social support after the horror attack.

"I have always struggled to find the basics of life, and I feel something better could be done for us to improve our lives."

Patricia Mapfumo is frail and weak, and she lives in severe lack.

The survivors including Mapfumo, are found in the Kamungoma community, which is made up of farms that were set aside for Africans by the colonial regime through the then Land Apportionment Act of 1930.

The farms average 30 hectares each, but the subsistence farming activities are largely non-mechanised and poverty is palpable.

Over the past two years, many families in the community lost entire cattle herds due to frequent outbreaks of theileriosis and foot and mouth diseases.

Mapfumo's circumstances are not different from those of other survivors as her family struggles to put food on the table.

She lives with her daughter Vongai (57), who lost her right forearm during the attack and still suffers from panic attacks.

"Although I have come to accept my physical condition, it remains a traumatic experience and the horrific images of the attack are still fresh in my mind," Vongai said.

"I think we should be living better lives because of the sacrifices we made and the blood and limbs we lost, but that is not the case.

"I lost an arm and that means I cannot be my whole self because of severe limitations in the nature of the work that I can do."

Compensation fund looting

In November 1980, months after Zimbabwe's independence, Robert Mugabe's government enacted the War Victims Compensation Act "to provide for the payment of compensation in respect of injuries to or the death of persons caused by the war, and to provide for matters incidental to or connected" to the liberation war.

Section 4 of the War Victims Compensation Act [Chapter 11:16] entitles citizens of the country to apply and make claims for disablement pension if their injuries were directly or indirectly caused by the war between January 1, 1962 and February 29, 1980.

Section 8 of the act creates categories of victims based on the extent of injuries sustained.

It stipulates that the disablement pension value that each category of victims is entitled to after a commissioner has made an assessment and determined the extent of disability emanating from the injuries.

Those determined to have suffered 100% disability and have changed or downgraded their normal occupation are entitled to the highest disablement pension.

In August 1997, a judicial commission of inquiry into the fraudulent disbursement of Z\$1,5 billion from Zimbabwe's War Victims' Compensation Fund started probing the abuse of the fund. The investigation followed complaints that top Zanu PF politicians, war veterans, senior government officials, and military leaders had, from as far back as 1995, defrauded the fund through inflated compensation claims.

The commission of enquiry was headed by the then judge president Godfrey Chidyausiku.

Chidyausiku's commission found that the then war veterans' leader Chenjerai Hunzvi, a medical doctor, certified that dozens of high ranking ruling party officials should be paid out for non-existent war injuries.

Hunzvi also signed his own fraudulent medical certificate as well as false claims by relatives.

Former president' Robert Mugabe's brother in law Reaward Marufu was paid nearly \$1 million in compensation for 'sustaining a scar on the left eye, ulcers, recurrent aching feet and arms and persistent backache and post-war stress syndrome'.

Then Rural Resources and Water Development minister Joice Mujuru received \$389 472 for "poor vision" and "mental stress disorder". Government ministers, security chiefs and other high ranking Zanu PF officials were said to have claimed that they had disabilities of over 80%.

It has now emerged that amid the looting frenzy, the Kamungoma massacre victims were getting pensions of between US\$100 and US\$120 depending on the severity of their injuries, a drop in the ocean in a hyperinflationary environment.

Sesedzai Maharure (62), who was shot on her hands, waist and legs on the night of the massacre, said she often suffers paralysing pain during winter, but has never been given any compensation.

"I expected a better life, but I am getting old and tired. As

a war victim, I expected enough compensation to help me to turn around my life and get the medical assistance I need, but it didn't happen," Maharure said.

Maharure was shot on her legs and other areas of her body, but has not received any compensation

"This year is particularly painful because of the drought and we are hungry," Maharure said.

She said she made several applications for compensation since independence, which were all in vain.

Bullet lodged in head

Petros Makwanya (62) said he has been living with a bullet in his head after doctors concluded that any surgery to remove it would result in death.

He was shot in the head, legs and arms. Makwanya spent several months in hospital after the attack that also claimed the life of one of his brothers, Naphtali.

Makwanya, who stays with his wife and son, walks with a limp and his speech is slurred.

"I sometimes take painkillers, but they just give me relief for a short time," he said while holding the X-ray image showing the bullet stubbornly ensconced in his cranium.

"It's an insult to (my brother's) memory that his grave is cracked like that, but there is little I can do because I don't have much.

"The government promised to erect proper tombstones for all those who died that terrible night, but it has not happened."

Naphtali's grave, with a downward gaping crack on the headstone, is almost hidden in thick grass and shrubs. Most of the graves of the victims that perished on the night of the massacre are in similar condition.

Makwanya's son Simpson, who was born in 1991, has almost lost hope of ever getting a formal job because his parents cannot afford to pay fees for him to enrol at a teacher training college.

Mnangagwa acknowledged that surviving victims of the massacre were suffering from trauma, wounds and painful memories when he officiated at the unveiling of the Kamungoma Liberation War Shrine.

"The indiscriminate attack saw teenagers and women, some breastfeeding mothers, losing their lives," he said.

"The deceased were buried in shallow graves.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage, as well as the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, among other stakeholders, are directed to broaden the memorialisation of the Kamungoma Liberation War Shrine and remodel the graves of all those who were killed."

He, however, did not elaborate on how the government would look after the victims of the massacre.

On the day, the 32 survivors were paraded and were each given a small grocery hamper.

'It's work in progress'

Musarurwa Dondofema, the Kamungoma Liberation War Memorial Shrine acting custodian, admitted that the survivors' welfare was neglected.

"They face many challenges and we have raised the issue with the relevant authorities to make sure that their plight is addressed. It is still work in progress," Dondofema said.

He claimed the outbreak of Covid-19 disrupted plans to rehabilitate the graves although it has been over two years since

the pandemic ended without any work being done.

"All the tombstones are there in Harare, but the process was delayed due to the Covid-19 outbreak," he said.

"We hope things can start moving now," added Dondofema, whom locals recognise as the de facto local representative of the Kamungoma massacre victims."

Dondofema would, however, not reveal where exactly in Harare the tombstones located were being kept and efforts to verify Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage drew blanks.

Gutu South Member of Parliament Pupurai Togarepi, who himself claims to have been a war collaborator, said the government was taking steps to give Kamungoma massacre victims comprehensive compensation packages.

"Many war collaborators are yet to get any form of compensation," the Zanu PF MP said.

"Money is never enough, but we are going to look for ways by which we can improve their lives.

"I will look for resources to make sure that we start projects for them."

Togarepi, who doubles as the Zimbabwe Liberation War Collaborators Association chairperson, claimed the victims were now getting recognition.

"There is a lot that still needs to be done but we are grateful that they have been put in front of the line to benefit from the compensation, which is a sign that the government recognises the collective efforts made by everyone during the liberation struggle," he added.

Victims of corruption

They can be considered victims of the unbridled corruption that characterised the War Victims Compensation Fund until around 1995 when it was discovered that it had been looted by former fighters, primarily service chiefs, senior army commanders and senior civil servants.

The payments were halted in 1997 following a public outcry, leading to the setting up of the commission of inquiry.

That same year Mugabe's regime was forced to pay unbudgeted pensions of \$50 000 to each war veteran following pressure from the ex-fighters, who were angered by the looting of the War Victims Compensation Fund.

In 2022, Mnangagwa's government said it was planning to pay one-off gratuities and monthly pensions to a new batch of 160 000 war veterans, war collaborators and ex-political prisoners who missed out during the first round of compensations.

- ***A few months after the publication of the story, the Zimbabwean government announced that it would take care of the welfare of the remaining 32 victims of the war who had been exposed to be suffering neglect. It also promised to take responsibility for the victims' medical bills relating to the injuries they had sustained during the war, through the War Victims Compensation Fund. In addition, the government set aside a fund to rehabilitate the graves at the massacre shrine. (<https://www.newsday.co.zw/southerneye/local/article/200038040/govt-jolted-into-action-over-neglected-rhodesian-massacre-graves-victims>).***

Mt Pleasant land scam leaves home-owners high and dry



BY MARSHALL BWANYA

HUNDREDS of Mount Pleasant Heights Phase 2 (Lot 4 Zizalisari) property buyers are enduring a 17-year land scam which has implicated Anthony Taengwa Parehwa, a local land developer with links to Zanu PF.

Homeseekers have been denied title deeds and crucial documents proving ownership, and now face prospects of repossession of their purchased stands.

Despite efforts to seek intervention from former president Robert Mugabe and former vice-president Joice Mujuru, over 10 years ago, the property buyers are still without a solution.

In March 2015, Parehwa lost Zanu PF's Hwedza North primary elections to David Musabayana, showing his links to the party.

The housing stands scandal has remained out of the public eye despite desperate attempts by the homeseekers to garner media coverage by approaching several outlets and even the ministry of Information.

The land in question is 84.5383 hectares currently registered under Mazowe Rural District Council (MRDC).

Despite some homeseekers paying for stands in full, at Parehwa's company, Jockstar Investments (Pvt) Ltd, 17 years down the line, basic infrastructure like roads and water is yet to be provided.

Some of the homeseekers have not received title deeds at a time the developer is demanding extra fees.

This has caused significant financial loss and emotional distress among them. Property buyers who shared their stories accuse Parehwa of demanding exorbitant development fees, resizing stands without consultations and failing to provide title deeds.

This has led to legal disputes and emotional distress among the affected buyers. "We bought our stand in 2010/11 and hoped to start building in 2012. We were then advised to pay

US\$6 500 before we could build.

"After paying the fee, it turns out there were no reasonable roads to access the stands nor was there any water reticulation infrastructure as would be expected. Basically the stands were not serviced," lamented a property buyer who preferred anonymity.

"Possible lost revenue for this period was approximately US\$36 000 through unplanned expenditure and what would have been realised from renting out current accommodation as we would have moved to a new house.

"I can't quantify mental stress which persists even up to now as we do not know if ever the stands will be serviced or if we will get title deeds to the properties," he added. Netsai, a property buyer, expressed regret over her financial setback and the lost opportunity to benefit from rental income. She highlighted the ongoing mental anguish caused by uncertainty over property ownership and the additional burden of legal fees.

"Buying land from this developer (Parehwa) was a huge mistake which has caused me a huge loss.

"I can't even quantify the figures, but there was a big loss financially and mentally.

"What I can say is by now I should have finished building that house. Either me staying in the house or letting the house and having an income out of it.

"I don't have title deeds of the land, meaning the land still belongs to him in a way.

"I still have kids going to school and I could still use that money from that property to improve the livelihood of my children.

"The engagement of lawyers to fight this developer is another loss. I am paying lawyers instead of using the money to build or to start other projects," added Netsai.

She said her mental well-being has been affected after re-

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ceiving repossession threats after refusing to pay extra charges, which were not initially stated on her contract.

"To think of it, I'm paying a housing loan to a bank for a property that the developer wants to claim back, saying 'you didn't pay developer's fees, so I am taking it back'.

"Yet my agreement doesn't say that. It's something I had acquired through hard work and what I had worked for during my prime years of working. I am now being robbed by this developer," said Netsai.

How the scam unfolded

An investigation, in collaboration with the *Information for Development Trust (IDT)* under a programme aimed at empowering under-reported grassroots and marginalised communities, uncovered this web of deceit in the Mount Pleasant Heights Phase 2 project.

The scheme dates back to 2007, when Parehwa promised swift development and title deeds for stands ranging from 2 000 square metres to 2 700 square metres.

The stands were priced between US\$15 000 and US\$23 000. However, after selling 351 stands, through Jockstar Investments (Pvt) Ltd, progress stalled.

Many property buyers are battling unplanned expenditure and uncertainty. They are anxious over title deeds.

The stands were to be transferred to Harare once development was completed ahead of title deeds issuance.

The scandal has now attracted the attention of the police

Investigations uncover web of deceit

Investigations reveal that two separate sets of agreement of sale (AoS) were entered into between Parehwa and property buyers.

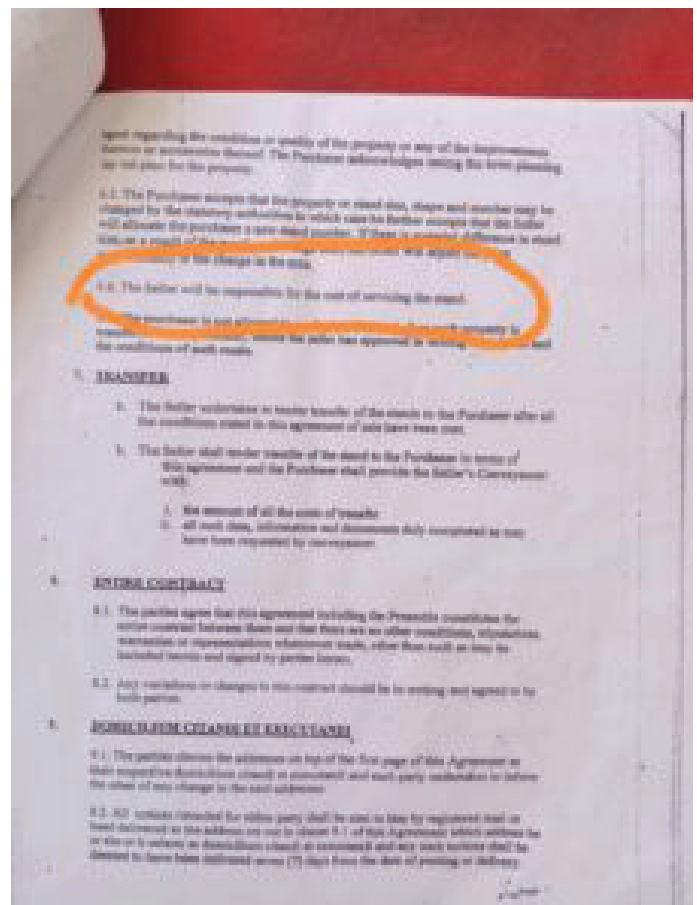
The first set of property buyers bought stands between 2007 and 2010. Their AoS indicated the purchase price included servicing of the land.

Paragraph 6:6 of their AOS reads: "The seller will be responsible for the cost of servicing the stand."

The second group purchased their stands from 2011.

The bulk of their AoS indicated they did not buy fully-serviced stands and would need to pay an unstipulated development fee at a later stage.

The stands were issued under a sub-division application from Shopex (Pvt) Limited with the permit number MASH/C3/2006, which was approved in 2007 by the Local Government ministry's department of physical planning.



Contract details of a property buyer that bought a fully serviced stand. Point 6.6 states that the seller (Jockstar Investments (Pvt) Limited) was responsible for servicing the stands.

A total of 351 stands were created with stand numbers starting from 2 399 to 2 750, in the area listed as Bannock Township of Zizalisari, commonly known as Mount Pleasant Heights Phase 2.

Property buyers said Parehwa gave them the impression that development would be done immediately.

However, 17 years later, little development has been done.

Documents show that after the stands were sold, IBI Property and Infrastructure (Pvt) Ltd, which is also owned by Parehwa, announced it was the "new" land developer in Mount Pleasant Heights Phase 2.

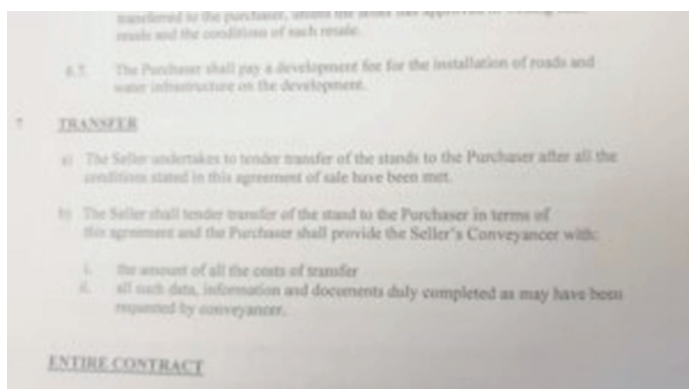
Through IBI Property and Infrastructure (Pvt) Ltd, Parehwa applied to the Surveyor-General for the cancellation of the general plan by placing an advertisement in the Daily News on 24 August 2012.

The general plan with permit number MASH/C3/2006, for the properties in Mount Pleasant Phase 2, was originally acquired by Shopex (Pvt) Limited, a company linked to Oniyas Gumbo, the former Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation director-general.

Gumbo in August 2011 lost the property after the High Court's Justice Samuel Kudya ruled in favour of Jockstar and IBI Property and Infrastructure, two companies in which Parehwa is director, following a legal wrangle.

The cancellation of the general plan with permit number MASH/C3/2006 was done without notifying the property buyers who had fully paid the purchase price, as required by law.

Land grab and shrinking stands Following the termination of the general plan in October 2012, Parehwa applied to the



Contract details of a property buyer that bought a stand that was not fully serviced. Point number 6.7 states that the property would pay a development fee for road and water infrastructure

department of physical planning at Bindura's provincial office for a new general plan, which was issued on 25 January 2013 under permit number MASH/C3/2012.

The permit reduced the size of the stands despite the fact that some were purchased as early as 2007.

Original subdivision application from Shopex (Pvt) Limited with permit number MASH/C3/2006, which was approved in 2007 by the local government ministry department of physical planning.

Mount Pleasant Heights Phase 2 residents accuse Parehwa of altering stand numbers and reducing stand sizes by between 200 square metres and 900 square metres under the revised general plan, without consulting them.

Aggrieved property owners protested and tried to access the original general plan (permit number MASH/C3/2006) as part of evidence to show that Parehwa had illegally reduced their stands.

The plan was not found and is still not available at the MRDC offices. The aggrieved property owners are now accusing MRDC of aiding Parehwa to illegally resize the stands. Asked for comment, MRDC chief executive officer Liberty Mufandaedza said: "... (as) of now I have no comments."

After reducing the stand sizes, Parehwa coerced property buyers to pay US\$6 500 development costs, including those who had paid for fully serviced stands, by threatening to repossess stands and restricting access to properties.

The original (first) letter requesting development costs issued on November 14, 2011

Property buyers who paid for fully serviced stands were also affected.

Those who complied received new contract letters and a clearance certificate, which included new terms and conditions that reduced the size of their stands and indemnified the developer against any potential legal action related to the new agreements.

Observations carried out during a recent visit revealed that the land developer is yet to develop the area.

The need for development fees was specified in clause 6.7

of the second set of property purchasers' AoS, which indicated that they would pay for the construction of "roads and water infrastructure."

The amount was not specified. The original letter requesting development costs was issued on 14 November 2011.

It indicated that development fees of US\$6 500 were "payable over three months" and that "payment" would "speed up progress towards completion" of housing amenities.

The letter also stated that the development would pave way for the registration of title of properties into buyers' names.

On 19 December 2012, Parehwa wrote another letter threatening homeseekers who had not paid "at least 50 percent of the fees within the next seven days" with cancellation of the AoS and repossession of their stands.

Second letter issued on December 19, 2012, threatening home seekers who had not paid at least 50 percent of the fees within the next seven days would have their agreement of sale cancelled and their stands repossessed

This included the first set of buyers whose AoS did not originally state they had to pay the development fees.

"We refer you to clause 6.7 of the Agreement of Sale entered with ourselves which places an obligation upon you to pay the development fees on demand.

"So much work has been undertaken on site said Mushamba. with a view to completing the development work within reasonable time as agreed with the contractor," read parts of Parehwa's letter demanding development fees.

"We have in the meantime incurred huge costs on the development. We are left with no option but to make this final demand of payment of development fees.

"Should we not receive at least 50 percent of the fees within the next seven days we shall refer the collection to our attorneys who have instructions to summarily cancel the Agreement of Sale and repossess the stand in the event that payment is not forthcoming," added Parehwa's letter demanding development fees.



Mt Pleasant home

Property buyers try to resist On 1 June 2013, over 100 property owners formed the Mount Pleasant Heights Residents' Association (MPHRA) with the goal of engaging the developer on a variety of issues, including AOS violations, reduced stands, and slow progress towards the completion of housing amenities that the developer was supposed to provide.

MPHRA members said efforts to engage Parehwa were ineffective since he out-manuevered the residents' association by engaging home buyers individually to ensure they did not have a unified position.

Parehwa refused to engage the residents' association, arguing it did not represent the interests of the property buyers.

To rally other property owners in the fight against Parehwa's contractual breaches, the association on 11 July 2013, issued a public notice in The Herald, inviting them to a meeting on 13 July 2013.

Parehwa, on 12 July 2013, however issued a Press statement in The Herald, describing the association as a rogue group.

He threatened homebuyers and potential property buyers against engaging MPHRA.

"...While we respect freedom of association and the airing of genuine concerns or grievances by bonafide purchasers, we find it unacceptable that our commercial reputation could be subjected to unwarranted attacks which are based, in our view, on misconceived perceptions," reads part of Parehwa's public statement.

In response to inquiries about why the government approved the cancellation of Shopex (Pvt) Limited's sub-division application Permit No. MASH/C3/2006 which was done without notifying property buyers and subsequently approved the general plan under permit number MASH/C3/2012, which resulted in the resizing of stands, the chief director for spatial planning and development in the ministry of Local Government, Shingirayi Mushamba, provided a detailed report.

"Zizalisari Lot 4 which is 84.5383 hectares in extent was initially registered in the name Shopex (Private) Limited when the first application was made on the 7th of December 2006.

"The application was acknowledged on the 14th of December 2006 and registered as MASH/C3/2006 in the Provincial Subdivision Register. An advertisement was placed in the Herald of 13th February 2007 to account for the Change of Use since the property was not yet incorporated.

"On the 24th of May 2007, a Permit was issued to Shopex (Private) Limited. On the 3rd of September 2007, the Applicant advised of their intention to have the Permit canceled for the Proposals were now completely varied from their taste and they indicated intention to make a new application," said Mushamba.

Mushamba said wrangles for property ownership between Shopex (Private) Limited and Jockstar Investments (Private) Limited arose on the 19th of September 2007, with the former pushing for the cancellation of the permit, with the latter opposing the same.

"On the 10th of April 2008, Amendment proposals were received which were based on stand number discrepancy and this resulted in the Permit re-issued on the 17th of June 2008.

"The office received a further application for PERMIT AMENDMENT on the 18th of July 2012, this time from the new owner, IBR Property and Infrastructure (Private) Limited.

"We are not privy to the period when the ownership changed. The application was acknowledged on the 20th of

July 2012 and Head Office was engaged on the proposal on the 17th of August 2012 who then advised that the application cannot be treated as an amendment for there was material change to the circumstances," Mushamba's comments failed to explain why the Local Government ministry cancelled the general plan and approved a new one, MASH/ C3/2012, which resized the stands of property buyers in violation of their AoS.

"This was owing to the new configurations of the stands in terms of sizes and units. On the 3rd of October 2012, the Surveyor-General advised of the Cancellation of General Plans relating to the previous permit, that is to say, General Plans," said Mushamba.

"...Consultations for this new application began on the 10th of October 2012 resulting in the Permit MASH/C3/2012 being issued on the 25th of January 2013. The Applicant later faced challenges in respect of Development monitoring as Harare City were refusing referring them to Mazowe Rural District Council.

"This resulted in the Applicant applying for an Amendment of the Permit to give Mazowe Rural District Council express role to monitor development as the land had not yet been incorporated. The Permit was amended on the 20th of December 2016."

Property buyers' plight After issuing the public statement and discouraging other property owners from attending the MPHRA meeting in August 2013, Parehwa continued re-pegging the original 351 stands without engaging property buyers.

Forty-three additional stands, with some reduced to between 1800 and 2000 square metres, were created.

Parehwa installed boom gates and deployed guards to regulate entry to the area. Property buyers who had not paid development fees were barred from accessing their property.

A property owner, who only identified herself as Nyarai, said she was victimised after declining to sign an addendum to her contract.

The addendum sought to indemnify Parehwa, for resizing the stand and also required her to pay an additional US\$6 500 in development fees.

"In 2010, I purchased a property from Jockstar Investments for a total cash price of US\$15 000 which was the full purchase price with no outstanding development fees.

However, in 2012, I received mail with an addendum to pay for development fee, which I did not agree to as I had already paid the full purchase price unlike others who had paid in local currency the previous years before the country dollarised.

"I made several visits and phone calls to his offices but never had a chance to meet him or get a response and in 2022 I was served with summons from the High Court of Zimbabwe wherein Parehwa said he had canceled the agreement because I refused to pay the development fee," said Nyarai.

Nyarai expressed frustration that her property size was reduced from 2 000 square metres to 1800 square meters without explanation or compensation. She said the double standards had caused her financial and emotional strain as well as anxiety about potentially losing her stand. Nyarai also fell victim to double allocation.

"Around the same time (Feb/March 2022) I was approached by the brother of a certain lady who is in the United Kingdom

claiming to have purchased the same property the previous year," she said.

"I had already started putting my building material on the site and due to the ongoing legal dispute I have been unable to develop my property. My building material is lying idle.

"...My mental health has been affected heavily because of the possibility of losing the property that I have worked for all my entire life.

"My heart bleeds, it hurts, it's painful."

National police spokesperson Commissioner Paul Nyathi said police were investigating five cases involving Parehwa.

"The Zimbabwe Republic Police is investigating five land scam cases involving Antony Taengwa Parehwa.

"However, we have not yet received cases in respect of relentless financial demands from unsuspecting property buyers and reduction of stand sizes purchased by the clients," said Nyathi.

Despite Parehwa successfully coercing hundreds of property buyers, a property buyer, Tendai Makombe and his spouse successfully took legal action against him under case number HC 5489/17 for breaching the original agreement of sale which resulted in the reduction of their property by 400 square metres.

Justice Edith Mushore on 30 October 2019 ruled that Makombe should be compensated US\$2 593 to be paid in two equal installments.

"It is hereby declared that the boundary lines of plaintiff's structures lie within the boundaries established by the Surveyor-General in its Survey Report on Stand 2858 Bannockburn Township of Lot Zizalisari, Salisbury District dated May 2018; and that those boundary lines shall so remain; without lawful encumbrance," Mushore said.

Mujuru's intervention After witnessing Parehwa re-pegging stands with impunity, MPHRA wrote a detailed report to the former vice-president Joice Mujuru, which was copied to for-

mer president Robert Mugabe on 21 January 2014.

The association lamented how Parehwa illegally re-pegged the stands and pleaded for government intervention.

"The beneficiaries (property buyers) then noticed in August 2013 that the developer (Parehwa) had undertaken a concentrated re-pegging of our stands, effectively reducing them in size, thus creating more stands for himself.

"At no stage of the process did the developer engage the beneficiaries to inform them of these developments as specified in terms and conditions of the AoS contracts," read the letter to Mujuru in part.

A month after the report was sent to Mujuru, MPHRA leaders and Parehwa were summoned to Harare Central Police Station, where the police said they had received a letter concerning the land disputes between the two parties but did not state its origin.

Following the police interview, Parehwa temporarily withdrew, preventing property owners business practices. from accessing their stands for two weeks before resuming restrictions on property buyers who had yet to pay development fees.

MPHRA on 13 February 2014 also wrote to the then minister of Information professor Jonathan Moyo, lamenting that the local media was ignoring the land scam.

No action was taken, prompting a homeseecker to write a second letter on 27 March 2014.

"We have tried to have this issue covered in four newspapers whose reporters interviewed the courageous members who took major risks and in some cases visited the site to substantiate the story.

"Unfortunately this story has fizzled out in all these newspapers without being published thus The Herald, NewsDay, Daily News and the Zimbabwean Mail," reads part of the letter.

Combined Harare Residents' Association (CHRA) director Reuben Akili said there was a need to take action against un-

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scrupulous property developers-cum-land barons that are taking advantage of desperate home seekers.

"Our message has been very clear on this matter that we have land barons and extortionists masquerading as property developers, these people take advantage of desperate and ignorant house seekers.

"Residents must organise themselves, report to police and drag these so-called 'developers' to the courts for the purposes of obtaining justice and redress or recourse," said Akili.

Some property buyers lamented that Parehwa was currently demanding payment of US\$13 000 from property buyers for conveyance, which includes an additional US\$6 000 for capital gains tax.

The property buyers argued that Parehwa did not have legal authority to demand this payment from property owners, stating he profited from the sale of 351 and 43 additional stands.

Parehwa's mounting legal woes Parehwa is currently at the centre of a web of complex legal battles, including: HC8237/2016, HC4746/2014, HC6804/2013, HC1626/2014: HC8167/2013, HC6663/2013, HC2099/20, and HC7488/20, raising questions about his business dealings.

The separate court cases highlight potential conflicts surrounding property ownership, contractual agreements, and transparency in his In case HC 2099/20, a company named Graniteside Electrical Hardware (Pvt) Ltd accuses Jockstar Investment (Pvt) Ltd, of failing to transfer ownership of land despite a completed agreement.

Graniteside Electrical Hardware (Pvt) also included IBI Property and Infrastructure (Pvt) Ltd, another company linked to Parehwa, in the lawsuit.

While the court dismissed Graniteside's initial claim against IBI due to a flawed filing, it allowed them to amend the lawsuit and potentially hold IBI accountable.

In case HC7679/23, Jockstar Investments (Private) Limited, sought a stay of execution pending the determination of an application for rescission of judgment.

The respondent, Chipa Muzirwa, had previously obtained a default judgment against the applicant, which the applicant sought to rescind. Jockstar Investments (Pvt) Ltd and Muzirwa had entered into an agreement of sale of stand number 2654 of Zizalisari Lot 4 Bannockburn Township Harare.

The material terms of the agreement were that Muzirwa would pay the purchase price of US\$17 000 for the stand and an additional US\$6 500 development fee.

A clause provided that the stand size, shape and number might be changed.

The applicant undertook a tender transfer of the stand after all the conditions in the agreement had been met.

Muzirwa paid the purchase price of US\$17 000 and development fee of US\$6 500.

Jockstar Investments (Pvt) Ltd proceeded to issue a certificate of compliance in 2018.

On 30 June 2022, Jockstar Investments however, issued summons against the Muzirwa under case number HC 4309/22 alleging that although the respondent had duly paid what was due in terms of the agreement, there was now a variation in the stand size from 2015 square metres due to the Surveyor-General's work to 2002 square metres.

Jockstar Investments in this case alleged that Muzirwa had refused to accept the adjustment to the stand size and the applicant had duly informed her that they were proceeding to

cancel the agreement.

Justice Emilia Muchawa on 19 January 2024 dismissed Jockstar Investments' urgent chamber application seeking a stay of execution.

Justice Muchawa found that the applicant's founding affidavit lacked averments on prospects of success and failed to attach the application for rescission.

The court further criticised Jockstar Investments for material non-disclosures and a lack of candour, including misrepresenting the timeline of their application for rescission and failing to explain why they did not apply for upliftment of the bar in previous opportunities.

The case, HC 6560/19, involves a property ownership battle in which Unitime Investments claims legal ownership of a property based on a 2002 purchase agreement with Parehwa and a registered title deed.

However, another couple possesses a conflicting title deed for the same property, registered later.

Unitime alleges the second title deed is fraudulent due to a potential clerical error and possible misconduct by a conveyancer.

Attempts to contact Parehwa for comment on the contractual breaches and resizing stands allegations presented by property buyers were futile, as his phone went unanswered after repeated attempts on various dates in the months of June and July 2024.

He did not respond to WhatsApp messages addressed to him. Webster Jiti, Parehwa's lawyer, when we first reached out to him for comment in June 2024 on the allegations that his client illegally altered stand sizes and breached contractual obligations, he gave the impression that he would comment on the matter, but insisted he was busy attending a family funeral and would comment after the bereavement.

A week later, after the funeral, Jiti shifted goal posts and said he was not in a position to comment unless his client gave him authorisation to comment on the matter, a matter he never mentioned when he first said he would comment after the family funeral.

Jiti, after several days, went on to state that he was denied authorisation by Parehwa to speak on the matter, thus could not comment on the allegations levelled against his client.

The interconnected lawsuits, however, paint a picture of potentially questionable business practices surrounding Parehwa.

- **The property developer, Anthony Parehwa, through his lawyer, bore on two publications and persuaded them not to run the story but IDT's own news site, News Hub Zimbabwe, published it. The author lost his job over the story and was subsequently hired by IDT. Nonetheless, Parehwa subsequently initiated out-of-court settlements with some of the aggrieved homeowners, while the police confirmed that it had since opened four criminal cases against the property developer (<https://newshubzim.co.zw/2025/02/12/mount-pleasant-land-saga-residents-decry-failed-system/>)**

Shocking details emerge as opposition, council officials and Zanu PF loot Harare City Council



BY MOSES MATENGA

The City of Harare lost millions of dollars to a network of corrupt officials and politically connected cartels that have virtually taken over its cash-cow, Rufaro Marketing, investigations show.

Rufaro Marketing, a once-lucrative venture that financed crucial city projects, is a stark example of the rampant plunder, neglect, and corruption that has plagued Harare.

Millions of dollars generated by this entity have disappeared, leaving a trail of mismanagement and unaccounted funds.

Investigations by the Business Times in conjunction with Information for Development Trust (IDT), a non-profit organisation helping journalists produce investigative stories on corruption and bad governance, have established that, taking advantage of leakages caused by porous council systems, the opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) party could also have benefited from the looted funds during the 2023 harmonised elections.

According to officials, Rufaro Marketing has been generating between \$35,000 and \$45,000 per month since 2022, totalling approximately \$500,000 annually.

However, there is no documentation to substantiate how

these funds have been utilised.

Several critical documents, it emerged, have gone missing over the years, raising suspicion officials and cartels sold some of the Rufaro Marketing property and benefited from the proceeds.

Cartels

Investigations show that a cartel comprising both ruling Zanu PF party aligned activists, opposition senior officials, councilors and council officials are involved in the illegal letting and subletting of Rufaro Marketing facilities across the city.

A visit to Zororo Bar in Mbare owned by Rufaro Marketing revealed a lot of underhand dealings and a complex web of dealers who "make it happen."

Posing as a prospective tenant, this reporter engaged with officials from Rufaro Marketing offices at Remembrance House in Mbare in the capital.

According to one of the operators running a shop at Zororo Bar, it is difficult to go directly to Rufaro Marketing officials to facilitate a place to operate from, hence the involvement of "brokers".

The operator said that, in order to facilitate "a discussion"

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there was need for “something”—meaning a bribe—for a dealer only identified as Maxwell who has links to a Rufaro Marketing official identified as Nyasha Jongwe.

Jongwe is employed as operations manager for the council-owned entity and is based at the Rufaro Marketing head office at Remembrance House.

After the visit, the reporter got several calls as follow ups to his interest on securing space to run a bar.

In one of the calls, the caller, one of the business owners at Zororo Bar outlet, was in the presence of Maxwell, whose full identity and role could not be immediately established.

In the recorded conversation, Maxwell kept on inquiring whether this reporter was serious and promised to facilitate a meeting with another official identified as Chikwariro, who described himself as a finance point person at Rufaro Marketing.

But later, other council officials said he was a mere clerical employee.

Business Times spoke to Chikwariro on the phone and presented to him allegations that he was part of a cartel fleecing Rufaro Marketing through financial malfeasance.

He denied any wrongdoing saying his role was only to receive money.

A visit to Chikwariro’s offices revealed the cartel’s modus operandi including a strict policy where nothing moves without money.

“My duty is simply to receive money,” Chikwariro said. “I don’t handle operations beyond the movement of money. There are others tasked with that. My responsibility is to manage financial transactions and make payments and I have been in this role for years,” he said.

In the recorded conversation, he, however, indicated that he only stepped in to facilitate property letting if the individuals in the operations department were not available.

When first approached by our undercover news team, Chikwariro told us that we would get “something” if we paid a “commission” for a prime property.

“There is nothing yet unless you’re willing to pay for a prime spot (Mbare and Highfields.) Rentals vary, but they remain fairly consistent across the high-density suburbs,” he said.

Maxwell, who took the news team to Chikwariro said: “Are you truly serious about this opportunity? If you are interested in this area, you need to pay a fee that we can negotiate among ourselves.”

It emerged these front dealers were not only there to facilitate acquisition of facilities at Rufaro Marketing but formed part of a larger scheme to also operate shady property transfers from Remembrance House, which also houses the City of Harare Housing Department.

The cartel, it was established, also manipulates the city’s house waiting list by backdating home-seeker cards for a bribe.

Several offices at Remembrance are involved in this, complete with the stations which date-stamp the forged documents.

It also emerged during this investigation that former Mbare constituency Member of Parliament, Starman Chamisa, brother to former Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) leader, Nelson Chamisa, was pushing to take over control of Zororo Bar using his political muscle.

This publication spoke to some of the people that made these claims and they said the legislator was using CCC councillors and his own influence in Mbare to wrestle out some tenants renting facilities at Zororo Bar.

Starman Chamisa, however, refused to respond to the allegations saying: “I don’t have time for interviews. I will respond when it’s convenient for me.”

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Hunters Bar in Mabvuku, Harare, owned by Rufaro Marketing, is currently being sublet to multiple business owners



Some of the small business outlets operating within the vicinity of Hunters Bar

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Zororo Bar is now home to a private college with classes from ECD to Advanced Level.

Sources said the school pays more than US\$1,000 in monthly rentals to Rufaro Marketing through Chikwariro.

Those who operate some of the businesses were initially hesitant to entertain the news team.

Said one of them: "A lot of investigations are happening. That's why I can't assist you."

This was in apparent reference to the commission of inquiry set up by President Emmerson Mnangagwa that has exposed the Rufaro Marketing rot.

Last year, President Emmerson Mnangagwa set up the commission chaired by a retired judge, Mathias Cheda, to probe suspected cases of financial mismanagement at the municipality since 2017.

The commission has so far received testimonies from numerous actors within the local authority, all pointing to massive looting of council funds that must have been accruing to the local authority from property rentals.

Nelson Chamisa, the popular opposition figure whose former party, Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), contributed the majority of councillors to the municipality has also appeared before the commission.

He distanced himself from corrupt council officials and denied that he facilitated the irregular transfer of hundreds of residential stands to woo urban voters ahead of the 2023 general elections.

This investigation also led this reporter to another Rufaro Marketing facility in Mabvuku called Hunters.

Numerous individuals have benefitted from the rental chaos at this outlet.

Mabvuku Ward 21 councillor, Alexio Nyakudya, is said to be one of the beneficiaries. Nyakudya is running Hunters bar.

An employee we spoke to at the facility mentioned Jongwe, whose name also featured prominently in Mbare, as the man to see if one wanted Rufaro deals.

The employee, a bartender, said they paid US\$1000 monthly rent to Rufaro Marketing through Jongwe.

He said in Mabvuku, those who wanted space could talk to a local businessman identified only as Mannex.

Investigations established that Mannex runs a number of tuck shops in the area.

The news team went to see Mannex who expressed eagerness to assist, saying his close relationship with Jongwe made everything easy.

Mannex refused to disclose his real and full names. Those who know him insisted that that is the name he is known by.

He said Rufaro Marketing had bars in Manresa, a middle density suburb in northern Harare, and that access to these facilities required "good financial backing".

He said rentals for grocery stores and beer outlets ranged between US\$250 and US\$350, depending on the size of the property. There were 20 of them and that brought the cumulative rental to US\$7 000 a month.

This money, the investigation established, is not remitted to council but is directed to members of the cartel that involves officials from Remembrance House in Mbare and their runners.

Missing records fuel looting suspicion

According to a report by a special committee on the operations of Rufaro Marketing in 2019, critical documents including minutes of annual general meetings and extraordinary meetings were missing, hence there was no clear picture of the state of affairs at the company, raising suspicion of looting and concealment of illegal activities.

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"The committee was not favoured with minutes of any AGM or EGM of Rufaro Marketing over the years especially for the years leading to the decision to liquidate the company in September 2012, and the years following the decision to liquidate the company. A failure to hold the mandatory AGMs would be in violation of the Articles of Association of the company and the Companies Act (Chapter 24 :03)," the report reads in part.

The committee was also not provided with any minutes of meetings of the previous boards.

Former Rufaro Marketing chief executive, Daniel Mutiwadirwa, confirmed the chaotic records system amid accusations and counter-accusations.

"They destroyed documents," Mutiwadirwa said. "They claim I have documents but they communicated my suspension electronically. So how could I have taken those documents? The chaos was designed to create grounds for looting," he said.

Among the missing documents were lease agreements between Rufaro Marketing and tenants, making it difficult to establish how much rent was being remitted.

This investigation discovered that, while rentals were being paid exclusively in US dollars, the little amount that was purported to be given to Rufaro Marketing was in the local currency changed on the black market.

The Harare mayor, Jacob Mafume, confirmed the missing documents but put the blame on Mutiwadirwa.

"There was no record of Rufaro Marketing. He (Mutiwadirwa) conspired to sell three bars and he was stopped."

CCC election funding claims

Mutiwadirwa claimed he fell out of favour with the opposition-dominated council because he resisted moves to fund the August 2023 harmonised election campaign for the Nelson Chamisa-led opposition party.

"They were saying CCC doesn't have money and needed money for elections," he said.

"I was introduced to CCC leaders and had meetings with so many of them, including Amos Chibaya (interim organising secretary), and what was left was for me to meet their (former) party president (Nelson Chamisa) but I resisted," he said.

Chibaya, however, denied ever meeting Mutiwadirwa.

"After one of the meetings, Mafume was angry. He said he wanted the Rufaro Machipisa outlet. He forced me to find escape clauses to do away with a person who was there," the former CEO said.

"They warned I could only remain CEO if I complied with their demands."

Mafume denied the allegations.

"I met him (Mutiwadirwa) once or twice the entire time. How could a non-performing company finance anything?" he asked.

But Mutiwadirwa insisted that he was forced out to pave way for well-known opposition fundraisers, Juma Ulete and Ngoni Chimbalu, who are now full-time directors at Rufaro Marketing.

A quick background search on the two shows that they have over the years been at the forefront of mobilising resources for opposition campaigns, with one major one being the purchase of a bulletproof vehicle for Chamisa.

The funds remain marred in controversy as no vehicle was delivered.

Ulete and Chimbalu are known opposition functionaries who have been active in fundraising for the party since the days of the late former MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai.



Harare mayor, Jacob Mafume,

Chimbalu and Ulete were also named at the commission's inquiry, with chairperson Cheda accusing them of creating looting avenues that also involve councillors and officials who are reportedly running businesses at the Rufaro Marketing facilities.

"The two directors are running the company and there is no corporate governance because a non-executive is taking over an executive role," he said.

Chimbalu declined to comment on the accusations.

Justice Cheda also claimed Rufaro Marketing was mobilising funds for the CCC party.

"The money is going into their own pockets. Since 2022, there are no remittances that have been paid," Justice Cheda said. "They are not meeting the responsibilities of council."

"We have a video of Hunters Bar and we are going to show you how these bars have dilapidated alongside Kuwadzana shopping centres and the 30 tuckshops that you have leased in your names," he was quoted as saying during the inquiries.

Mafume skirted the question on why he appointed board members to executive positions against principles of corporate governance.

"What did the former CEO (Mutiwadirwa) do? (With Ulete), it has been from zero to refurbishing Rufaro Marketing headquarters. Rufaro Stadium was also refurbished using proceeds from Rufaro Marketing," he said.

Mafume confirmed that Rufaro Marketing assets had been taken over by cartels.

"They (new management) are actually doing far better than the previous CEO but they are facing resistance from tenants who have turned bars into tuckshops, using political muscle and influence. Some are refusing to pay rentals," he said.

Documents gleaned as part of the investigations that include a 2019 audit committee report showed that most of the facilities were in dire need of maintenance as they have lost

shape.

The documents at hand supported by observations show that all facilities are in a state of disrepair.

The report shows “significant underutilisation” of the vast land housing the Rufaro Marketing outlets.

Incidences of land invasions were also noticed at Hunters Tavern in Mabvuku, according to the report by the committee.

“The committee noticed underutilisation of the vast land housing the outlets. Sub economic rentals are being charged as the committee noticed that stalls were being sublet for at least US\$60 each while Rufaro Marketing is paid an average of Rtg\$3000per outlet. Eleven stalls averaging USD\$660 at Hunters in Mabvuku are being sublet by a Rufaro Marketing tenant.

“Rufaro Marketing receives a meagre 3000rtgs (US\$250) which is the equivalent of just 2 stalls. The committee noted that more value can be unlocked out of the properties.

“In addition, the rampant subletting, which does not benefit Rufaro Marketing, must be stopped, even if it means considering having direct relationships with the sub-lessees,” reads the report.

Despite the recommendations, investigations have established that the subletting still continues.

Documents show that cases of subletting involving political actors is rampant.

Some of the tenants who have been given leases unprocedurally are taking advantage of lack of accountability to modify Rufaro Marketing properties.

Recently TN Holdings, Rufaro Marketing and a Zanu PF senior official, Emmanuel Mahachi, fought in court after the latter destroyed and reshaped council facilities at Vito Complex in Mbare into tuck shops for subletting.

“It is declared that the respondent does not have any authority to sub-lease Vito Complex, construct and build tuckshops, modify or demolish the existing and approved buildings comprising Vito Complex,” the ruling reads in part.

The court ordered the demolition of the additional or revamped structures.

Vito Complex is a Rufaro Marketing facility in the populous Mbare suburb and has been the battleground for fights over control by space barons.

Despite the court order, Zanu PF elements continue operating from Vito Complex and recently, lawmakers from the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chaired by Kuwadzana Member of Parliament, Chalton Hwende, were forced to abort a fact finding mission in Mbare at the complex after they were mobbed by Zanu PF activists with one of them brandishing a firearm.

Rufaro Marketing board chair, Warren Chiwawa, confirmed some political elements were giving the company hell but warned that action would be taken.

“We have politicians occupying some of our properties but we have impressed upon the politicians that this is not politics but commerce so we should have a win-win situation,” Chiwawa said.

“There has been resistance from politicians but I think some of them are now coming to the realisation that it is in their best interest to work with us because if they resist us on the basis of politics, we will simply take them to court and evict them,” he added.

Residents speak on Rufaro Marketing drama

Reuben Akili, Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) director, said: “Over the years, you actually see that there hasn’t

been meaningful contribution from Rufaro Marketing remittances to the revenue inflows for the local authority,” Akili said.

“Rufaro Marketing would in the past finance council-run infectious diseases hospitals in terms of rehabilitation and would even contribute to social amenities, rehabilitation of key infrastructure but you realise that, because there have been no remittances, this has seriously impacted on the conditions of our social services,” Akili said.

“If you go to Tafara, the situation is unacceptable. If you go to Mufakose, all those social services, they are collapsing. Even if you go to Gwanzura Stadium, it’s collapsing. Funds from Rufaro Marketing were contributing towards the development of such infrastructure and even social services,” he added.

He said an audit on Rufaro Marketing was critical.

“Some facilities were sold under unclear circumstances which qualifies as fraud because it remains public property. We feel that the local authority has been prejudiced of millions of dollars,” he said.

Deteriorating infrastructure

Observations show that a number of facilities have been run down. Documents also support the collapsing infrastructure.

In Mbare, the facilities including Vito Complex are now an eyesore with unplanned tuckshops where officials also suspect are the hub of drug peddling.

In Highfields, high human traffic is raising fears of disease outbreaks because the ablution facilities are mostly malfunctioning.

A committee set up in 2019 to probe the Rufaro Marketing case and was chaired by Ian Makone, a former opposition funder, revealed gross irregularities that included opaque selling of facilities and missing funds.

“In his verbal submission to the committee the Acting Finance Director revealed outlets at Chitubu, Nyenyere and Island Bar had been sold based on an internal valuation.

“Authority for the sale was not confirmed. The committee considers that, in line with its overall findings, better candidates for disposal would have been Vito Red Room in Mbare and Gazaland,” the report reads in part.

- **The Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) commenced investigations into the looting at Rufaro Marketing after the story was published, with Harare mayor, Jacob Mafume, vowing that the involved cartels would be thoroughly investigated. Council took the matter to ZACC. The publishing of the story inspired several council officials and councillors to step up to our media partner, Business Times, with more information on the corruption at Rufaro Marketing and Town House. This story was published just as the Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the Harare municipality was just starting and, when their investigation turned to Rufaro Marketing, most of the issues that were raised coincided with the revelations made in our own probe. (<https://businesstimes.co.zw/council-looting-scan-dal-jolts-zacc/>)**

Chiredzi South relegated to the Dark Ages by uncaring govt

BY MORRIS BISHI

PEOPLE in some parts of Chiredzi South depend on mobile networks and broadcasting services from neighbouring Mozambique and South Africa, which has left many convinced that the government has relegated them to the shadows as it perpetuates colonial practices.

Smuggling has become a way of life for many, while several roads are impassable.

In addition, these rural citizens live on the edge of the chair because, anytime, government may kick them out of their ancestral land to pave way for a project which will benefit cattle for the rich.

This is not a modern-day Wilbur Smith script. The description relates to the Shangani people of rural Chilonga and surrounding areas in Chiredzi South in Masvingo province.

Poor mobile network coverage and elusive airwaves sever connection to the world, isolating communities and stifling opportunities.



Auspicious Ndlovu, founder of Community Initiatives for Sustainable Development Trust (CIFOSUDE),

Poverty's suffocating grip is evident for all to see. Limited access to healthcare condemns people to premature death. Crumbling and distant educational facilities as well as an acute shortage of teachers dash many dreams of escaping poverty, trapping generations in a cycle of despair.

In areas like Chilotlela, Davata, Madzanda and others near Sango Border Post people rely on cellphone networks from Mozambique and South Africa. This is the case even in emergencies.

The dependency on foreign networks means locals cross the porous border to buy airtime and data bundles which they then resell in their villages.

Relying on foreign networks however has huge disadvantages, some of which are fatal.

Lives are at stake

Susan Mazinyani from Chilotlela told *The NewsHawks* that her relative lost a baby because of the poor network.

She said during that emergency they had to use a Mozambican signal to call for help, but it was unavailable.

"Some years back we lost a baby after a relative had complications with her pregnancy. We used a sim card with Mozambican reception to call for help but it was not connecting and when we succeeded after many hours, it was too late. She lost the baby," said Mazinyani.

Brighton Baloyi, who lives on a farm near Sango Border Post said, he has been using a Mobitel line from Mozambique since 2015. He uses the service provider for both calls and internet connection.

He buys rechargeable cards from villagers who illegally cross into Mozambique to buy goods for resale back home.

"I have been using a Mozambican line for almost nine years now and it is reliable and cheaper as compared to charges being charged by local providers, in the limited areas where there is connectivity. I have no choice since local networks have poor reception in my area," said Baloyi.

Nyeleti Luvani from Davata said she is finding it harder to speak to relatives in Zimbabwe due to high charges although it is easier for her to speak to her husband and relatives in South Africa.

"My phone is always online since I use an MTN line whose data charges are cheaper than local service providers. I usually find it difficult to connect with relatives in Chiredzi or Harare than speaking to those in South Africa especially my husband whom I can speak with even on data calls," said Luvani.

Meanwhile, in distant boardrooms, people donning suits and neckties deliberate on the fate of residents of Chilonga and parts of Chiredzi South. Their decisions are shaped by interests and agendas far removed from the dusty realities of a rural life, setting the stage for a showdown between the tradition and progress, community and commerce.

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Chilonga is an area located in the south-eastern part of Zimbabwe, near Chiredzi town. It has a complex history. Originally inhabited by the Karanga people, a sub-group of the Shona, the area was designated as a native reserve by the British colonial authorities, leading to forced relocations and land expropriation.

A fraught history

The Shangani people, also known as the Tsonga or Hlengwe, were the residents of the present-day Gonarezhou National Park before their eviction by the colonial government after the area was declared a game reserve in 1934. The declaration kick-started forced evictions of the Shangani communities from their ancestral land to create space for the game park.

The displacements were implemented by enforcing racially guided land alignment that followed the promulgation of the discriminatory Land Apportionment Act in 1930.

Gonarezhou is Zimbabwe's second-largest National Park and one of its most famed wilderness areas. It stretches 5 053 square kilometres, covering 1.25 million acres, from the Save River in the north to the Mwenezi River to the south. The park is home to some of the most spectacular landscapes in southern Africa – including the iconic Chilojo Cliffs.

In the 1960s, they were forcibly evicted from their territories in Chiredzi to create space for the establishment of the Triangle and Hippo Valley sugarcane estates. They relocated to Chilonga.

In February 2021, the government served Chilonga residents with an eviction order to pave way for a lucerne grass project by Dendairy, a private dairy company. A total of 2 258 households and around 13 840 people faced eviction.

An investigation supported by Information for Development Trust (IDT), a non-profit media organisation promoting investigative journalism in Zimbabwe and the Southern Afri-

can Development Community, revealed that social exclusion has affected the lives of the Shangani people in Chilonga and most parts of Chiredzi South, leaving deep scars across generations.

The denial of basic rights and opportunities has perpetuated cycles of poverty. The lack of access to quality education and healthcare has resulted in widespread illiteracy, early child marriages, child labour and family disintegration, as parents leave the country for greener pastures.

Community leaders say the poor road network in Chiredzi South is testament of the community's neglect. Many areas cannot be reached, especially during the rainy season.

In 2000, Cyclone Eline caused severe damage to Chilonga Bridge at Runde River which connected Chiredzi with Chilonga, Chikombedzi, Malipati and Sango Border Post. The bridge is yet to be replaced despite several promises by government officials. A small causeway bridge at the site has claimed lives during rainy seasons. In 2022, a total of 14 people were swept away while trying to cross the river.

A neglected community

Headman Ngwenyeni, born Kennias Mukachana of Malipati, told The NewsHawks that there are various issues relating to development and social services which local leaders have been raising with government officials. He said their pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

"You are lucky to talk to me over the phone, network is poor and there is no access in many areas. Most people are using Mozambican or South African cellular networks. It is easy that way than accessing our own. We travel for more than seven kilometres to a nearby clinic from our area and the roads are



Malipati school



Chilonga Bridge

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not being attended to. Since Independence, we are yet to access transmission for local radio stations; we are listening to stations from Mozambique and South Africa. People from this side are not in touch with what is happening in our country in terms of news and other developments. We raise these issues every time we meet authorities, but we are not seeing the answers since nothing is improving," he said.

Auspicious Ndlovu, founder of Community Initiatives for Sustainable Development Trust (CIFOSUDE), a community organisation based in Chiredzi South focusing on initiatives to promote sustainable development, told The NewsHawks Chiredzi South is marginalised.

"We have various problems including road network, communication and other services. People are feeling that they are being ignored maybe because our area is in the border area. About 70% of our area does not have network connectivity. People are using South African network (MTN) and Mobitel from Mozambique and with high numbers of stocktheft we are having challenges to communicate with others over this issue. Education is also another challenge; it is a problem which started during the era of our ancestors and many look for employment just after Grade 7 since schools are faraway," Ndlovu said.

"Our health facilities are few, considering the distances people travel to access a clinic. For example, someone in Chigalo walks to Rutandare and someone from Mhlekwane walks to Dumisa and these distances are more than 10 kilometres. This is unbearable for someone who is sick. Due to lack of a bridge to connect us with Chiredzi, during rainy seasons, we travel to Chiredzi via Rutenga from areas such as Gezani, which is almost 300 kilometres.

"Social ills are rampant in our area, mostly child marriages and early pregnancies, due to shortage of normal services like

education which are better in other rural areas."

Esther Mungoni from Vhelemu area said women were bearing the brunt of the lack of development.

She said during rainy seasons, accessing Chiredzi Hospital becomes extremely challenging, forcing many to risk their lives by crossing the flooded Runde River in makeshift boats.

She shared a personal experience where her sister-in-law gave birth in a boat, surrounded by men, in a humiliating and dangerous situation.

"The struggle to access healthcare in our community is a matter of life and death. As I have witnessed firsthand, expecting mothers are forced to risk their lives by crossing the flooded Runde River in makeshift boats, just to reach Chiredzi Hospital. It's a harrowing experience that's both humiliating and dangerous. I recall the traumatic incident where my sister-in-law gave birth in a boat, surrounded by men, in the middle of the river," said Mungoni.

A Zanu PF councillor who requested anonymity said it was a shame that Chilonga Bridge has not been repaired, many years after destruction.

He said the community felt the government was deliberately neglecting the area.

"Chilonga Bridge was damaged in the early 2000s and we witnessed other disasters since that time and as locals we are still asking the whereabouts of the emergency response funds for Cyclone Eline. A lot of infrastructure was damaged during that disaster but there was nothing done to address these damages. Electricity at Malipati Business Centre developed a fault in 2020 and the fault is yet to be rectified, four years later.

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This shows the extent to which we are being neglected," said the councillor.

Cyclone Eline was the second longest-lived cyclone in the Indian Ocean, which travelled over 11 000 km during its 29-day track through the Indian Ocean in February 2000. The cyclone formed on 1 February 2000, and caused severe damage in several southern African countries including Mozambique and Zimbabwe before dissipating over eastern Namibia on 29 February.

Children denied education

Chiredzi Rural District Ward 6 councillor in Chilonga Happie Chikutu said people in Chiredzi South are surviving under harsh conditions.

He said shortage of educational facilities is affecting the standard of living in his area.

Chikutu said in his ward there is only one school at Chambuta, resulting in children travelling more than 15 kilometres to school.

"People are surviving, but they are living in poverty. Secondary school is the biggest challenge, with children travelling between 18 to 30km to a secondary school every day. Lack of basic education is the driver of poverty and this is causing dropouts since children are dropping out after Grade 7. In my ward there is only one clinic at Chambuta and if you look at a distance from Chikovo to Chambuta the distance is over 20km. We only have a single network booster at Vhelemu and Chambuta. After primary level at 12 or 13 years, many children are entering into early marriages because they have nothing to do. Our area is behind in terms of development and that is being caused by lack of social services," said Chikutu.

Kettie Mukachana from Chibwedziva said children are facing a significant setback in their education due to the lengthy distances to school.

She said most children are starting their education at the age of 7, two years or more after their peers in other areas to allow them to have the stamina to walk long distances.

"The delayed start to their education has far-reaching consequences. If a child starts ECD A at six years or seven years then what can we expect in terms of educational success from that child. They cannot cope or compete with children who start learning early, and this leads to school dropouts," said Mukachana.

Marginalised, excluded, forgotten

Community Tolerance Reconciliation and Development (Cotrad) director Zivanai Muzorodzi said the Shangani-speaking people of Chiredzi South bear the scars of social, political and economic exclusion.

He said the pending forced evictions of Chilonga people to pave way for Lucerne production will disrupt their livelihoods, cultural practices and identity, indigenous knowledge, land rights and other human rights.

"Shangaan-speaking people bear the brunt of social, political and economic exclusion. Economically, a few of them possess sugarcane plots distributed during the land reform and the recent Kilimanjaro project despite being evicted from the area way back. Most parts where the Shangaan people reside in Chiredzi are remote and there are no well-connected road networks, airwaves and basic amenities. Lack of information negatively impacts on their access to information which could enhance their informed political participation," Muzorodzi said.

"There are profound challenges in getting Zimbabwean radio and television waves in some parts of Chiredzi South covering Boli Mhlanguleni, Chilonga, Malipati, Davata, Gezani and others. The disconnection from national broadcasting deprive them accessing information which is vital in enhancing their political horizon which is critical just like any other citizens."

Smuggling is rife

Tsakani Chauke, who comes from Chilonga, said he is surviving on smuggling goods from South Africa through an illegal point at Chikwalakwala area. He said since he failed to access education, he has resorted to smuggling for a living. During the rainy season when the Limpopo River is impassable, he survives on operating an illegal boat service, ferrying people across the Runde River at Chilonga.

"My homestead is faraway from a secondary school, so after finishing my Grade 7, I ventured into smuggling, which is the business most of my brothers are doing. It is risky, but I am happy that we are able to manage security officers manning the border area. We bring in various goods to Chiredzi and this business is paying us. I got married at 14 after leaving school. We bring in various goods, especially groceries, supplying shop owners in Chiredzi South and our local town. This is what most of us are doing, others are working on South African farms and they don't use legal entry points since they do not have passports.

"When the river is impassable, we move to Chilonga causeway Bridge where we use boats without engines to transport people across for a fee. We also transport goods and even dead bodies across Runde River and on a day we make a lot of money, enough for our families to survive. This is what we are doing to survive."

Miriam Mbalati, a single mother from Gezani said her business at Malipati Business Centre is thriving since she is hoarding cheaper goods from those who are into smuggling goods into the country through an illegal crossing point at Chikwalakwala.

She said it is cheaper to buy from the dealers than buying from Chiredzi which is far and expensive.

"The buses to and from Chiredzi travel according to timetables. If you arrive in Chiredzi after lunch hour you should look for alternative accommodation since it will be difficult to get transport to our area. We are buying from those into illegal cross border trading and this is making a difference and my small business is thriving," said Mbalati.

According to a masterplan released by Chiredzi Rural District Council in 2023, a total of 3 920 pupils dropped out of school due to various reasons, including the long walking distances, unavailability of secondary schools, non-payment of fees and lack of interest.

Eighty percent of the dropouts are secondary school learners. Of this number, 2 060 are girls. Seven wards within the district do not have secondary schools at all, with some learners forced to travel for more than 20kms to the nearest secondary school.

"While the country has made significant strides in achieving universal education, key challenges remain in the access to quality, equitable and inclusive education across Chiredzi district as mentioned by community members and stakeholders

during consultation meetings. Attention was directed to broad access and participation to quality, equitable and inclusive education by disenfranchised populations that are found in rural Chiredzi," the masterplan says.

"There are only 148 primary schools against the existing 48 secondary schools in Chiredzi rural. This indicates a shortage of secondary schools within the district. Seven wards within the district do not have a secondary school at all. Some learners proceeding from primary school to secondary school are forced to travel over 20km to the next secondary school which will be outside their ward. Some end up dropping out of school. Of the 48 secondary schools, only four secondary schools offer Advanced Level studies. There is only one boarding school in the district.

"The challenges in education have also created a conducive environment for sexual abuse, teenage pregnancies and child marriages in girls. Most girls are exposed to abuse during school days, especially those travelling to school early and coming back late and also during their stay in bush boardings. There is need for establishment of girl-friendly schools and increasing the number."

Shortage of schools

In all wards, both primary and secondary some learners walk more than five kilometres to the nearest school. Early childhood development (ECD) pupils also walk such long distances. The masterplan reveals that in ward 13, secondary school learners from areas like Masukwe and Pahlala attend school at Alpha Mpapa (Chikombedzi) and Malipati High which is more than 20km.

"In addition to inadequate infrastructure there is serious shortage of furniture and learning equipment within schools. Most schools in rural areas are not electrified despite Zimbabwe's NDS 1 [National Development Strategy] emphasis on Stem-focused education as a response to the country's needs for innovation, industrialisation, and creation of wealth for all, especially girls and women. Most schools do not have laboratories for science subjects. Therefore, all schools should have at least solar-powered laboratories and adequate learning equipment," the report says.

The majority of health facilities in the area have inadequate infrastructure. Most health facilities do not have a shelter for waiting mothers, inconveniencing expecting mothers.

"On the existing health facilities there are no admission rooms which are necessary and prompt people to seek medical attention in bigger hospitals which are faraway. Unavailability of disability-friendly infrastructure and trained personnel at health centres for disabilities also widens the gap for access to health. Availability of essential medicines and medical supplies remains a challenge. Unavailability of pharmacies also adds to the above-mentioned challenges," the masterplan says.

"Members of the community suffering from chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, asthma and others find it difficult to access their medication every month. The general population of the wards also suffer the same challenges, especially when they fail to secure any medication from the local health facilities. People are forced to travel long distances to secure medication from pharmacies in Chiredzi Town.

"Chiredzi rural has a total of 38 health facilities. The number of hospital facilities is very low as compared to the population they serve. There are 11 wards without health facilities and all rely on health facilities in neighbouring wards which are very

far in most instances."

Arrested development

Malipati Development Trust chairperson Lawrence Moyo said the poor road network makes it difficult for development partners to access the local areas.

Chief Chilonga, born John Ben, said his people are facing many challenges, especially connectivity to Chiredzi during rainy seasons as well as shortage of mobile network boosters. He said his area is drought prone and is happy that the government is trying, through drought relief programmes, to alleviate hunger.

"We are having challenges as people of Chilonga. We cannot generally say government is neglecting us, but from the programmes being undertaken we can say they are trying to address some of the challenges we are facing. It is true that unavailability of a bridge across Runde is causing deaths annually during rainy seasons, but we are hoping the problem is going to end since government is taking action. Network connection is another challenge and people are moving from place to place to search for network so that they can communicate with their relatives. Child marriage is a cancer which should be treated and we hope government will mobilise resources to address issues, especially educational facilities, so that our children can be occupied," said Chief Chilonga.

Chiredzi district development coordinator Lovemore Chisema said the government is aware of the challenges being faced by residents of Chiredzi South.

He said the government is making efforts through devolution funds to address challenges in education and healthcare in the area. There are plans to replace Chilonga Bridge and as a district they are waiting for allocation of funds from central government, he said.

"Obviously as government something called social exclusion is something which could be perceived, depending on who will be talking about it. Nevertheless, we appreciate that there are areas which are behind; that's why government efforts are talking about devolution and on planning we are targeting infrastructure development in those areas. The Chilonga Bridge is in government plans and it's all about availability of funds. If you look at the masterplan for Chiredzi RDC, it is targeting improvement of educational and health facilities in Chiredzi South," said Chisema.

- **The Chiredzi Central MP, Ropafadzo Makumire, acknowledged that, after reading the story, he took it upon himself to move a motion in parliament on 18 December 2024 where he asked the ministers of ICT and Information, respectively, on what government was doing to ensure access to radio and cellphone services in Chiredzi, as exposed by the investigation (<https://thenewshawks.com/government-neglect-leaves-chiredzi-south-community-in-de-spair/>)**

Justice stalled for victims of Zim political violence

BY MIRIAM MANGWAYA

AN investigation into the handling of political violence cases by Zimbabwean police has exposed a deep-rooted pattern of systemic inaction.

Interviews with opposition activists reveal a troubling trend of stagnation: cases are left unresolved, with no arrests or charges, perpetuating a cycle of impunity and fuelling violence.

Since 2000, Zimbabwe's elections have been tainted by violence, with human rights organisations highlighting the 2000, 2002, 2008 and post 2018 election periods as particularly brutal. Decades later, many victims are still seeking justice for violations of their rights.

Despite identifying their attackers, many victims report that the police fail to take meaningful action, fostering a climate of impunity that only emboldens perpetrators.

An investigation by the Zimbabwe Independent, in collaboration with Information for Development Trust, a non-profit organisation supporting investigative reporting focusing on communities, uncovered numerous cases of political murders and violence dating back to 2021 that remain unresolved, with victims' families living in a cloud of uncertainty.

Police have consistently failed to provide updates, leaving families without hope.

Testimonies from victims of political violence paint a bleak picture of the aftermath — job losses, displacements, discrimi-

nation, and fractured family ties.

Systemic injustice The failure of the justice system to hold perpetrators to account has eroded trust among victims and their families. This has allowed perpetrators to act with impunity.

Many victims end up abandoning legal channels in favour of spiritual beliefs. They seek solace in ancestral spirits, hoping for retribution through supernatural means.

"Sometimes I go to his grave and speak to him," Mollen Banga, widow of slain Gutu activist Nyasha Zhambe, said. "I ask him to fight for himself, to fight back. It pains me to see his killers walking scot free. I will only find peace when the killers have been arrested and imprisoned.

"The law may have failed us, but surely the spirits cannot. He reported the matter to the police before he died and even identified his assailants but he succumbed to the injuries before they were arrested."

Zhambe was assaulted by Zanu PF youths on October 14, 2021 and died from his injuries at Parirenyatwa Hospital in Harare on November 27, 2021.

The youths had mounted an illegal roadblock along the Gutu-Masvingo road in October 2022 to block opposition supporters from meeting with the then Citizens Coalition for Change leader, Nelson Chamisa.

Another victim, Patrick Chimbare of Gutu, has also lost faith

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From left, Patrick Chimbare, Brian Sithole, Takudzwa Mashiri, Privilege Goremushandu, Anna Chuma, Tapiwa Chiro all CCC members from Chatsworth, Masvingo province, were allegedly assaulted by Zanu PF members ahead of the November 2023 Gutu West by-election.

in the police. After being assaulted by a Zanu PF youth member, Chimbare was instead arrested for public violence.

"I was beaten up and left for dead but Robson has not yet been arrested," Chimbare alleged.

"I am a builder by profession, but I cannot work anymore because my hands were permanently injured during the assault. What hurts more is I am the one who was arrested for that case.

"I was convicted for public violence at the Gutu Magistrates Court and I served two weeks before the High Court over[1] turned the judgement."

Former Mabvuku Tafara legislator James Chidhakwa, who was abducted and tortured by unknown assailants, voiced his despair over the absence of any arrests in his case.

Chidhakwa was left for dead in the Arcturus mining area in Goromonzi district, some 30 kilometres east of Harare. He sustained permanent injuries to his left leg and right hand.

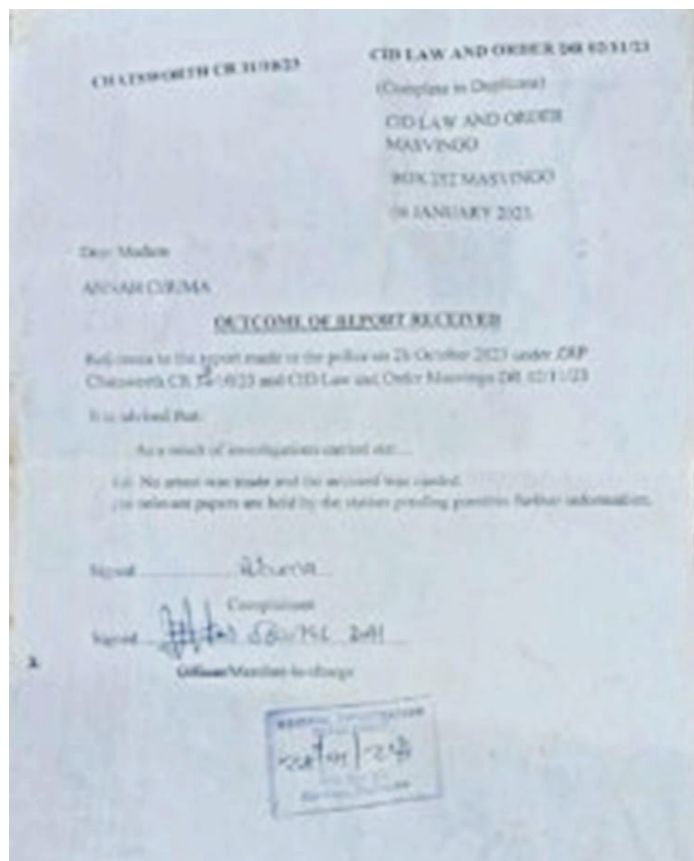
"There is no hope for justice under Zanu PF leadership," he said.

"If some perpetrators, who were identified as in the case of the murder of (Tapfumaneyi) Masaya have not been arrested, what about in my case where I could not identify the perpetrators?" Masaya, a CCC member, was killed after he was allegedly abducted on November 11, 2023 in Mabvuku while campaigning for a party candidate Febion Kufahautizwi ahead of by-elections in the constituency.

Perpetual victimisation The investigation also revealed that postelection violence in 2023 continued to haunt opposition activists, particularly those from the CCC.



Potifa Mwanza, a CCC member from Ward 32, Bikita sustained permanent injuries on his right leg after he was allegedly run over by Zanu PF Senator Anna Rungani's car in July 2023, a month before the August 2023 general elections.



Police docket

Many CCC supporters were displaced after the August elections, fleeing to safe houses to escape retribution from Zanu PF supporters.

A CCC member, Vongai Tome, reported that as of September 2024, 1 740 cases of rights violations had been documented, and 25 CCC activists emigrated while four others remained in hiding due to ongoing political victimisation.

Perpetrators, often linked to the ruling Zanu PF, continue to operate with impunity. Bishop Abton Mashayanyika, who made death threats against Chamisa, was reported as saying he was "too Zanu PF to be arrested".

This sentiment resonates with other victims, like Anna Chuma, who was allegedly assaulted in October 2023 in Gutu. She reported the matter at Chatsworth Police Station under case reference (CR) number 33/10/23.

Despite knowing her assailant, police have failed to act, even suggesting Chuma brings the attacker to the station herself.

She was assaulted on October 16, 2023 ahead of the Gutu West by-elections. "I know the guy who assaulted me. His name is Vimbashe Bhunga, but the police just said he was on the wanted list although he is in the neighbourhood," she alleged.

"Sometimes police would tell me to bring him to them. Seriously, how do they expect me to convince my assailant to come with me to the police station?"

"But the harassment still continues. He knows I cannot fight back and he cannot be arrested." Efforts by the Independent to obtain police updates on political violence cases have been met with silence.

On June 25, the Independent sent a formal letter to the police requesting details on the case, after which it made daily phone calls. Formal requests for information have gone unanswered, and multiple visits to the police general headquarters yielded no results.

Police inaction on politically-motivated criminal cases have prompted the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights to lodge a complaint against officers who are reluctant to investigate a case where Zanu PF Senator Anna Rungani's driver allegedly killed and injured CCC members in a road traffic accident.

The accident occurred on July 30, 2023 at Nyika Growth Point in Bikita and claimed the life of Cathline Mupamhadzi and injured Potifah Mwanza, both renowned CCC members in Bikita district.

In a letter dated July 25, 2024 addressed to Police Commissioner General Godwin Matanga, ZLHR, acting on behalf of Mwanza, said a year after the crime was committed, the accused person, John Esau Taruvinga, had not yet appeared in court.

Part of the letter reads: "Our client now believes the political influence of the owner of the vehicle is now being used to deter the matter and the entire process is no longer being executed within legal and ethical framework of the ZRP." Seeking justice, State betrayal For those seeking justice, the experience is often one of betrayal. Some victims, initially called as witnesses, later found themselves facing charges.

In one instance, five CCC activists in Gutu were summoned to the police station to discuss an assault on a colleague but were instead charged themselves and sentenced to a year in prison. They spent two weeks in jail before the High Court overturned the charges.

The five, Tapiwa Chiro, Privilege Goremushandu, Brian Sithole, and Takudzwa Mashiri, all from Chatsworth, Masvingo province, had been summoned to assist in Chimbare's case.

"I stayed in jail and served for two weeks for trumped-up charges," Chimbare said.

"I was assaulted, and I was blamed for the assault. The assailant left me for dead, but I went behind bars with those injuries. What justice is that?"

"The High Court found us not guilty, but who will compensate for the two weeks we served in jail, the life we lost during the time we were accused persons for the offence?"

Banga was arrested on November 30, 2021, just a day after her husband's burial, but was released shortly afterward. Her arrest followed a confrontation with her husband's suspected murderer.

In another case, Chari Mudzingidzi, a CCC candidate for Mazowe South, was acquitted by a magistrate in Concession in September 2024 on charges of defeating or obstructing the course of justice.

Ahead of the 2023 elections, Mudzingidzi had reported Zanu PF supporters to the police for tearing down his campaign posters. However, in June 2024, he was instead summoned and accused of that very offense."

Flawed investigations

The investigation also revealed significant flaws in police documentation, including incorrect dates, misspelt names, and missing details.

Victims frequently endure exhausting bureaucratic hurdles, only to have their cases remain unresolved.

Chuma is one such victim, initially directed to her local Chatsworth police station but later told to travel to Masvingo to file her complaint.

The journey was not only long and expensive, but also physically exhausting and emotionally taxing. Unfortunately,

Chuma's experience is far from unique.

Many victims endure similar ordeals, being passed from one office to another with no resolution in sight.

"I reported my abduction and torture at the Harare CID Law and Order, but my case was never even recorded," recounts CCC councillor Womberaishe Nhende, who was abducted, tortured, and later dumped by suspected State security agents.

"I returned to the police multiple times, offering to identify my abductor, but they simply refused to act."

This bureaucratic maze often discourages victims from pursuing justice altogether.

The urban-rural divide

Opposition activists in rural areas face even greater challenges than their urban counterparts. While activists in cities sometimes benefit from solidarity and media attention, those in rural areas remain isolated, unsupported, and unheard.

Their stories rarely reach social media or attract human rights campaigns, leaving them especially vulnerable and voiceless. High-profile campaigns like #FreeTimba, #FreeSikhala, and #FreeNamatia have been launched for jailed activists, yet some rural residents of Chatsworth were convicted and had served part of their sentences before the High Court quashed their charges — without any social media campaign rallying for their freedom.

In the end, Zimbabwe's justice system continues to fail victims of political violence, fostering a culture of impunity that leaves the country's most vulnerable at risk.

- **On their own acknowledgement, several victims of politically motivated violence were inspired by revelations in the story to renew their efforts to ensure that justice was done. One of them, legislator James Chidhakwa, indicated that he would be taking his case to the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) after police failed to take decisive action (<https://newshubzim.co.zw/2024/12/24/political-violence-victims-in-fresh-pursuit-of-justice/>)**

Perpetual outcasts: The plight of Bulawayo 'Villages' reeling from neglect



BY SENZENI NCUBE

Reginald Mkhosana and his subjects from St Peters village on the outskirts of Bulawayo are classified as urbanites in terms of Zimbabwe's political boundaries, but their living conditions undoubtedly mirror the penury that typifies rural life.

St Peters like Robert Sinyoka, Mazwi, Hyde Park Estate and Methodist villages are under Bulawayo City Council's ward 17 and are part of Pumula Constituency that also encompasses Old Pumula, Pumula North and Pumula South high density suburbs.

Lying on the fringes of Zimbabwe's second largest city, the five villages have been partially assimilated into the boundary of the greater Bulawayo urban space, but the areas are disconnected and marginalised from the sites of business and commerce in the city.

There is a distinct difference between the urban areas of the city and the villages that accommodate the poor and the marginalised where the majority still live in mud huts without running water and electricity.

Mkhosana, who is the village committee chairperson, said they still walk distances of between five and 12 kilometres to access primary health care services because of the slow pace of development in the area.

The roads in the village are not navigable and access to running water is still a pipe dream for the majority while infrastructure at the local school is crumbling due to years of neglect.

"We don't have a clinic and the situation is very bad," Mkhosana told CITE at his homestead in St Peters.

"People walk to Pumula Clinic, which is 12 km away, for treatment or go to Khami Clinic that is 5km from here.

"The city centre (where there are referral hospitals) is about 27 km from where we stay."

The villages are mostly made up of people that lived under constant threat of displacement by various local and national authorities before they were formally resettled by the government before independence.

Some came from informal settlements within urban Bulawayo such as Ngozi Mine and Killarney.

Information obtained from the Bulawayo City Council shows that Robert Sinyoka Village has 107 households, Methodist Village (110), St Peters Village (188) and Mazwi Village (197).

Pumula Constituency where the villages are located is a largely urban administrative area politically, but the settlements are disconnected from services found within greater Bulawayo.

An investigation by CITE in collaboration with the Information for Development Trust (IDT), a non-profit media organisation promoting investigative journalism in Zimbabwe and the SADC region, revealed a wide urban and rural divide in the constituency that put the struggles of villagers in the five settlements into sharp focus.

Lagging behind

Ideally, the pace of development at St Peters, Robert Sinyoka, Methodist, Mazwi and Hyde Park Estate must be at par with what is happening in the urban parts of the constituency as the villages are officially under the Bulawayo City Council.

The areas should also be benefiting equally from the council's ward retention fund and Parliament's Constituency Development Fund (CDF), but the villagers say they are not seeing the impact of both schemes.

Council through its ward retention policy allows its 29 wards to retain three percent of the rates residents and businesses pay to the local authority for the development of their areas.

Councillors are the custodians of the funds. On the other hand, the government introduced the CDF in 2010 to enable legislators to spearhead development projects in their constituencies.

MPs get up to the equivalent of US\$50 000 a year from the CDF, but the scheme has over the years been disrupted by Zimbabwe's currency problems.

The allocations, which are often in local currency, are dis-

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bursed late to an extent that by the time they become available to the constituency the money would have lost value significantly.

In April the country switched to the Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG) from the RTGS dollar after the local currency was battered by inflation. This was despite the fact that this year's national budget was crafted in RTGS.

Zimbabwe has been battling currency instability since 2008 when it dumped the inflation ravaged local currency in favour of multicurrencies dominated by the US dollar. The local unit was reintroduced in 2019, but it has struggled to find its footing on the market.

Over the years, legislators have been pushing the government to disburse the CDF money in US dollars after service providers rejected the unstable local currency.

MPs always attribute their failure to complete projects or to initiate new ones to late disbursement of funds and currency fluctuations.

Mkhosana, the St Peters village leader, said development remained elusive in his community as he bemoaned the lack of a clinic in the area and a deteriorating road network as well as a shortage of well-equipped schools.

Situation dire for villagers

The five villages suffer from perennial water shortages as the homesteads do not have running water.

They rely on water points that consist of taps dotted around the villages and council insists that it has no capacity to provide running water in their areas because of dwindling supplies and lack of funds to improve infrastructure.

Bulawayo is battling perennial water shortages because of a population that has outgrown the six supply dams and the effects of climate change.

Four of the city's supply dams were built before Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 when Bulawayo's population was 386 000.

The 2022 national census put the city's population at 658 028. Council has in recent months stopped drawing water from Umzingwane and Upper Ncema dams after they ran dry due to the drought.

Bulawayo also gets some of its water from boreholes on the Nyamandlovu Aquifer, but supplies remain way below the daily demand of 135 megalitres a day for the city.

"We also have a challenge with water as the pipes are now old and are small," Mkhosana said.

"They can no longer adequately serve the growing population in this area."

Saliwe Ngwenya from Mazwi said the lack of health facilities in the area was a sign of under development, which put people's lives at risk.

"The only time we get health services closer to us is when staff from Pumula Clinic carry outreach activities such as the immunisation of children," Ngwenya said.

"At times when we call for ambulances to rescue women who are labour they take too long to arrive because of the poor road network and this gives rise to home deliveries.

"We are appealing for a clinic to be built here so that we can access health services."

Phathiwe Tembo, who said her family was resettled in Robert Sinyoka in 1969 from an informal settlement that was in the Pumula area, said the village had seen little development despite its proximity to Bulawayo.

"The local roads are in a bad state," Tembo said. "When we call for an ambulance during an emergency they can only drive to a certain point and we push the sick person in a wheelbarrow to reach them."

Tembo said villagers have to wake up as early as 4am to fetch water at designated points and this posed serious risks, especially for young girls who were susceptible to attacks by sex predators.

The villagers rely on a few community boreholes dotted around their areas. Their livestock also gets water from the boreholes as there are no dams in another sign of underdevelopment.

NGOs to the rescue

Mkhosana said the only institutions that have shown interest in developing their area were non-governmental organisations that assist them to set up horticulture gardens.

"The pace of development here is very slow compared to the urban areas," he lamented.

"We are peasant farmers and as such most people are unemployed and our only source of development is non-governmental organisations, who help us with gardening projects, among other things."

World Vision, one of the NGOs that was supporting the Robert Sinyoka community with development programmes targeted especially at children and "offering relief to elders in the village" for 23 years, pulled out on August 7 this year, council documents showed.

The humanitarian organisation constructed two teachers' cottages at St Peters Primary School to curb the problem of high staff turnover.

It was also part of a consortium of organisations that established Sizalendaba Secondary School and also supported other schools around the area.

"The City of Bulawayo is grateful for the assistance rendered by the World Vision organisation through its interventions to the underprivileged and disadvantaged communities in and around Bulawayo Metropolitan Province," reads a report of council's health, housing and education committee tabled at the local authority's full council meeting in early October.

"It is hoped that in future they would return and continue being a worthwhile partner of the City of Bulawayo," the local authority added.

Bulawayo United Residents Association chairperson Winos Dube said the lack of development in the peri-urban villagers was a major source of concern.

Dube said a shortage of facilities such as clinics was worrying and urged the community to continue putting pressure on the authorities until they act on the uneven development of the ward.

"The villages depend on Pumula Clinic as they do not have any facility close to them," he told CITE.

"Those people need to be taken care of and the authorities must make sure that there is a clinic close to them, which is very important.

"Local authorities will always cite various challenges for failing to provide services, but there is need for these peri-urban areas to have clinics close to them."

One of the Mazwi villagers, Margret Mpofu (70), said she had been struggling to access treatment for a suspected hip

fracture for over two weeks because she had no money for transport to the nearest clinic.

"I got injured two weeks ago on my hip after I fell while coming from fetching water," Mpofu said. "I don't have money to go to Pumula Clinic or the one at Khami Prison."

She said one of her grandchildren, who always ferries her to the clinic on a wheelbarrow, was away.

No schools, no hospitals

Nqobizitha Moyo, the Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BPRA) organising secretary for ward 17, said people living in the villages on the outskirts of the city were bearing the brunt of lack of facilities such as hospitals and schools.

Moyo said they have been pushing for the construction of clinics and schools in ward 17 to alleviate the suffering of villagers, who have to walk several kilometres to access health services.

"The people in ward 17 have to walk to Khami Prison to access primary health care services," he said.

"Some residents use scotch carts while others walk to a clinic in urban Pumula and they would be struggling due to illness.

"As BPRA we have been advocating for the construction of a clinic near Sizalendaba to serve all the four villages and this will alleviate the problem of people having to walk several kilometres to access primary health care services."

Moyo said they were organising regular meetings with residents and other stakeholders to plot the effective use of the ward retention fund, including the construction of a proposed clinic to service the areas.

Waiting for city to expand

Ward 17 councillor Sikhululekile Moyo said the villages were being serviced by a mobile clinic and more services would become accessible as the city expands.

The councillor said ward retention funds had been used to develop the Robert Sinyoka football and netball fields and there were plans to also develop a water reticulation system in St Peters as villagers there had no access to running water.

For this financial year, Ward 17 was allocated US\$2 299 and \$ 444 306 in local currency under the ward retention fund, information obtained by CITE indicated.

Some of the projects that have been proposed for next year to be bankrolled by the fund include rehabilitation of streetlights on the urban side and construction of a car park at the Pumula North municipal hall.

The five villages will benefit from the construction of staff cottage and a science laboratory at Sizalendaba Secondary School.

The councillor said they were pinning their hopes on plans to expand the City of Bulawayo by a radius of 40 kilometres as proposed in the local authority's new masterplan. Expansion of the city's boundaries will see the five villages being formally incorporated to spur development.

Sichelesile Mahlangu, the Pumula Constituency Member of Parliament from the opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), said constant recalls of elected representatives and currency instability was impeding the effective use of the CDF.

Pumula has been under control of the opposition MDC, MDC Alliance and now CCC since the year 2000.

Since the CDF was introduced in 2010 there have been three recalls of MPs representing the constituency because of

perennial squabbles afflicting the opposition.

Mahlangu said they have tried to spread the funds to finance projects in the constituency's three wards, but bemoaned the low allocations.

"Pumula has three wards, which are 17, 19 and 27," she said. "Ward 17 encompasses the rural villages.

"The first CDF allocation of \$50 000 (in local currency) was used at Methodist Village at a school called Hyde Park where we renovated an ECD (early child education) block.

"We had to start with the rural side because we felt that the school was left behind in terms of facilities."

Mahlangu said they were yet to get allocations for 2023 and this year, which they had budgeted for the construction of a community hall at Robert Sinyoka.

She said the community's expectations were too high because they believed that the CDF allocations were in foreign currency, which was not the case.

The MP said there was need to treat the urban and rural sides of the constituency equally as she admitted that the five villages were marginalised.

"Development must be equal, but this is not the case at the moment because the road network on the rural side of the constituency is poor," Mahlangu said.

"The Khami Prison road is in a poor condition and as the MP I want to see it being upgraded so that there is development.

"The council also needs to rehabilitate the community water points so that the people in the villages enjoy their rights to water as guaranteed in the constitution."

She said there was need for cooperation between national and local government representatives to push for development in the marginalised areas.

Council spokesperson Nesisa Mpofu said council's vision for residents to have clinics within where they lived was being hampered by lack of money for infrastructure development.

"There are plans to ensure all citizens have a clinic within walking distance (of at least 5km)," Mpofu told CITE.

"However there is a challenge of staffing and low capital budget funding."

Bulawayo, like most local authorities in Zimbabwe, have been failing to embark on meaningful capital projects over the last two decades due to a failing economy and currency problems.

The local authority has budgeted US\$82 million for capital projects next year yet according to the mayor David Coltart the city needs a minimum of US\$15 million to maintain its road network alone.

Central government is also accused of taking too long to approve the council's annual budgets, which slows down collection of revenue that goes towards the ward retention funds.

- **This story inspired academic research work. A UK-based Zimbabwean academic reached out to the author of the story and her publication, CITE, and acknowledged that the coverage had inspired him to conduct a study on the peri-urban areas explored in the article.**

Exposed: Inside Manyame shady land deals . . . Zanu PF MP implicated . . . villagers resist land takeover



MRDC jurisdiction spans rural Chitungwiza, Darwendale, Manyame, parts of Norton and Beatrice as well as rural Seke.

BY PAULINE CHATEUKA

A PROMINENT ruling Zanu PF party lawmaker has been implicated in disputed plot allocations which have exposed the involvement of the Manyame Rural District Council (MRDC) in questionable land deals.

MRDC jurisdiction spans rural Chitungwiza, Darwendale, Manyame, parts of Norton and Beatrice as well as rural Seke.

A five-month investigation has established that, in at least two instances, MRDC played an active role in allocating land to Herentals Group of Colleges owned by Innocent Benza, the Zanu PF lawmaker for Mutasa Central in Manicaland province after the August 2023 general elections.

The investigation was carried out in collaboration with Information for Development Trust, a non-profit organisation supporting investigative reporting around corruption and public as well as corporate accountability.

Subverting the law

Residents affected by the controversial land allocations have come out guns blazing — and so has Chief Seke — with both sides accusing the local authority and Benza's Herentals of sub-

verting the law and harming local social and economic interests.

The Herentals Group is a mass-enrolment institution that already has at least 45 learning centres in different parts of the country.

Greater Harare has the highest density of learning centres, with 20 and the group also has branches in Mutare, Masvingo, Beitbridge, Chiredzi, Victoria Falls, Gweru, Zvishavane and Chitungwiza.

Political connections

Benza is not a small player by any standards.

He owns topflight football club, Herentals FC and sources say he is a close associate of Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri, the current Defence minister and the fourth most powerful politician in Zanu PF after the President and his two deputies.

The Defence minister, then in charge of the Zanu PF Women's League, threw her weight behind Benza as a 2013 Zanu PF parliamentary candidate during a star rally in Mutasa, Manicaland.

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Benza did not make it then.

In early 2015, Benza and his twin brother Gerald organised a well-subscribed event to celebrate Muchinguri-Kashiri's return to the Zanu PF politburo and Cabinet after being booted out during factional fights, where they donated five beasts and 8 000 litres of beer, among other contributions.

Chief Seke and his subjects have been up in arms against the attempted takeover of pieces of land in the area by Herentals.

The affected communities in Seke are angry that MRDC has been supporting the Herentals land acquisitions in disregard of due process.

They are aggrieved that MRDC approved takeover of the plots without consultation with the chief and community members as individuals with strong political links are colluding with public office holders and land barons to subvert the law and local tradition.

Zimbabwe's rural land management system is primarily governed by the Communal Lands Act (Chapter 20:04) and the Traditional Leaders Act.

Under the Communal Lands Act, land is defined as customarily occupied by members of a community under the custody of traditional leaders.

While the President holds ultimate authority over communal land, its administration is delegated to Rural District Councils in consultation with traditional leaders.

Section 282(1)(d) of the Constitution tasks chiefs with overseeing land allocation according to customary law.

Additionally, the Traditional Leaders Act mandates chiefs to prevent unauthorised settlements and approve new ones.

As rural land ownership disputes skyrocket, the High Court made a landmark judgment.

In September 2024, it ruled that district councils cannot sell rural communal land, over a court application in which 35 villagers from Buhera challenged the sale of 40 hectares of land that they occupied to a family trust with the involvement of the local authority and as moves were being made to evict the residents.

Controversial deals

On June 7, 2023, MRDC controversially leased 7,5 hectares of communal land to Herentals for four years.

According to the lease agreement, Herentals was supposed to pay US\$38 250 to the council. The lease was for Stand Number 7058A at Murisa Rural Service Centre in Seke on which Herentals intended to construct a secondary school.

Before the lease was finalised, Herentals tried to hold a groundbreaking ceremony on May 29, 2023, to announce the acquisition to villagers and other stakeholders.

Villagers from NeChiva, Masona and Marimbi resisted the takeover and stopped the groundbreaking ceremony by destroying the tents that has been pitched by Herentals.

They feared the acquisition of the stand would lead to their eviction from the land they had occupied for decades.

Chief Seke, who attended the event, raised concern about lack of consultation with local traditional leaders.

Despite inquiries, Herentals failed to provide evidence of due process, including the involvement of village heads.

The lease, it was established, was granted without consultation with local traditional leaders, in violation of section 8(2)(a) of the Communal Land Act [Chapter 20:04]

This section stipulates that, when granting such consent, RDC must consult and co-operate with the chief appointed to preside over the community concerned in terms of the Traditional Leaders Act [Chapter 29:17].

Disturbed by this omission, the investigation discovered, Chief Seke sought answers from Cosmas Murepa, the council's district planner, but did not get a satisfactory response.

The chief demanded proof that MRDC had consulted residents and village heads or provided compensation to displaced residents before leasing the land to the Herentals Group.

Lack of such documentation raised further doubts about the transparency and legality of the deal, deepening concerns about systemic abuses in land allocation.

A June 13, 2023, petition written by the villagers that this publication obtained also alleged that MRDC had no evidence that due process had been followed in allocating the stand to Herentals.

Residents accused the local authority and Herentals of orchestrating the land acquisition in a way that robbed them of their source of livelihood.

Anomalies

A review of the lease documents awarded to Herentals revealed significant anomalies. Strangely, a witness, one Caroline Katiyo, signed the lease agreement before the major parties.

Katiyo signed on June 6, 2023, while MRDC district planner, Mupera, did so six days later on June 12 and Benza, on behalf of Herentals, appended his signature a day after the witness.

Benza ignored repeated voice calls and questions sent to him via WhatsApp, while this reporter could not locate a college spokesperson when she visited the group's headquarters along Robert Mugabe Road during investigations, with the receptionist indicating that they did not have one.

Procedurally, witnesses are expected to sign when the major parties have already done so. Mupera declined to comment, saying: "I cannot respond now. Look for me in January."

Deal backdated

As questions around the lease agreement mounted, MRDC issued a backdated letter of allocation to Herentals with the same stand size.

The letter, dated March 28, 2023, purported to allocate Herentals a new stand number 1032, to replace number 7058A that had been originally allocated to the educational institution.

"Council is pleased to allocate you secondary school stand number 1032 Murisa Rural Service Centre measuring approximately 7,5 hectares.

"The approved use of the stand has not changed though the location has changed. Please be advised that the offer conditions about servicing of the stand remain unchanged and you will be required to meet the full costs of servicing fees when they become due.

"Also take note that the allocation of stand number 1032 Murisa Rural Service Centre effectively means that you no longer have any rights whatsoever over stand number 7058A Murisa Rural Service Centre," further read the letter that Murepa signed.

Determined to safeguard its lucrative deal with Herentals,

MRDC threw the villagers occupying the land under the bus.

In a 2024 letter addressed to Herentals, council said: "According to our records, you are the legally recognised owner of school stand 1032 Murisa and there is a need for you to take charge of the stand and protect it from illegal land invaders.

"All developments that are on the stand or currently occurring have no blessings of the council and are illegal.

"As discussed in the council committee to which you were invited, there is a need for you to take legal action in terms of interdicts, eviction and demolition orders against all the people illegally occupying and constructing illegal structures within your stand. Council will support you in all the processes as the land authority with the legal mandate to allocate stands in the area," a separate letter originated by Murepa read.

Shadowy lawsuit

Emboldened by yet another MRDC confirmation letter dated July 18, 2024, the Herentals Group filed a lawsuit against the villagers at the Chitungwiza Magistrates' Court, seeking to evict 15 families from Stand 1032.

The Chitungwiza Magistrates' Court on August 18 issued summons against the 15 villagers who were cited as respondents, advising them to lodge their defence within two weeks or risk a default judgment being issued against them.

Subsequently, MRDC wrote to the affected villagers, informing them that there will be a consultative visit to the plot which Herentals had been allocated.

The letter came well after the rural council had made the decision to allocate the land to Herentals and the process to evict the villagers had already been started, indicating that MRDC had not done due diligence checks or consulted the occupants of the new stand.

The move to carry out the site visit was seen as an attempt to address the omission made when MRDC did not consult the villagers.

By December, at the time of going to print, the site visit had not yet taken place.

Similarly, the Herentals court application remained in limbo, four months after the summons against the villagers was issued and it was not immediately clear why Herentals was not pursuing its case.

MRDC had indicated that it will consult the Herentals lawyer as part of the dispute resolution process.

But villagers who spoke to NewsDay had reservations regarding the site visit, expressing fear that it would be sub judice given the court application.

This reporter attended a court session presided over by Chief Seke on August 2, 2024 where it was concluded that MRDC was not consulting traditional leaders as provided for in the Traditional Leaders Act.

Farirai Guta, MRDC chief executive officer declined to comment on the Herentals case, citing the ongoing litigation.

However, she expressed concern over illegal land sales in the area, stating: "While we cannot comment on Herentals's case at this moment as it is now in court, we are deeply concerned by the proliferation of land barons in Seke."

"These individuals are illegally parcelling out communal land and it's against the law. Currently, we're seeing a staggering number of cases, over 300, where our eviction orders are being brazenly defied by the residents who bought land from



land barons," said Guta

"We are saying no to land barons and no to illegal parcelling out of land and we will never tolerate this abuse of power and disregard for the law," she added.

Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (Zacc) spokesperson Simiso Mlevu confirmed in an interview that they had received complaints about illegal sale of communal land in Seke.

"We have received several complaints from Seke on land issues. The cases are at different stages. On some, investigations were done, accused accounted for and the cases are already before the courts," said Mlevu.

But Zacc had not received any complaint from Seke villagers regarding Herentals, added Mlevu even though, according to the villagers, they had taken their matter to Chief Seke.

Investigations revealed that the villagers reported the matter to Chief Seke.

Chief Seke informed them that their case was now before the courts and that his assistance would be limited to appearing as a witness to highlight the illegalities and irregularities committed by MRDC in allocating land to Herentals.

- **Just as in the case of the Rufaro Marketing story, Pauline's investigation opened floodgates of news leaks from concerned citizens and victims of land barons. Because of limited resources, the author managed to write only two follow-ups based on new information that was shared with her and the media supporter, IDT. (<https://www.newzimbabwe.com/zanu-pf-mp-faces-scrutiny-over-housing-co-operative-scandals/> and <https://newshubzim.co.zw/2025/01/22/self-imposed-headman-turns-land-baron-sells-70-of-village/>)**

Double allocations scam rocks Hopley



A street in the populous suburb of Hopley in Harare

BY THANDO KHUMALO

Dreams of homeownership have turned into a nightmare for nearly 50 Hopley residents, who now face the unsettling reality of potential eviction due to alleged double allocation of the stands they purchased in the area.

The ownership disputes of housing stands follow an inquest by the local housing co-operative into its activities between 2013 and 2024.

The Hopley Housing Co-operative Door-to-door Stands audit report by ACG Consultancy, an independent audit services, accounting, taxation and business advisory firm, reveals that there are 37 unregistered occupants of stands and 14 more that are disputed due to double allocations.

The scandal has highlighted the broader housing crisis in Zimbabwe, with growing urban populations clashing with inadequate urban planning.

Double allocations stem from the parallel housing programmes that were used in the resettlement of residents mainly by the Ministry of Local Government, the Urban Development Corporation and the City of Harare.

Hopley, initially an informal settlement, was incorporated into Harare's southern boundaries following the controversial Operation Murambatsvina in 2005.

This government-led urban clean-up displaced approximately 700 000 people nationwide, according to United Nations figures.

To address international condemnation, the government

launched Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle, promising housing for those affected.

At the same time, the City of Harare initiated its own housing programme, allocating stands to displaced residents in Zones 1 to 5 of the settlement.

However, investigations with support from Information for Development Trust (IDT), have uncovered poor coordination, corruption, and political interference that has resulted in multiple instances of double allocations, leaving many residents at risk of losing their homes.

The Hopley Housing Co-operative, tasked with managing 600 stands, has come under scrutiny following an internal audit conducted by its land audit committee team for the period 2013 to July 2024, which revealed significant irregularities.

The co-operative is among one of over 35 operating in the area. The audit report highlights unauthorised payments, missing funds, and a lack of accountability among co-operative leaders.

Allegations have been levelled against the co-operative's chairperson, Tinashe Chuma, secretary-general, Francis Dekete, and one Tsopo for misappropriating funds and enabling double allocations.

"During our door-to-door stand audit, we received anonymous tips and disclosures from some of our members. Our investigation revealed that the management committee had allocated stands to their spouses, children, and relatives with-

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out paying the required fees," the report reads.

The audit report alleges that Tinoziva Mondo and Grace Banda are in a double allocation over ownership of Stand 9514. Banda claims she paid a total of US\$9 000 for the stand in three installments to a man named Brian Chipunza, but Mondo disputes her ownership.

For Stand 9427, Douglas Mugwadi is in a double allocation with Sam Zimhondi, while Stand 7477 was also allocated to Martha Verengera and Zvidzai Mabvukwenyu.

Similar disputes have arisen over other stands, with many cases dragging on for years due to a lack of clear documentation.

Other cases detailed in the audit report involve Dekete, who allegedly received US\$1 500 from Kizito Gwengwe in payments for Stand 9563 without issuing receipts or involving the treasurer.

Similar allegations surround Stand 7921, for which US\$2 500 was reportedly paid directly to Dekete without proper documentation.

The transactions detailed in the report paint a picture of financial chaos, exacerbated by a lack of oversight in the co-operative.

Dekete and Chuma reportedly received US\$3 500 from Ernest Rutsito in 2014 as joining fees for Stand 7715, again with no proper documentation being provided.

Dekete, however, denies the accusations, claiming he has been targeted by individuals trying to protect the real culprits.

"I don't have a record of how money flows in the co-operative. I'm not even close to the money because I'm not responsible for holding the money," Dekete said over the phone.

"There are some people who want to tarnish my image. There are people who are protecting those misusing funds and using my name in the process. The claims are unfounded.

"I flagged issues related to unsigned vouchers and other anomalies, but now my name is being used to shield those truly responsible. The things that I raised related to the systems, and the auditor also raised them, meaning that I was right about everything," Dekete said.

The number of residents in Hopley has surged, reaching an estimated 80 000, according to the 2022 census report, double the estimated 35 000 recorded in 2015.

Despite lack of data to show the acceptable holding capacity in the suburb, the area is visibly overcrowded.

For residents, the consequences of this double allocation have been devastating.



Many have lost homes they spent years building after discovering their stands were fraudulently sold to other claimants.

Martin, a former Hopley resident, shared his story: "I purchased a stand and began building in 2019. But someone came and claimed the stand was theirs. Without any documentation, I lost my two-roomed house."

Another resident, Chipo Chizeze, explained how she lost her home after the original stand owner demanded she vacate the property.

"It's not easy to build your house and be told the land belongs to someone. I was told I had been staying on their land for free. They refused to let me recover anything from the structure I had built," Chizeze said.

The scale of the problem is staggering.

So chaotic is the growth of Hopley, such that these investigations by the Zimbabwe Independent, in collaboration with IDT, a non-profit organisation supporting investigative reporting focusing on communities, revealed that Harare City Council has not been able to collect rates in sprouting housing settlements in Zone 6, which has yet to be incorporated into its billing system.

Regularisation programme

The chaos in Hopley reflects a broader housing crisis in Zimbabwe. Urban population growth, driven by rural-to-urban migration and natural population increase, has outpaced the country's ability to provide adequate housing.

Zimbabwe faces a housing deficit of 1,2 million units, and settlements such as Hopley have become symbols of the government's failure to address the crisis.

With an estimated 80 000 residents crammed into poorly planned housing units, Hopley epitomises the consequences of unregulated urban expansion.

The Harare Master Plan, released in June this year, highlights the challenges of managing settlements such as Hopley.

The plan admits that co-operatives and politically connected land barons have driven much of the city's expansion, often disregarding planning rules and encroaching on land reserved for public services.

It estimates that 70 000 people are living in unrecognised pay schemes, with many settlements lacking basic amenities that include water, sanitation and electricity.

While some of these schemes have been earmarked for regularisation, others remain in legal disputes, further complicating the city's ability to manage its growth.

The City of Harare has acknowledged the challenges posed by Hopley's rapid expansion.

Stanley Gama, the city's head of corporate communications, said efforts are underway to regularise the settlement as part of the Southern Areas Local Development Plan.

"It is true that these areas are within the boundaries of the City of Harare... most of the provisions of this plan (Southern Areas Local Development Plan) have been violated by illegal developments where houses have been constructed on school sites, commercial sites," Gama said.

He added that regularisation efforts are being coordinated with the Ministry of Local Government and the Urban Development Corporation, but progress has been slow.



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“We will continue to work with the Ministry and the beneficiaries towards regularisation. However, we will not regularise those settled on schools or institutional sites, commercial sites and wetlands,” Gama added.

Inadequate social services

The lack of basic infrastructure in Hopley has compounded the residents’ plight.

Most areas lack water and sewer connections, while public spaces and recreational facilities are non-existent.

Precious Shumba, director of the Harare Residents Trust, criticised the government’s failure to provide adequate services.

“The service provision in most of the areas is determined by co-operatives and land barons and there are no water and sewer connections,” Shumba said.

“Our settlements are being established through politics by land barons aligned to the ruling party and those with protection from authorities.

“The land barons are spearheading the establishment of certain suburbs and people are settled there as part of government’s policy of parallel development.”

Efforts to formalise Hopley are further complicated by the area’s history of political interference. Many residents acquired land through politically-connected individuals, bypassing official channels.

The population of Hopley and the neighbouring areas such as Southlea Park, Southlands and Chigwende, among others, has rapidly grown over the past decade, creating a Zanu PF stronghold, mainly consisting of beneficiaries of its urban re-settlement programme.

This has resulted in the opposition party losing the Harare South constituency in recent elections, despite urban settlements being opposition strongholds.

The Harare Master Plan identifies political interference as a key driver of the city’s urban planning challenges, noting that it has led to haphazard development and the proliferation of illegal settlements. This has seen people settling in wetlands,

open spaces and land reserved for future development.

Addressing the crisis

In response to the crisis, the government has launched the Presidential Title Deeds and Settlement Regularisation Programme, which aims to provide residents with legal ownership of their stands while ensuring the installation of essential services.

However, progress has been slow. Residents say without addressing the systemic corruption and lack of accountability that have plagued land allocation processes, such initiatives will fail to deliver meaningful change.

The Hopley Housing Co-operative audit recommended several measures to restore transparency, including proper documentation of land transactions, regular financial audits, and a forensic investigation into past mismanagement.

However, the implementation of these recommendations remains uncertain, given the entrenched interests of those benefiting from the status quo.

As Hopley’s population continues to grow, the settlement’s challenges have become a microcosm of Zimbabwe’s broader urban housing crisis.

With the city’s resources stretched thin and political interference undermining planning efforts, the prospects for meaningful reform remain uncertain.

Nonetheless, the audit report suggests that the findings be presented before a general meeting for discussion and resolution. The general meeting has the power to decide on these issues in line with the bylaws.

“We suggest that the general meeting consider taking appropriate action, including disciplinary action against management committees involved and revoking stands that were allocated to relatives,” the report said.

Gweru council target informal traders



BY CATHERINE MASOCHA

In a disturbing crackdown on Gweru's informal traders, the city's municipal authorities have been accused of unlawfully confiscating goods from vendors operating in the city's central business district (CBD).

Investigations reveal that these actions, which lack legal backing, are driven by outdated by-laws and have sparked outdated allegations of corruption within the council's municipal police.

The 1977 by-laws prescribe penalties for operating in undesignated areas but do not authorise the seizure of goods.

Despite this legal vacuum, the council's municipal police routinely confiscate vendors' wares, demanding fines of up to US\$35 for their return.

Many traders claim that not all confiscated goods are returned, fuelling suspicions of corruption.

Evidence gathered by *Business Times* working with support from Information for Development Trust uncovers practices of bribery, with some traders paying municipal police officers to prevent confiscations or recover goods at a lower cost.

Information for Development Trust is a non-profit organisation supporting investigative reporting focusing on communities.

Interviews with sources inside the municipal police exposed the prevalence of corruption.

One municipal police officer admitted: "Corruption has become our daily bread. Some traders even pay us to overlook their illegal operations, while others bribe us during confiscations".

Another source said the real corruption takes place in the CBD when the goods are being confiscated.

"Some traders give us money so their confiscated wares are not taken to the city council. So instead of paying us US\$35, traders pay us a negotiated amount, which is far less than the municipal fine."

The municipal officers refused to shed much light on how they share the spoils.

"We cannot be seen knocking off and having lots of bananas or potatoes after the confiscations. That would make people raise eyebrows, which is why we surrender them all to the local authority."

However, a vendor who claimed anonymity says some of the municipal police officers grab what they want as they are conducting the confiscations.

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"They walk around in groups of three to five. When they raid us at times they choose what they want and put the items aside. The chosen items are left behind with one officer who delivers them to trusted allies a bit far from where the confiscations were conducted. The rest are taken to the office as evidence of carrying out their duties."

Witness accounts revealed that confiscated goods are transported to the council's lost-and-found room before being recorded and sometimes discarded at a dumpsite.

However, allegations of theft and misappropriation remain rife, with traders like Beauty Chigogo complaining, "Even if you pay the fine, not all your goods are returned. We don't know where they go missing — either in the municipal vehicle or at the council offices".

Gweru City Council spokesperson Vimbai Chingwaramuse denies these claims, insisting that perishable goods are disposed of at the dumpsite and non-perishable items held temporarily.

She said non-perishable items are held for a limited period to allow owners to pay their fines and collect them.

Yet, the council has refused to provide full documentation of the confiscation process, raising further concerns about transparency.

"The documents are for official use. They contain people's names and signatures, so they cannot be shared," Chingwaramuse said.

Refusal to share this documentation by Gweru City Council prompted this reporter to write an information request letter.

The Gweru acting town clerk Livingstone Churu authorised that this documentation be availed to this reporter but authorities within the Gweru Municipal Police kept on tossing and turning this reporter to come back at a later date, saying the office with the information was locked since the bearer had taken some time off duty.

As part of the investigation, this reporter posed as an informal trader and observed the disposal process together with other informal traders who were hoping to get their confiscated goods back.

All perishables were counted and documented by an official from the municipal health department working with the municipal police before being crushed by a refuse compactor which then drove off to the dumpsite.

Currently, Gweru City Council is not giving back any confiscated perishables to the traders so they are taken to the dumpsite, but in the recent past the local authority would make them pay fines and retrieve their goods.

The unclaimed confiscated goods would be taken to the dumpsite in a municipal police Nissan Navara vehicle.

A visit at the dumpsite by this reporter however revealed that vegetables and tomatoes were the most commonly discarded items of the confiscated goods which include fruits, clothing and small electric appliances. While local authority officials claim that some traders retrieve their confiscated goods after paying fines, informal traders allege that some wares are misappropriated by council workers.

Informal trading amid economic decline

Gweru, like many urban centres in Zimbabwe, has seen a surge in informal trading due to high unemployment and a struggling economy.

With over 2 000 informal traders in the city, according to

the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations 2023 database update survey—three-quarters of them women—the lack of adequate market spaces has forced many to operate in undesignated areas.

However, the figure could be higher in Zimbabwe's fourth largest city, whose population is over 158 200 people.

The council's failure to provide sufficient infrastructure, such as the dilapidated Mtapapa market, leaves traders with no choice but to return to the streets, sparking on-going conflicts with municipal police.

Vendors like Sekai Musvuugwa highlight the challenges: "We operate illegally because we have no alternative. But the fines are too high, and the harassment is relentless."

"The US\$35 fine demanded by the council is unreasonable. Some of us sell simple items like maputi and chips, and we can't afford to pay such fees and restock. We know we are operating illegally, but Gweru City Council should not demand such exorbitant fines".

Another vendor, Vincent Manene said he once paid a fine of US\$30 to get his goods back.

"There is a book where they keep their records when you collect your confiscated goods but, you just hand them your receipt and they do the recording. You don't sign anything."

He accused the municipal workers of soliciting bribes to return the goods.

"Sometimes we pay municipal police to get our goods back as they will be conducting the confiscations. They can make you pay an additional US\$5 to get the goods back," Manene said.

Legal violations and calls for reform

The confiscation of goods violates vendors' constitutional rights, including Section 64, which guarantees the right to trade, and Section 24(2)(b), which calls for the removal of barriers to economic activity.

Legal experts like Linah Nyamukachi stress that relying on archaic colonial-era laws is oppressive and contradicts the constitutional protections afforded to informal traders.

"Council cannot be seen relying on archaic law. Most of these archaic laws are oppressive and they tremble upon constitutional provisions. The council has to work towards having revised laws," Nyamukachi said.

She pointed out the harassment and abuse female informal traders endure during running battles with municipal police.

"In as much as they might be on places they are not supposed to sell their wares, their right to be treated with dignity remains," Nyamukachi said.

"Their rights enshrined in the constitution must be respected. Municipal police must be educated that wherever they are carrying out their mandate, they must respect the dignity of female vendors."

She, however, said section 71(3)(b)(i) of the constitution legalises imposition of confiscations by municipal police.

The section further reads: "The deprivation is necessary for any of the following reasons, (i) in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality, public health or town and country planning".

Gweru City Council has made promises to review these out-dated by-laws, but progress has been slow.

Former Gweru mayor Josiah Makombe confirmed the existence of a 2020 resolution that authorised the confiscation of goods from informal traders operating in undesignated areas.

However, current council officials deny the resolution's existence, creating a cloud of uncertainty.

"We are reviewing by-laws so that they align with current realities and accommodate informal traders," Makombe said at the time.

"Some of these laws are out-dated and were crafted during the colonial period and no longer speak to the reality on the ground.

"There is need for adjustment so that we co-exist (council and informal traders) and I promise you that these running battles between vendors and council should end."

Speaking recently to *Business Times*, Makombe reiterated that the resolution was implemented as a means of enforcing existing measures.

"In 2020 or 2021, we passed a resolution allowing Gweru City Council municipal police to confiscate the wares of informal traders operating from undesignated spaces. This formalised what was already happening," he explained.

Two former councillors have corroborated Makombe's statement.

However, current Gweru City Council officials deny knowledge of the resolution, stalling efforts to locate and verify it.

Chingwaramuse says: "There is no any resolution to that".

The municipal acting Chamber Secretary, Tapiwa Marerwa distanced himself from the issue, stating, "I was not yet in office when that resolution was made".

Another legal practitioner with the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA), Abigail Matsvayi said local authorities have a mandate to come up with by-laws that stimulate economic opportunities.

"Council must have in place by-laws and regulations that encourage the economic empowerment for both men and women in a fair manner," Matsvayi said.

Informal traders in Gweru call for reform

Thirty-year-old Nhamoinesu Jijita, a father who turned to street trading after failing to secure formal employment, described the relentless challenges he faces.

"I want to survive, but the authorities make it impossible. How am I supposed to pay rent, feed, and clothe my family when my goods are being taken away?"

However, many traders in Gweru endure routine harassment from municipal police.

Dyson Musharukwa, another street vendor, highlighted the exhausting cycle of evasion: "We just run when the municipal police come, but the hide-and-seek game is exhausting. We return to the streets because we have no choice".



A call for policy reform

This ongoing conflict underscores the urgent need for policy reform to address the unlawful confiscation of goods and create a framework that supports the informal sector.

David Chikore, executive director of the Gweru United Progressive Residents and Ratepayers Development Association, condemned the abuse of informal traders.

"At a policy level, we must support the informal sector, not suppress it. The council's actions are tantamount to criminalising poverty. Informal traders are not criminals — they are simply trying to survive," he said.

"We need to revisit how we engage with them and create spaces where they can operate without blocking pavements or enduring daily harassment."

Chikore called for dedicated trading zones in Gweru, similar to Bulawayo's designated streets for informal traders.

"We used to have a street reserved for clothing vendors. A similar arrangement should be reintroduced. The council must find a way for informal traders and retail outlets to coexist".

Shepherd Museve, president of the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA), echoed these sentiments.

"The informal sector is growing rapidly, and there will never be enough markets for all traders. Why not allow them to work freely and collect reasonable fees instead of harassing them?"

Despite the harassment, Museve noted the difficulty in substantiating reports of abuse due to insufficient evidence.

"As an organisation, we struggle to pursue these cases without clear evidence, as it would appear we are accusing law enforcement of failing in their mandate," he said.

The need for immediate action

Midlands Zimbabwe Republic Police spokesperson, Inspector Emmanuel Mahoko, stated that the police have not received reports of confiscated goods but urged informal traders to formalise their operations.

He also called on Gweru City Council to follow due process when arresting traders or seizing goods.

Climate change-induced droughts fuel exodus of young people in Matabeleland South



One of the many illegal crossing points along the Zimbabwe-Botswana border. Desperate young people from Bulilima cross the border to search for elusive jobs in neighbouring Botswana

BY LULU BRENDA HARRIS

Lwazi Ndebele says she decided to join the great trek to South Africa after her village located along Zimbabwe's border with Botswana experienced two years of successive droughts and putting food on the table became a daily struggle for her family.

Ndebele left Empandeni in Matabeleland South's Mangwe district in 2018 for South Africa's major economic hub, Johannesburg, where she found a job at a restaurant just before Covid-19 struck two years later.

"I have not been back home since that time," Ndebele said. "Two years after I arrived in Johannesburg there was Covid-19 and the borders were closed.

"I have not been able to find a steady job since then to raise enough money to be able to return home."

Returning home is an option that she is not willing to consider for now because parched Empandeni village offers very little opportunities for young people like her.

Mangwe is bordered to the north by Bulilima district, to the south by South Africa, to the east by Gwanda district, and to

the west by Hwange district.

Bulilima District is one of the driest areas in Zimbabwe and young people say lack of economic opportunities forces them to migrate to other countries in droves.

The district is primarily rural, with agriculture being the mainstay of the local economy and the area has a history of recurrent droughts that have significantly affected agriculture and livelihoods, particularly during the 1990s and early 2000s, with notable drought years including 1992, 1994, 2002, 2008, 2016, 2019 and 2024.

These droughts coincide with the district's semi-arid climate, characterised by average annual rainfall ranging from 400 to 600 mm, rendering any form of subsistence farming unviable.

Empandeni village is about 52 kilometres from Plumtree, a transit town with very little economic activity to offer employment opportunities for young people from the surrounding villages like Ndebele, which makes neighbouring South Afri-

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ca and Botswana the only viable options for the army of job seekers.

An investigation by CITE with support from the Information for Development Trust (IDT), a non-profit organisation supporting investigative journalism in Zimbabwe and southern Africa, revealed a growing trend of environmental refugees originating from Matabeleland South, which is largely ignored in the country's migration crisis discourse.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) records for 2024 showed that 52 percent of the people who left Zimbabwe were coming from Matabeleland South.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), an environmental refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their home and community due to changes in the environment, such as frequent droughts.

1,2 billion to be displaced

A global think tank, the Institute for Economics and Peace, predicts that 1.2 billion people could be displaced around the world by 2050 due to climate change and natural disasters.

Although there are no statistics on the number of Zimbabweans that have been forced to migrate to other countries due to the now frequent droughts and other adverse weather conditions caused by climate change, millions of Zimbabweans have been forced to move to different countries because of hardships.

South Africa's 2022 population census showed that there were now 1.012 million Zimbabweans living in the neighbouring country, which translated to 45 percent of the immigrant population in that country.

A significant number of Zimbabweans living in South Africa are undocumented, which means that a huge proportion of immigrants from this country were not counted during the census.

Thousands others live in countries such as Botswana, Namibia and Zambia as well as overseas.

According to the Zimbabwe Statistics Agency (ZimStat) 2022 Population and Housing Census preliminary results, Matabeleland South, with a population of 760 345, had by far the highest number of households with people that migrated to other countries at 32.6 percent of the national figure.

Matabeleland North followed at a distant 24.2 percent, Masvingo (22.7 percent) and Bulawayo (21.7 percent.).

ZimStat established that although the migration started as far back as the time of the country's independence, the figures have been on a steady increase since the 1990s when droughts became more frequent.

Unemployment is the biggest push for Zimbabweans to leave the country with the census preliminary report noting that 84 percent of the people that left the country were look-

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ing for jobs.

Plumtree has limited economic opportunities for young people. Those that cannot join the informal sector are forced to migrate to countries such as Botswana and South Africa.

South Africa was the major destination with 85 percent of the Zimbabwean migrants being based there followed by Botswana (five percent) and the United Kingdom (three percent).

Why people are leaving

Over the years the government has been accused of not taking the root causes of people of Matabeleland leaving the country in big numbers seriously with former president Robert Mugabe in 1996 dismissing it as just a culture in the region.

In 2015, Mugabe sparked outrage when he said Kalanga people, a dominant ethnic group in Matabeleland South, were criminals who lived off by carrying out violent robberies in South Africa.

Plumtree Border Post is the gateway for the so-called greener pastures for most youths from rural areas in the area.

Dr Khanyile Mlotshwa, a Zimbabwean-born academic at South Africa's University of KwaZulu Natal, said the environment was the biggest push behind the high levels of migration from Matabeleland even before independence.

Mlotshwa does research in social and political philosophy, epistemology and ethics.

He is currently involved in a project titled The constructions of black citizenships in post-apartheid South African print media vis-à-vis migration and urbanisation

Mlotshwa said initially migration in Zimbabwe was enforced physically by the colonial government that removed black people from their fertile ancestral lands to unproductive farming areas.

As a result men from Matabeleland South migrated to South Africa in droves to work on gold mines in the Witwatersrand for them to be able to continue providing for their families.

Colonial laws such as the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 discouraged many indigenous people, including those in Matabeleland South, from engaging in agriculture production and forced them into the wage labour market, including migrating to South Africa.

July Moyo, who was the Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare at the time of the investigation, acknowledged the link between migration and climate change, which he said had become a major subject of debate on international platforms.

"We have had international conferences discussing this issue," said Moyo, who was moved to the Energy and Power Development portfolio this month.

"Actually, last of (2023), I attended conferences in Greece and Geneva where we were talking about the relationship between climate change and migration."

Zimbabwe chaired the second Conference of Parties (COP) in 1996 and the minister said at the time the issues were not being taken seriously.

"If you see how water is rising in the seas and some of the islands are now sinking, displacing a number of people who end up migrating, then you notice that indeed climate change can induce migration," Moyo added.

Academics, Janna Frischen, Isabel Meza, Daniel Rupp, Katharina Wietler and Michael Hagenlocher in their book titled Drought Risk to Agricultural Systems in Zimbabwe: A Spatial Analysis of Hazard, Exposure and Vulnerability published in

2020 say Zimbabwe is one of the countries that are seeing an increase in the frequency of droughts as a result of climate change.

The droughts have led to acute water shortages, declining yields, and periods of food insecurity at a time the economy has been on a downward spiral.

Droughts now more frequent

Since independence Zimbabwe has witnessed droughts during the 1991/1992, 1994/1995, 2002/2003, 2015/2016, 2018/2019 and 2023/2024 agriculture seasons with Matabeleland being the hardest hit region

Various publications such as IOM, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and ZimStat gleaned as part of this investigation noted that migrant flows have become a major coping strategy for many people in Matabeleland South in response to climatic shocks.

In its Zimbabwe 2022 Population and Housing Census Report, ZimStat said:

"Matabeleland South Province had the largest proportion: 33 percent, of households that experienced loss of members through emigration."

Matabeleland North and Masvingo provinces experienced losses of 24.2 percent and 22.7 percent respectively.

According to the ZimStat 2022 census report and IOM situational reports published throughout 2024, most Zimbabweans are leaving the country in pursuit of elusive economic opportunities at home.

A sign in Plumtree Town shows the direction to Dingumuzi, a township in the border town. The sign also shows the direction to Francistown in Botswana. Francistown is Botswana's second capital city. The other direction is Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city.

The Matabeleland South Report of the Zimbabwe Livelihoods Assessment Committee (ZimLAC) 2024 Rural Livelihoods Assessment said unemployment was the major challenge facing the youth in the province at 79.4 percent followed by substance abuse (67.6 percent).

It also noted agriculture has become unviable because of changes in climate with about 60.1 percent of households not owning cattle and 25 percent without goats.

About 92 percent of the communities indicated that pastures were often inadequate and of poor quality.

Andile Nkomo, a 19 years old young woman from Empandeni Village in Mangwe District, 52 kilometres south of Plumtree Town. Andile said moving to other countries in search of jobs seems to be the only route out of poverty for most of her peers.

Andile Nkomo (19) from Empandeni in Mangwe District said most of her peers from the village left for South Africa and Botswana soon after finishing school because frequent droughts made survival difficult.

"This was another very difficult year because of the drought," Nkomo told CITE.

"It does not matter how much effort you put into tilling the land, you reap nothing.

"A lot of people are moving to other countries because of the drought.

"From my family everyone has crossed to Botswana or South Africa even those that don't have passports."

Sakhile Tshuma from Madabe village near Plumtree, but is based in Johannesburg, said she is forced to send groceries back home every month because her family has no other source of food due to frequent droughts.

"They have not harvested anything meaningful for the past three seasons and they have lost a lot of livestock due to droughts," Tshuma said.

"I have to make sure I send food home every month for my children and siblings.

"The situation is now different from when we were growing up where my father would sell his cattle to raise money for school fees and food was mainly from subsistence farming."

Child headed families

Makhadi Moyo, Bulilima's Ward 16 councillor points to the illegal crossing point at the Zimbabwe-Botswana border in her ward.

Makhadi Moyo, councillor for Ward 16 in Bulilima, said droughts were to blame for the high number of young people leaving her area to countries such as Botswana and South Africa where there were better standards of living.

"We have a lot of child-headed families because the parents or guardians have moved to other countries to raise money for food," Moyo said.

"Food shortages are our biggest challenge and the government has been very slow in providing food aid to hungry families."

Winani Ncube, Bulilima's Village 23 head, (right) bemoaned the devastating impact of the drought in the area

Winani Ncube, a traditional leader from Village 23 also in Bulilima's Ward 23, said hunger was taking a toll on his subjects.

Ncube said the cycle of poverty drove many people into desperation, which forced young people to migrate to other countries in numbers.

"I settled here in 1986 coming from Ndolwane (in Plumtree)," he said.

"I then became the village head and I know the struggles that people are facing.

"It's tough because people are starving. We even sell the feed for our livestock to raise money or exchange it for food."

As the drought situation worsens in Bulilima's Ward 23, Village 23 head, Winani Ncube led her people in gathering dried fruits from an indigenous tree known as umtshatshatsha, to feed their livestock.

Reena Ghelani, the UN assistant secretary general and climate crisis coordinator, early this year said Zimbabwe and other southern African countries were seeing the "massive impact of the climate crisis."

Ghelani said there was a need for urgent investment in communities to help them adapt to climate change.

Migration as coping mechanism

IOM Zimbabwe spokesperson Fadzai Nyamande-Pangeti said people often turn to migration as a coping mechanism when their livelihoods are threatened.

"Currently, we lack precise data on the number of migrants who have relocated due to climate-induced phenomena like droughts," Nyamande Pangeti said.

"The International Organisation for Migration is conducting



a study to gain a clearer understanding of mobility patterns and trends related to drought.

"People often turn to migration as a coping mechanism when their livelihood is affected by shocks.

"In the case of drought, its effects on households and households' incomes are likely to lead people to move from an area of extreme stress to one which they deem habitable and with favourable opportunities."

She said other climate related challenges include heavy rains that cause flooding and significant damage to the environment.

In the last few years, Zimbabwe has been hit by a number of cyclones with Cyclone Idai of 2020 being the most devastating as it killed 634 people and displaced thousands others.

IOM said decreasing rainfall was forcing entire families in Zimbabwe's rural areas to migrate to urban areas or neighbouring countries.

"As livelihoods in rural areas decline due to decreasing rainfall, families are more likely to migrate," Nyamande-Pangeti said.

"However, in most cases, men are the ones who are moving, leaving women and children behind.

"This trend leaves women to manage the day-to-day impacts of climate change, such as reduced crop yields and water shortages, while also taking on the responsibilities of running the household in the absence of the men."

UNHCR says climate change increases the risks of extreme weather events – like storms, floods, wildfires, heatwaves and droughts – making them more unpredictable, frequent and intense.

The agency added that at the same time, rising sea levels, droughts and drastic changes in rainfall pattern as a result of warmer temperatures can destroy crops and kill livestock, threatening livelihoods and exacerbating food insecurity- all which can force people to migrate.

Blasting livelihoods away: Chinese miner Chengxi's operations disrupt life in Shurugwi

BY MARY TARUVINGA

OPERATIONS by Chinese miner Chengxi Pvt Ltd, which is in partnership with President Emmerson Mnangagwa's son Collins, have left hundreds of houses in Shurugwi Town with cracks with residents living in fear that their homes may collapse, an investigation by NewZimbabwe.com has established.

The investigation, in partnership with Information for Development Trust (IDT) also established that Chengxi's operations have disrupted livelihoods and caused air and water pollution, besides the well-documented environmental damage on the iconic Wolfshall Pass, also known as Boterekwa escarpment.

The environmental damage has extended to the picturesque Dunraven Falls, which is a tourist attraction, and a place where villagers used to conduct rituals.

Chengxi also cut off villagers from their fields, pastures and areas they used to pick mushrooms and wild fruits, by deploying armed guards to protect its claims.

The investigation established that a villager, Emmanuel Geje (20), was shot and injured by a Chengxi Chinese employee on 4 September 2024. Villagers also say company employees and guards have occasionally set dogs on them for straying onto their claims.

Many villagers say they have silently endured abuse by the company because of its association with the president's son and senior Zanu PF officials.

Last year, Chengxi constructed the Zanu PF District Party offices in Shurugwi.

Midlands's Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution, Owen Ncube, who is Mnangagwa's close ally, officiated at the commissioning.

Chengxi has been carrying out open-cast gold mining in Shurugwi since 2021.

The entity is a privately owned mining company with a notable presence in Southeast Asia, East Africa, and Central America.

Locally, its ownership details remain somewhat obscure, although it is known that Collins Mnangagwa, serves as the chairman and senior partner of the gold mining company.

Speaking at the handover ceremony of Zanu PF offices, Chengxi general manager Simon Karimanzira named Collins Mnangagwa—who was also present—a senior partner.

The company is operating heavy machinery including excavators, rigs and dump trucks. It is



Dump trucks and other machinery seen on site at Chengxi mine along Boterekwa pass

conducting massive open pit mining which threatens to deplete the area of its natural resources and grazing lands, jeopardising the livelihoods of future generations.

Our investigations have established that heavy machinery and dump trucks disrupt the community's longtime peace, operating relentlessly from dawn until dusk.

These heavy-duty trucks have also become common, even in the town centre.

Blasting and the fear of houses collapsing

The investigation established that Chengxi is using high-capacity explosives, whose impact is felt in Shurugwi residents' homes. In some cases, ceilings have fallen while windows have broken during blasting.

Residents say the blasting has weakened their houses and other infrastructure, leaving them worried that their homes may collapse. The situa-

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tion is aggravated by the fact that most houses were built on top of underground mining tunnels.



Windows have broken during blasting.

"Chengxi is the main culprit because of the magnitude of their operations.

"The impact of their blasting is felt far away from the mine but there are other Chinese and black-owned companies who are also contributing to the damage.

"Not houses only are affected. There are water reservoirs at MacKinnon Kopje where mining is taking place. There are also network boosters on this mountain as such they are all under threat," said Pardon Machochi the chairperson of Shurugwi Residents Trust.

"We get complaints of houses cracking and in some cases, windows break and this happens frequently.

"Hundreds of houses have been affected in Shurugwi urban our pleas have fallen on deaf ears."

Machochi said disaster is looming in Shurugwi due to the combined effects of the blasting and the area's many underground tunnels.

"We have petitioned the local authority and government but we are yet to get a meaningful action," he said.

Machochi listed 17 affected residential areas, including Makusha, Ironsides, Ironkop, Dark City, Feny Creek, MacKinnon Kopje, Tebekwe, Camperdown, and Wanderer.

Sylvia Moyo* (65) of Mambowa, a high-density suburb in Shurugwi said most houses are old having been built during the Smith regime.

"This makes many houses vulnerable to collapsing," she said.

"We live in fear due to the ongoing blasting by Chinese miners. Our houses sit above underground tunnels, and every blast feels like an earthquake. The risk of structural collapse is huge.

"Our houses have developed cracks which widen each time they blast. In some cases, ceilings collapse on us. The blasting is so intense that sometimes kitchen utensils such as water glasses get damaged," she said.

This reporter counted 20 houses around Leilano Lodge and



Dust engulfs the environs after blasting

Selukwe Primary School, close to the Central Business District, which had cracks. The owners say the cracks were a direct result of Chengxi's blasting operations.

Chemicals, Dust and Visibility

The dust has also become an issue due to Chengxi's Mining operations.

Residents say pervasive red dust impacts visibility, making it hazardous for motorists, who often find it necessary to stop their vehicles, especially in the Boterekwa area during blasting operations.

Blasting is done randomly and community members say they are seldom informed of blasting schedules. Blasting occurs day and night.

"We now have to damp-clean our houses constantly due to the dust, and children are at risk of being hit by vehicles, as visibility is often poor. But crucially, we wake up every day fearing for our lives," lamented Emilda Moyo* (38) from Feny Creek area.

Community members also complained that chemicals are being washed into streams and rivers including the Mutevekwu River which is close to the Boterekwa area.

Chipo Mutuke* (40) a villager from Marishongwe said most Shurugwi villagers had resigned to fate because of Chengxi's association with politicians.

"Our leaders (village heads) say they can't do anything because there are 'higher-ups' involved in this exploitation," Mutuke said.

"There are senior figures involved. This situation is talked about everywhere, yet help seems distant. The company is excavating everywhere. We no longer feel safe in our own homeland. They have desecrated places we hold sacred, dug up graves, and destroyed mountains; nothing remains for us to cherish."

Disrupted Lifestyles

Villagers said indigenous trees, including fruit trees, were being buried under Chengxi's mine dumps. This reporter witnessed this in Camperdown.

The trees such as *muzhanje* provided a livelihood for the community members who would gather fruits for consumption and sale.



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"The company does not even give us a chance to cut the trees for firewood so that we at least benefit something," said Moyo.

"We can no longer gather fruits or mushrooms in the forest, as they prohibit us from getting close to their mines. Grazing land for our livestock has been destroyed because vast stretches of forest have been cleared, which deeply concerns us. Arable land is slowly vanishing. Soon, everything will be lost.

Moyo added: "Dunraven Falls was once a sacred site for spiritual rituals, like rainmaking ceremonies. Now, the river is obstructed, and no water flows through the falls anymore."

This reporter observed armed guards at the Chengxi Peak mining area at the Boterekwa pass. Some guards were stationed at the Peak View tourist site to prevent people from approaching the claim.

The news crew had to negotiate with some guards to be able to take pictures at the popular site.

Geje's Shooting

Villagers revealed that tensions between guards and community members were common, often resulting in company security officials firing in the air or setting dogs on trespassers.

A Shurugwi resident, Emmanuel Geje was shot in the right leg by a Chinese national employed by Chengxi at its Dunraven mining claim on September 4, last year.

Geje told NewZimbabwe.com that he was passing through the area on his way to buy fuel. He said he has not been given an explanation why he was shot.

"The company gave me US\$5 000 for medication but I never really got answers regarding why I was shot. It was even difficult to get them to pay for my medication. My relatives had to intervene," he said.

Chengxi general manager Simon Karimanzira admitted that

the incident happened, but said Geje had trespassed onto the company's premises.

"He is an illegal miner and it is a lie that he was just passing by," Karimanzira said.

"It was a cat and mouse day. They had illegally trespassed. The fact is that they cornered our guy together with his colleagues. It was 10 of them and our guy shot him to protect himself."

Shurugwi MP speaks out

Shurugwi North legislator Joseph Mpasi, whom villagers allege is close to Chengxi officials and other Chinese miners, said he had not received a formal complaint from Shurugwi residents.

He dissociated himself from the company although he maintained it was operating above board.

"People complain that they are destroying their land but they do not understand the mining operations now happening in their land," he said.

He attributed the villagers' concerns over the destruction of the environment to the fact that they had not witnessed large-scale mining before.

"Growing up in this area, we have never seen massive mining taking place, so people are now having concerns, but these are legally pegged claims. They have been there for many years for the purposes of mining chrome and gold," Mpasi said.

"I have overheard people talking but officially no one approached me to say we have a challenge. If they come to me and say the Chinese are not obeying the laws of Zimbabwe and are not doing the right thing, they do not have EIA, I will obviously attend to that because it is my duty as an MP. I won't be aware if they don't tell me.

"Chengxi is doing a lot. They are drilling boreholes and em-

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playing our people. They are also helping contractors to mine ... But we have got about a quarter of the Chinese that are not even doing anything to the community where they are operating from."

Our operations are above board: Chengxi

Karaimanzira confirmed that Chengxi holds claims in Peak Area Boterekwa, Wanderer and Danranven areas of Shurugwi, which many villagers saw as tourist attractions.

He, however, dismissed concerns that the company was destroying tourist attractions.

"If we look back, how much was realised through tourism from the Boterekwa area? Compare that with what we are getting out of there now. We extract gold and send it to Fidelity for the betterment of our economy," Karaimanzira said.

"My company has been operating in Shurugwi since December 2021. My company legally acquired all the mining claims it is operating and its certificates are up to date and on some of the claims we are currently in the process of consolidating our EIAs as we are a company that believes in 100 % compliance with the laws of Zimbabwe."

He confirmed that Chengxi has been fined for flouting environmental, labour, safety or mining laws and that villagers had raised concerns over the blasting, but insisted nothing was amiss.

"It's not a peculiar situation for a big company like ours to receive a few tickets and orders from time to time and because we are a law-abiding company with compliance legal documents we have never been shut down," Karaimanzira said.

"On the issue of blasting, we have reviewed our blasting techniques and timetable working closely with the Ministry of Mines and at some point we actually voluntarily suspended our blasting to address the concerns of the community because we want to coexist in harmony with our community and nature."

Karaimanzira said Chengxi was conducting open cast gold mining and dismissed concerns that the company's operations were causing the siltation of rivers.

"In cases where our operations encounter feeder streams or

small streams within our mining claims we consult EMA and upper Runde Sub catchment council hydrologists to help us construct certified water diversions which do not harm the ecosystem.... Remember we subscribe to the principle of living in harmony with nature," he said.

He also denied allegations that the company was discharging chemicals into the environment and water bodies.

"We work closely with EMA. They come and conduct periodical testing of water sources within our mining areas and we have not been found wanting of any violations of chemical discharge into the environment," he said.

"In cases where we sought to acquire more land, we worked and continue to work closely with the Lands office and DDC's office to help facilitate win-win compensation agreements with affected community members so it would be a distortion to suggest that we displace community members without any valuable compensation packages."

An official from the Ministry of Mines acknowledged the environmental degradation but indicated that rehabilitation efforts "would only commence once the mineral resources in these areas have been depleted."

The officials interviewed by our publication were evasive, often deferring questions to one another.

The Environmental Management Agency (EMA) said commenting on the situation was challenging due to the involvement of multiple sectors in mining.

EMA spokesperson Amkela Sidange directed this reporter to the mines licensing department, although she did not attend to questions about environmental violations.

Provincial Mining Director Khumbulani Mlangeni said a rehabilitation plan was in place for Boterekwa.

"We will be monitoring compliance. The mines hold legal titles, and rehabilitation will only occur after the economic resource is depleted. Many matters relate to EMA compliance, and I believe they have conducted EIAs," he said.

According to the Centre for Natural Resources and Governance (CNRG), Chengxi's mining activities have far-reaching consequences and are exacerbating climate risks for local inhabitants.

CNRG director Farai Muguwu said that due to slime spillages, the villages surrounding the Boterekwa River can no longer safely use the river water for domestic or agricultural purposes. Community members have also stated that they are losing a major tourist attraction at Boterekwa Falls due to blasting, slime dams, and general deterioration of air quality.

"The hills, which serve as vital aquifers, are being destroyed, disrupting the delicate water table and rendering the local population increasingly vulnerable to droughts," Muguwu said.

"This ecological onslaught not only jeopardises the region's biodiversity but also undermines the livelihoods of local communities, who depend on these natural resources for their survival.

"The long-term effects of this environmental degradation will be catastrophic, perpetuating a cycle of poverty, displacement, and human suffering."

***Names have been changed to avoid victimisation**



Troubled Nyaminyami: Violent competition, corruption threaten fishing on Lake Kariba

BY ELVIS DUMBA

Piracy, internecine wars over fishing space and widespread corruption involving parks officials have become a daily occurrence at Lake Kariba whose water levels have been fast receding over the years due to climate change.

This was established in a four-month investigation by this publication in collaboration with Information for Development Trust, a non-profit organisation supporting watchdog journalism in Zimbabwe and southern Africa.

According to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, an estimated 200 000 people living along the shores of Kariba and workers in the fishing industry have their livelihoods dependent on the lake, and the obtaining crisis is now posing acute survival challenges.

Kariba, the world's largest man-made lake and reservoir by volume, has been a thriving fishing hub since the dam was filled some 60 years ago.

The fishing industry has now been pushed to the edge due to the drastic reduction in water levels and a plethora of other challenges. Illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing are some of the significant issues threatening the sustainability of the industry.

Other challenges include overfishing which has led to the collapse of some important fish stocks, and weaknesses in the fisheries management which results in increased use of destructive fishing gear.

Lake Kariba spans the shores of Zimbabwe and Zambia and the Zimbabwean shoreline communities include Kariba Town (population: 20 000 – 30 000), Binga District (population: 30 000–50 000), Siabuwa District (population: 10 000 – 20 000) and Nyaminyami District (population: 10 000 – 20 000).

The notable tribes living on the shores of Kariba are the Tonga who are predominantly found in the Binga and Siabuwa areas and the Shona people who are present in Nyaminyami and Kariba areas.

Fishing is the major source of livelihood here although agriculture, livestock and tourism also play a part in the economy of this area.

The receding water levels in Lake Kariba have meant dwindling fishing spaces whose allocation to the growing number of the fishing crews on the lake is now characterised by corruption. Fishermen have to wrestle for the best fishing territories and often pay 'tokens' of between US\$50 – US\$100 to officials responsible for fishing space allocations.

Fishermen said they were fleeced on a daily basis by corrupt officials that are supposed to manage the lake. Management authority staffers demand bribes to allow them to go about their business.

"They take money or part of the crews' catch especially Kapenta, threatening to throw out vessels for even the slightest or false regulation flouting by fishermen that refuse to play ball," said Chartwell Tanga, chairperson of Siavonga Fisheries, a



Zimbabwean fishing cooperative operating on the lake.

Tanga is also national chairperson of Kapenta Fisheries Association of Zimbabwe. Siavonga is one of several indigenous companies that catch and dry Kapenta for wholesale mainly to indigenous businesses.

Tanga paints a grim picture of the fishing industry sector at Lake Kariba. "We encounter robberies regularly on these waters," he said. "Curiously these robbers always know which vessels would have made good catches. They rarely strike empty vessels, and this makes us suspicious. We now believe that they work in cahoots with corrupt teams from the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority commonly referred to as Zimparks, and other dam authorities with whom they share the spoils."

Tanga said there were numerous reports from members of his cooperative, of unscrupulous officers from the dam management authorities, particularly Zimparks staffers, who made

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random visits to the fish camping sites demanding 'license fees' from those found without fishing permits. They threatened to impound their vessels and the 'fees', paid in cash or kind, were not receipted, he said.

Illegal fishing syndicates take charge

This investigation found that fishing permits are issued corruptly by authorities who demand kickbacks for facilitating almost anything for the fishermen. This has created cartels where members, working with corrupt officials, get easy access to the permits. Members of these cartels are now in the business of hiring out the permits to those who fail to access them.

Some boats have duplicate number plates where one registered plate is used by several other boats for a fee ranging between \$100 and \$150 per boat per fortnight.

Tanga, who personally runs a fleet of Kapenta fishing rigs on the lake said corruption compounded their misery as unlicensed fishermen were allowed to operate in their spaces.

"There is what we call boats without permits. These are vessels used by fisheries that 'hire' temporary permits from members of the corruption syndicate," said Tanga who leads a 12-member fishing cooperative.

"We also have people who just come from nowhere and freely enter prohibited waters including even breeding areas. They are never arrested and it has become public knowledge that they would have bribed authorities."

Fishermen take heavy losses as robberies escalate

"We have had numerous encounters with robbers and our fishermen have lost huge catches. Whilst these ugly incidents have been widely attributed to poachers from the Zambian side, we have come across local robbers whose arrogance and impunity betray links with dam authorities," Tanga said.

He said the losses are often heavy, ranging around US\$1500 in a single attack. They have tracked some of the gangs to Kariba's Nyamhunga Township.

Some of the fish robbers set bases along the shores of the lake where they waylay and rob fishing crews that would be returning to the shores. They quickly dispose of the stolen fish by selling to visiting buyers at Nyamhunga.

We visited Nyamhunga Township as part of this investigation and found that fish is indeed the major protein source in the town. Pricing of the fish, including Kapenta and the most common bream, is determined by the source of the fish, with differences indicating, as confirmed by some residents, that fish robbers literally dump their loot in the township at very low prices.

Fights break out and people get injured

"Our business has been negatively affected by the drastic drop in water levels. We are now forced to crowd the little available fishing spaces," said Frank Zenda a member of one of the fishing cooperatives on the Zimbabwean side.

Catches have gone down from 10 000kg to a paltry 1 000kg per annum according to records kept at the Kariba Fisheries Research Institute.

"Fights break out and people get injured in the skirmishes between various fishing groups over fishing spaces. Fishing equipment such as nets get lost as usually these clashes take place at night when vessels are docked and fishermen would



be packaging their catches.

"Sometimes we return to base with nothing after these water wars, but because that is our only source of income, we have no choice but to prepare for the next jaunt and pray for luck," Zenda said.

Part of our undercover investigation took us on an excursion with a fishing crew on one of the nights. It was a dry outing and indeed, in an effort to harvest something, the crew would drift out of their allocated spaces. We spotted several other boats well out of bounds too and a few unregistered vessels were also seen.

We noticed one small boat going around the fishing areas picking out and stopping unlicensed vessels. We saw money changing hands. Upon inquiring what transaction that was, our crew explained that the boat collecting bribes was not an official dam management vessel.

By the end of the excursion we had established that the small boat actually belonged to the syndicate that collected 'protection fee' on behalf of corrupt dam management authorities.

We also witnessed an unlicensed small boat being stopped and its nets confiscated. The crew had failed to raise the "protection fee".

Fishing in Zimbabwe is managed under legislation governing natural resources (Parks and Wildlife Act (Chapter 20:14 1996) and the authority to enforce this legislation is vested on the Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry through ZimParks.

A fishing permit is a legally mandated license which is renewable every three or 12 months that commercial fishermen are permitted to fish in the lake and the Zambezi River. The permit is issued by ZimParks, the state agency responsible for wildlife conservation in the country.

Permits were introduced in 1990 in a bid to regulate the number of fisheries, thus preventing overfishing and aiding conservation. Fishing without a license is punishable by a US\$2 000 fine and confiscation of the vessel which is forfeited to the state.

Fishermen, however, told this investigating team that the hefty fine was rarely paid because authorities took bribes. Offenders usually ended up paying amounts ranging between US\$50 and US\$200 which arresting officers pocketed.

An organisation working on the lake, the Kariba Fisheries and Research Institute helps to manage the fishing industry through research and capacity building for members of the fishing cooperatives. It seeks to help with fishing control as all fishing is by way of a permit with specific restrictions on fishing gear and fishing grounds.

It also helps to monitor authorisation or prohibition of destructive fishing methods.

"The regulations prohibit fishing in areas with less than 20 meters depth, but low water levels on the lake have made some gazetted areas shallow," Tanga explained. "We are not allowed to fish in these areas, but they're our traditional fishing grounds."

Last year Zimparks adopted a nine-year management plan for the lake, dubbed Lake Kariba Inshore Fishery Management Plan (2023-2032).

The plan was officially launched on March 21 2023 at a ceremony graced by top government officials and ZimParks executives. ZimParks board chairman, Agrippa Sora and director-general of Zimparks Fulton Mangwanya signed for the agency while Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry minister Mangaliso Ndhlovu and the permanent secretary, Raphael Faranisi signed for the government.

The plan sets out laws regulating use of the lake, including fishing timetable, a move meant to accommodate the interests of other players in the tourism sector that do boat cruises and para-sailing on the lake.

To accommodate these activities, the regulations restrict fishing boats and rigs from setting gillnets no earlier than 4pm and to pull them out early in the morning between 6am and 10am.

"No movement of boats in the lake or the Zambezi River after 1800 hours and before 0600 hours, except for Sunday or the last day of a public holiday which is 1800 hours to 1900 hours," the plan reads in part.

This investigation however found that a good number of fishing crews bribe their way into daylight fishing and were seen in prohibited fishing spaces including reserved breeding spaces in broad daylight.

At Nyaodza fishing camp where we spent a night, some rangers from Zimparks offered willing fishermen leeway for daylight fishing for a fee of US\$10 per individual. A group of 11 fishermen took up the offer and made the payment for which they got no receipts.

The fishermen set out in hand-made canoes after having been told not to use engine-powered boats to avoid easy detection.

A lot more fishing takes place under cover of darkness and against the law, and pirates and robbers take advantage, hence the numerous reports of night attacks and robberies.

Fish robbers still operate during the legally allotted timeframes and reports of attacks on bona fide fishers abound. Zimparks spokesperson Tinashe Farawo confirmed challenges in the fishing sector and Kariba in particular and blamed players in the industry.

"Fish poaching is prevalent in the country especially in areas outside of protected areas with little or no law enforcement. Even in protected areas, poaching happens although it is not as rampant. The problematic poaching is that by licensed fishers who use illegal fishing gear such as small net meshes as

well as fishing in breeding areas," said Farawo.

Police confirm piracy, robberies on Lake Kariba

Police confirmed robberies along the lake but would not provide specific detail or statistics.

"We have attended to cases reported by members of fishing groups who would have lost property including fuel and fishing gear. There are cases too where fishermen have lost their catches to thieves who target boats operating on the Lake," said Ian Kohwera, the provincial police spokesperson for Mashonaland West.

"We do occasionally receive reports on illegal activities on the lake although not all are related to the fishing industry. Remember we also have cases of illegal immigration on the lake and as police, we occasionally carry out joint monitoring operations with the immigration department, parks officials and lake management authorities," said Kohwera.

Zimparks warns corrupt officers, impostors

Farawo said Zimparks had put in place various initiatives to protect the fishing industry on Lake Kariba.

"Zimparks have put in place measures to combat fish poaching including increased surveillance in protected areas to determine, detect and eliminate all forms of illegal, unregulated fishing. We have increased shore patrols, increased the number of (police) water vessels and adopted modern technologies such as Vessel Monitoring Systems to identify, in real time, illegal fishing by licensed operators in the Kapenta fishery.

"We have also enhanced awareness and education of the general public on the impact of illegal fishing in water bodies," said Farawo.

Responding to reports of corruption by officials on Lake Kariba, Farawo said ZimParks was strict on the conduct of its employees and did not tolerate corruption. He said they had reports of criminals impersonating ZimParks staff and going around fleecing unsuspecting fishermen on the lake.

"We also note the allegations that are leveled against our staff involving cases of corruption and other crimes in the fishing regions of Lake Kariba and as an agency we do not tolerate such behaviour. Anyone found on the wrong side of the law will face the consequences," Farawo said.

"We will be glad to get any reports of our members involved in corrupt and poaching activities as our core business is to protect the natural resources on and around Lake Kariba."

An organisation advocating for resource conservation around the lake, Bumi Hills Anti-Poaching Unit concurred and said there had been an increase in poaching on the islands on Lake Kariba in recent years which was affecting licensed fishing groups.

"We have been noticing an increase in poaching and of great concern is the wanton fish harvesting that is taking place now with the current low water levels of the lake. Unscrupulous fishers are using even mosquito nets, taking out every living organism on the lake," a volunteer with the organization, Tracy Smith said.

Statistics from the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, and Rural Development points at a 43% decline in the fishing population at Kariba Dam over the past five years.

Fisheries and Aquaculture Resources Production Department director in the ministry, Milton Makumbe, said lack of

proper regulation in the industry led to overfishing and disruption of crucial breeding processes.

"In the past we would come back from the waters with more than 20 kg of Kapenta per haul but now we are averaging below 5kg," a member of a Kapenta Fishing group Alois Bandawe said.

Poverty compromises regulation on Lake Kariba

Our investigation took us further down to Nyaodza Fishing Camp, situated 120 kilometres from Kariba Town on the lake's southern shore in Nyaminyami District. This camp specializes in Kapenta fishing.

Simon Gumbo, a crew member said sometimes they went up to a week or more without coming across a single patrol boat.

"We can go for days without seeing the authorities. Their usual excuse is that they have operational challenges, especially fuel. And indeed sometimes they show up at fishing camps appealing for fuel," Gumbo said adding that such 'operational challenges' compromised authorities as poachers easily bribed them.

Poachers crowd out bona fide fisheries

The Kariba Dam is divided into several fishing catchment basins namely Mlibizi, Binga, Sengwa, Bumi/ Chalala and Sanyati. The basins are named after the rivers that flow into Lake Kariba.

This investigation established that there should be an average of 500 fishing rigs or boats on the lake on both the Zimbabwe and Zambian sides. Reality though is that as many as 1500 vessels are floating on the lake at any given time. Most of them are unlicensed, according to the Kariba Fisheries Research Institute.

Information gathered from the organization reveals that as of April 1 2024, there was a total 434 registered units on the lake, owned by 129 companies. Of these, Sanyati Basin has 172 boats from 70 companies while the Kariba Basin has 27 floating units owned by 13 companies, signifying a six and three decrease in the number of units from last year respectively.

Fear of witchcraft protects illegal fishermen

The natural population growth in the Kariba communities and immigration has increased the number of people dependent on fishing and the successive droughts in recent years have driven more people into the industry.

Because of the resultant pressure on the lake, some fishermen now accommodate unlicensed people on their fisheries (for a fee) and these people end up buying their own fishing gear and embarking on illegal fishing.

This investigation established that these new illegal fishermen would be using their hosts' fishing permits in exchange for money and or free labour. Such working relationships have become commonplace along the shores of the lake but authorities have failed to bust them because of the protective nature of the relationships in these communities.

"There are no whistleblowers here," said a fisherman who identified himself only as Mafu. "Communities here are very superstitious. So, fear of witchcraft and losing important social relations supersedes the urge to report illegal activities".

Women relegated to mending nets, sex work

The fishing camps along Kariba are male dominated with the

few women in the industry relegated to fish sorters, cleaners and menders of nets. Most of the women that have made it in this industry are engaged in fish sales and as such are found mostly in Kariba town rather than fishing areas.

A significant number of women that have remained in the fishing areas during the drought period have turned to sex work for survival. Sandra Butawo a 34-year-old mother of two said most women waited for fishing crews at the river banks to sort and clean the fish which they would take to the market. They did not join the crews due to the long periods that fishermen take in the water. They also cited safety issues associated with venturing into the lake.

"Usually the fishing crews take a whole week in the water and they sometimes come back empty handed, having had run-ins with robbers. Now, as a mother it's hard to spend a week away from the children, so we focus on mending the nets, sorting the fish and marketing," Butawo said.

She said the low fish catches currently being experienced had seen more women spending longer periods on the river banks and lake shores where focus had turned to commercial sex.

"Some women are turning to sex work in the fishing camps to get preferential treatment on accessing the scant Kapenta," she said.

This aspect probably explains statistics from the Kariba district office of the National Aids Council of Zimbabwe whose recent research found that sexually transmitted infections in Kariba District are concentrated in the fishing camps.

Kariba district development coordinator, Desmond Anele Gumbo said various initiatives to address the fishermen's plight were ongoing.

"We are aware of various challenges faced by the fishing industries which inevitably affect the general economy of Kariba. We are losing revenue," Gumbo said.

There have been attempts to bring together various stakeholders from Zambia and Zimbabwe to mitigate these challenges but the idea has remained a pipedream.

"Engaging all rig owners or representatives in the Sengwa basin and other areas to work together and arrest illegal Zambian operators is key to ensure we protect our livelihoods," said 57 year -old Clarion Kabirabira, a veteran fisherman.

Clever Mutondohori of Maruva Fisheries said he was a multiple victim of suspected Zambian 'pirates' operating in that part of the lake. They took away fish, clothes and fishing equipment, he said.

A Zambian fisherman we spoke to, however, refuted the allegations. David Mwemba said he and his compatriots operated according to the regulations. He accused their Zimbabwean counterparts of trying to elbow them out of the industry.

"We all know that the water has receded on the lake and that we are all experiencing low catches, but our Zimbabwean counterparts want to elbow us out of the industry by fabricating robbery stories," Mwemba said.

"We also encounter these robberies and corrupt patrol officers. Remember this is just water and there is no clear demarcation to show that this is Zimbabwe or Zambia. What is needed is just finding ways to preserve our industry."

Zimbabwe's planned Cyber City brings pain to citizens as thousands face displacements and job losses



BY THANDIWE GARUSA

THOUSANDS of residents of Turner Farm in Mt Hampden are facing displacement to pave way for the development of the new multi-million-dollar Zim Cyber City project, 26 kilometers northwest of Harare, investigations have revealed.

The cyber city, estimated to cost around US\$60 billion when complete, will be part of Zimbabwe's proposed new administrative capital, also known as New Harare.

As a precursor to the evictions, the government exhumed about 1 000 graves between June and August, to pave way for the project.

The cyber city is being developed by United Arab Emirates-based industrial conglomerate Mulk International, which has injected an initial US\$500 million.

It will consist of 250 townhouses, more than 80 luxury villas, a number of apartment blocks, high-tech office facilities, a 15-storey commercial tower, and landscaped gardens, covering 2.5 million square meters of land.

The construction will take place near the new parliament building whose construction was funded by the Chinese government.

The development of the cyber city has, however, left the community in panic and fear as they are facing eviction, relocation uncertainty and job losses.

In March this year, the Local Government ministry issued a

notice giving Mt Hampden residents three months to prepare for the exhumation of graves.

"In terms of Section 38 (4b) (5) of the Cemeteries Act (Chapter 5:4), the Minister of Local Government and Public Works hereby gives notice of intention to remove human remains, memorials and monuments in the Mount Hampden area to pave way for the establishment of the Cyber City.

"Any person wishing to object to the proposed action may lodge a written objection within three months of publication of this notice to the Minister of Local Government and Public Works, Makombe Building, Corner Herbert Chitepo Avenue and Leopold Takawira Street, Harare," read the notice which was published in the government gazette and the *Herald*.

The exhumation process

Investigations by NewZimbabwe.com with support from Information for Development Trust (IDT) revealed that the notice came just after the government had denied allegations of the graves' removal, following a social media uproar concerning the matter.

The government has gone on to remove the graves, memorials and monuments, despite assuring residents it would not do so.

This reporter witnessed the exhumations in July after the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ)

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identified 1 103 graves in the area. Most of the graves were unmarked.

Residents revealed a team of government officials asked them to identify their relatives' graves and make reburial arrangements.

Speaking in an interview with this publication before the reburials took place, the residents said the government team was going to dig the graves and offer only transport and a letter to present addressed to traditional leaders and other stakeholders where the reburials would take place.

"I was told if I wanted to take my relatives' remains to my rural area, I would need to make all the arrangements at my own expense except digging the grave and transporting the remains.

"For those with nowhere to rebury the remains of their loved ones, the government said it would bury them in Chief Zvimba's area," said Loveson Mandiranga, a community member whose two relatives were exhumed and reburied.

Zvimba is in Mashonaland West about 60km northwest of Harare. Chief Zvimba is a local traditional leader for the Zvimba East constituency, which incorporates Mt Hampden is located.

Mandiranga said he preferred taking his relatives' remains for reburial in Nyanga, where he originates but was incapacitated.

The exhumation was conducted by workers from the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) after locals refused to participate in protest.

"The NMMZ asked for men from this community who could dig the graves as a way to give us employment, but no one was willing, and they had to bring their own guys for the job.

"They came and asked for able bodied men from this community to do the digging up, but no one agreed, and they had to find them somewhere," said Russel Nyamvura, a Mt Hampden resident, whose relative was also reburied.

Disgruntled community members said they were powerless to stop the government but are disappointed that their cultural practices were not followed during the exhumations and reburials.

"The authorities had promised us to come and conduct a proper cultural reburial ceremony. However, they did not. This goes against our cultural norms and beliefs. Where have you seen graves being exhumed without any relative of the deceased present?" asked another disgruntled community member Clever Paurosi.

"Most of the graves were unclaimed because the process was rushed. Many people with relatives buried here, but who are no longer staying in the area may not have received the message.

"They were digging and putting the remains of our relatives in plastic bags."

Some Mt Hampden residents also feared that their relatives were buried in mass graves.

NMMZ regional director Godhi Bvocho, however, dismissed the mass grave claims, saying the remains were reburied in a proper way.

"The 823 remains which we exhumed were each buried in separate graves and coffins. There was no mass grave and they were buried according to their relatives' culture. Each relative was given an opportunity to perform rituals before reburial," Bvocho said.

"A total of 1103 graves were identified and only 25 remains were claimed by relatives who buried them at places of their choice, 823 graves were reburied at Murombedzi cemetery (in Zvimba) and the remaining 255 graves had no human remains inside, maybe because some had lived way beyond recognition, and some were just soil heaps mistaken as graves since

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Early stages of construction at the new Cyber City in Mt Hampden

this was a very old cemetery.”

Bvocho said most graves were not claimed because the majority of people buried there were farm workers originally from Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia.

From the early 1900s to the mid-1960s, many people migrated from Malawi (Nyasaland) to Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) for various reasons like seeking employment with higher wages.

Nyasaland, which like Zimbabwe was a British colony, was densely populated but not as economically developed as Zimbabwe, hence the movement of people in search of better paying work. Zimbabwe also attracted labourers from Mozambique and Zambia during the same period.

Potential eviction fears

Our investigations also uncovered that the community is leaving in fear of being evicted from the area as most of them have nowhere to go. Government confirmed the evictions would be affected.

Most of the community members were born in the area and have no other home.

Some residents have lived in the area since the 1950s.

Stima Sophia (85) started living in Mt Hampden in 1952 as a child. She was later married to one of the farm workers, who died 10 years ago.

“Where will I even go at this old age? Ten years after my husband died, what do you think I can do at this age? They should just let us be and stay here. I have lived here since I was a little girl, got married here and now if they want me to leave this place I do not know where I will go,” Stima said.

Joyce Washamira, who has been staying in the area for decades, says Mt Hampden is the only home she knows.

“I started my family here. All my children were born here,

and they learnt at this school (Kuwadzana) community school. They are now all married. My husband passed on and I now have grandchildren, and all this happened here. Where do I go,” she asked.

“My husband was from Mozambique, but I have never been there. I also do not have any rural area where I can go if they chase me away from this place.”

Washamira’s remains were exhumed and buried in Zvimba.

Another resident, Thomas Chihutu, said it was almost clear they will be moved given that graves have already been removed.

He said the community was in distress because of the looming evictions.

“I was born and raised here, and this is the place I call home, so where will I go? All my parents died here so where will I go? I have nowhere to go, neither do I have money to buy land,” Chihutu said.

Zvimba East legislator, Decide Manhanzva confirmed that the residents could be moved. He, however, claimed adequate measures would be put in place to cushion them from the inconveniences coming with the intended displacements.

“We are aware that there are people who are going to be displaced because of the coming of the Cyber City. At this juncture, the government has not yet identified any place or area to relocate these people, so it is still work in progress.

“Once we have projects that need to be done on where they are staying, the government will make a plan for them,” Manhanzva said.

“President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s government will never leave them without a place to stay as the mantra goes, leaving

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no one and no place behind.”

Asked for a comment on what the future holds for the community, the local government ministry chief director for spatial planning and development, Shingirayi Mushamba, showed there was no clear plan yet to resettle the affected residents.

Government, he said, was still planning the displacements.

Mushamba said 301 former farmers who used to occupy part of the affected land had title deeds or lease agreements and were compensated, while some were still in the process of getting their compensation.

“There were 301 farmers with offer letters issued by the lands ministry, and these have been served letters formally by the ministry of land and letters of withdrawal of the offer for land for agriculture has been made for the 301 farmers,” he said.

“The issue of relocation of families normally triggers a negative vibe from those affected. We have two groups affected here. The first group comprises former farm owners who were holding title deeds or 99-year leases.

“For this group, the government has instituted processes of formal valuations of the improvements that were made by the former farm owners, and these people have been compensated for improvements made on the farms. Those who had title deeds have been compensated or are still being compensated for both the land and improvements on the land,” he said.

Mushamba added that the government would find a place to settle residents without title deeds or lease agreements.

He said the affected residents would have been moved by mid-2025.

“The second group of the affected are those people who were working as farm workers for former white farm owners or the 99-year lease holders (resettled under the fast-track land redistribution programme).

“Those are the people that the government is now seized with in terms of how best to empower them so that they can earn a livelihood elsewhere outside the new city in Mt Hampden,” he said.

“The reason they are still on these farms is that the government is continuously reviewing the planning and framework for managing how those people can be assisted.

“Although they do not have a legitimate claim in terms of land ownership, either in the form of a title deed or 99-year lease, we recognise them as citizens of the country and people who were contributing to the farming economy.

“Right now, there are ways and means that are being defined so that when they are relocated from the new city in Mt Hampden, they are actually empowered and placed in areas where they can continue to earn a living,” he added.

“What I can assure you is that, by the time we get to as early as 2025, second or third quarter, those processes would have occurred because the developments have already commenced, and we do not want any disturbances because there are people still staying on the land.

“So, we are looking at the next six to nine months. We will take all the necessary measures to ensure all the families are relocated elsewhere where they will derive a life,” said Mashamba.

Loss of employment

Cultural violations regarding the graves and impending evictions aside, the thousands of community members will lose

jobs as the biggest company in that area, Prawell Bricks, faces closure.

Workers say they were given a four-month verbal notice after the company was ordered to vacate its premises as the government prepares the land for the cyber city.

“Our days are numbered here. The company is about to close down, and our contracts will expire soon. They did not tell us why they are closing, but we hear this land now belongs to some Arab guys who are developing the area,” said one of the workers, Edward Dhlwayo.

Despite earning less than US\$200 per month, workers say they will be left more vulnerable if they lose their jobs.

“The money I earn here is not much. My monthly take home is around US\$180. However, it is better than not having anything to do at all,” said Blessing Mbanje who also works at Prawell bricks.

Women are particularly anxious about the future.

“The job losses will come with a lot of problems. We will not have a place to stay, and our children will also be affected. We will not even afford food to give them, not to mention paying for their education. I have six children, and they have to go to school, what will I do with them” said Theresa Chigoma, also a worker at Prawell Bricks.

An official from Prawell Bricks, however, denied shutting down allegations, saying no one was given a notice and also said the company was not seizing operations.

“We are not closing down; we are not going anywhere. The workers committee met with the director and were told that if there are any developments of that sort, everyone will be told. We actually built a new plant, and we are not going anywhere.

“Even the claims that this land was now repossessed by the government for the Zim Cyber City project are all rumors and we have not been told,” one of Prawell Bricks management team who preferred anonymity said.

This is despite the local government confirming the land in that area now belongs to the government after those who had title deeds and leases were served with formal notices to vacate.

“President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s government identified land in Mashonaland West and Mashonaland Central and combined we have a total of 15 500 hectares earmarked for the new city in Mt Hampden, so essentially what it means is in as far as the state is concerned, the land in Mt Hampden is now vacant and all the land belongs to the state and any land of the state belongs to the President,” Mushamba said.

Some community members believe the Prawell Bricks was planning to shut down and leave its employees without giving them their redundancy packages.