

Urban Regeneration Through Collaborative Approaches in Local Government: Case of the City of Harare

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Abstract

African cities, due to substantive urban growth, have faced the challenge of urban deterioration which has contributed to city unattractiveness and low business opportunities over the years. Previous studies have indicated that urban decay is a process against a willful act which cannot be corrected by command, however through collaborative efforts by several stakeholders from diverse fronts. This study examined the adoption of collaborative approaches towards urban regeneration using the City of Harare as a case study, firstly by exploring challenges contributing to the deteriorating nurture of the city as well as identifying different roles which stakeholders can play to restore the city. This was achieved through a qualitative research methodology which encompasses a document search complimented by key informant interviews. The City of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe has suffered the same challenge of urban decline associated with poor waste removal, proliferation of informal business markets, poor enforcement of by-laws, disinvestment among others. The study identified several actors which included resident associations, private sector entities (private property developers, consultants, private businesses), Ministry of Local Government, and the Harare City Council. It was established that efforts by several stakeholders can drive urban regeneration through the creation of synergies, among the same actors.

Keywords: Local Government, Collaborative Governance, Stakeholders, Urban Decay, Urban Regeneration, Private Sector

Introduction

Urban regeneration, in general terms, is an approach to urban decay remediation. Ndou and Nyamwanza (2023) citing Saranya and Mewa (2017) underscore that urban decay is a significant issue that affects cities worldwide, leading to numerous social, economic, and environmental challenges. In the contemporary world, cities are facing a challenge of urban decay which can be seen as an erosion or progressive deterioration of the physical, economic and sociological processes that sustain a functioning city. Its presence in urban typologies and mechanisms necessitates a profound self-reflection on the atrophy of society and prompts a level of introspection upon the fragility of constructed environments on a city scale. (Matai & Ndhlovu, 2020). Urban decay is oftenly, associated with negative aspects of urban living, manifesting in conditions relating to crime, physical dereliction, abandonment. This is a similar case for the City of Harare to which Maturure (2023) alludes that infrastructure in the city has been deteriorating at an alarming owing to a growth in population coupled with poor urban planning. Illegal car washes, eruption of unregulated vending sites, lack of bins and insufficient public toilets are some of the signs of urban decay associated with the City of Harare (Tome, 2023)

Matai and Ndlovhu (2020) postulate that despite being a matter of public concern for many years, urban decay has not been given enough attention in Zimbabwe's urban planning and management platforms. This is despite the realisation that urban decay affects the socio-economic activities of the cities which is central to its resilience. The City of Harare's 2020 Strategic Plan was to achieve the world class city status by 2025, which the city has already failed to attain (Maturure, 2023). The decaying elements associated with the City of Harare also include dilapidated buildings, abandoned spaces, and declining social systems (street kids roaming and harassing urbanites in every part of the city). Furthermore, decay extends beyond the physical realm, permeating the social systems and networks, leading to fragmentation and disruptions within the urban landscape and its spatial configurations (United Nations Habitat, 2022). The transformative potential of decay within urban spaces remains a topic requiring further exploration and comprehension. While urban expansion and migration is projected to continue in the near future especially in developing countries, it is critical to map how urban spaces can be regenerated and renewed (Ndou & Nyamwanza, 2023).

Against this backdrop, it is important for the city to spearhead the agenda of urban regeneration, with previous efforts being futile a collaborative governance approach to urban regeneration can be a feasible pathway for restoring the city of Harare to its glory days (Ndou & Nyamwanza, 2023). While there is no clear-cut policy framework for sustainable inner city or city creation in Zimbabwe, it's imperative for cities to come up with strategies that enable them to revamp and reconstruct the city. This study examines the role of different actors in driving urban regeneration through collaborative mechanisms among different actors within the city. Recent literature has emphasised that concerted efforts are necessary along diverse fronts to cause regeneration or renewal of deteriorated urban centers to standards reflective of the point in civilisation at the time (Egolum & Emoh, 2017; Govender & Reddy, 2020). A collaborative approach can contribute to an improvement in a city's livability, productivity and image over the long term. Effective urban renewal actions are inevitable in contemporary urban cities if these cities would compare with those of the developed economies or comparable developing economies (Egolum & Emoh, 2017). Many initiatives associated with the revamp and the reinvigorating of the urban fabric has evolved over the years however, what makes urban regeneration outstanding, is that it has mostly been related with "development within the towns and cities (Govender & Reddy, 2020). However, despite much progress that has been made in collaborative governance research and practices in recent years, a discrepancy still exists between the recognition that collaborative governance receives in urban regeneration and the knowledge we have about it (Wang, Ran & Li, 2022).

Urban regeneration concept

Urban regeneration is a process by which the physical, social, environmental, and economic aspects of an urban area undergo momentous changes (Edzang & Darby, 2024; Dissanayake, Dissanayaka, Rankoth, & Abeysingh, 2020). Urban regeneration initiatives deal with improving urban areas which are decaying because of physical and social problems and disinvestment (Edzang & Darby, 2024). Furthermore, urban regeneration includes the overlapping processes of the rehabilitation and renovation of urban spaces, urban revitalisation, redevelopment, and the regeneration of urban spaces (Monclus, 2018). All these related processes are carried out with the aim of improving the quality of life within the identified urban area. It should be noted that urban regeneration goes well beyond the physical aspect of the city. At its core, it serves the physical, spiritual, emotional, cultural, social, environmental, and economical, to bring out the authentic values of the locale (Gao, Yin & Zhu, 2020). McCarthy, (2016) argues that urban regeneration policies are strategies related to physical

environmental and social regeneration of areas suffering from concentrations of deprivation. Deriving from the above conceptualisation, this study notes that urban regeneration is a set of coordinated actions seeking to address and bring improvement to the physical, social and economic outlook of a city. In line with the aim of this study the regeneration process will be done through collective efforts of different stakeholders associated with the city of Harare.

Collaborative approaches to urban regeneration

The case for urban regeneration has become one of the most important issues in managing public affairs in modern cities, (Wang, Ran, & Li, 2022). This is because what needs to be regenerated touches on citizens' life directly and usually has significant historical or architectural value but needs to balance different needs for cultural heritage, urban development, local economy, and local neighborhoods (Zhou, Zhou & Liu, 2017), thus posing great challenges for local public administrators. Strokosch & Osborne (2020) established that the traditional models of public service have emphasised the expert and solitary role of public managers within a model of closed decision-making. However, as a consequence of marketisation, a more fragmented and pluralistic system of public services has emerged (Osborne et al, 2015) as postulated by Sorensen & Torfing (2018). This has led to increased interest in inter-organisational relationships and related contingencies and challenges for value creation through the involvement of various actors. Therefore, given these dynamics there have been increased calls for collaborative networks which improve the democratisation of public governance. The notion of collaboration in city governance has come about as an increasing number of researchers have begun to argue that stakeholders should jointly participate in the governance of cities (Gomes, 2020) as cited by Guiwen, Fu, Han, Huang & Zhuang (2020).

Ran & Qi (2018) underscore that collaborative governance focuses on the collaboration of different stakeholders from public, private, and civic sectors who are working together based on deliberative consensus and collective decision-making to achieve shared goals that could not be otherwise fulfilled individually. In the context of urban development, collaborative approaches are increasingly viewed as key policy solutions to challenges being faced in contemporary cities. In collaborative urban regeneration governance, a large number of stakeholders are involved in the process, forming a network with complex interactions (Bixler, Lieberknecht, Atshan, Zutz, Ritcher & Belaire, 2020). Collaboration amongst different stakeholders can contribute to improvements in the inner-city areas to encourage the development of better and more livable environments (Zhang, Kang, & Koo, 2021). Therefore, it can be drawn that participation across different fronts in urban regeneration has proved to be an important means to maintain sustainable and inclusive urban development.

Research Methodology

A qualitative case study design was adopted for study by combining key informant interviews with a desk study approach to explore a collaborative approach towards urban regeneration at Harare City Council. A case study methodology is "unparalleled for its ability to consider a single or complex research question within an environment rich with contextual variables" (Schell, 1992). The essence of case study methodology is triangulation, which is the combination of different levels of techniques, methods and theories to achieve the research objectives (Melbourne, 2010). Desk top research involved an analysis of journals articles, books, newspaper articles, Harare City Council newsletters to derive data relevant on urban regeneration, renewal, and collaborative governance. For key informant interviews, a purposive sampling was adopted to identify 5 (five individuals) who were council officials, Ministry of Local government officials and academic personnel. Such a sampling technique was chosen as it offers a guarantee to the researcher that the participants selected can provide

relevant data for the study. Having the opportunity to access data from informants in position of influences that possesses knowledge on the research problem is vital in primary data collection as eluded by Becker & Meyers, (1975) in Marshall (1984). Although this is a comparatively small number of interviews, they were used to generate rich and insightful data into various understandings of collaborative approaches to city governance (Silverman, 2017). Elite interviewing was then conducted with selected knowledge holders who possess knowledge on the research problem and the study area. The qualitative data, which was in the form of audio, typed and described, was converted into text to make the data analysis process smooth. The analysis enhances the meaning of data; hence a thematic approach was adopted to achieve this as guided by the study's research questions. Initially, patterns across the data were identified and analysed and these were organised into categories as presented in the research findings.

Results and discussion

The following section provides for a presentation and discussion of study findings on the key contributors to urban decay in the city of Harare which warrants urban regeneration. The researcher investigates several stakeholders or key players for a collaborative approach towards urban regeneration. This investigation reveals the different roles each actor can play towards promoting the implementation of an urban regeneration project.

Poor solid waste management in the CBD

The study established that the deterioration of the urban center was driven by poor mechanisms of managing waste disposal. One participant in an interview established that the council has made concerted efforts to ensure that there is scheduled waste and refuse collection across strategic points of the city, however uncollected waste remains a concern. One academic personnel suggested the existing waste management policies may not be efficient or effective enough to handle the large volumes of waste generated in urban areas. Ndebele (2022) asserts that business owners in the CBD are reckless in that during the end of business hours, they dispose of their waste in the street. Bus terminuses like Ruzende Parkade, Market Square and Fourth Street have become dumping sites for waste. Another participant added that there has been proliferation of vending sites by informal traders who sell wares that range from consumables like fruits and vegetables to non-consumables like secondhand clothing. The informant had this to say,

“Since these individuals operate illegally, there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that their waste is safely disposed”.

Another interviewee had this to say,

“Recycling pickers disperse it first, then rain and winds carry it to the drainage system. Those that stay awake solely to dump trash in canals and waterways are the worst. The commuters who eat everything and dump them in the drainage, this poor waste management is definitely a problem to be considered.”

The above findings are clear evidence of poor waste management practices, particularly extensive trash dumping in water bodies and unregulated disposal sites. Study findings suggest that poor waste management practices are caused by high population density in urban spaces and comes with an increase in consumption and waste (Govender & Reddy, 2020, Zhou *et al.* 2017). In such instances of high population growth, usually infrastructure and land use

planning, particularly waste management, are not keeping up with the increase of metropolitan areas, which is a source of concern (Dissanayake, Dissanayaka, Rankoth, & Abeysingh, 2022).

Disinvestment

Urban degeneration and decay experienced at Harare City Council is also a result of physical and social problems and disinvestment. Disinvestment in urban decay refers to the process where both public and private investors withdraw their financial support and capital from urban areas (Alanda, Hassan & Chimango, 2023). Over time, the lack of adequate investment fosters a cycle of neglect and deterioration. Moreso, Tome (2023) added that dilapidated property owners in downtown Harare are delaying efforts for urban renewal in Harare as they continue to hold onto property despite not having plans to use them in the future. The downtown area has become an eye-sore comprising of archaic and unfit buildings, with some of them qualifying to be condemned, such areas are harboring criminal activities.

In an interview a participant had this to say,

“Ruthless and/or irresponsible property owners allowing their buildings to be invaded and/or become dilapidated, whether purposefully or not. Such desolated properties are socially dangerous to the community because they attract criminals and street gangs, contributing to the volume of crime.

In support of the above another interviewee had this to say,

“Urban decay is evidence by obsolescence”

Matai & Ndlovhu (2020) citing Thomsen & van der Flier (2011) define obsolescence as the useless, outdated, worn away, eroded, effaced and broken-down buildings. One of the major reasons for this is the fact of deferred maintenance exposing the area to urban decay. This usually happens when the property is left empty. Since there will be no incentive for maintaining them, they are left idle to decay. In a poorly performing economy with low levels of investment, most property owners rarely repair their buildings (Alanda, Hassan & Chimango, 2023). Similarly, repair and maintenance of infrastructures such as water, sewerage pipes and roads, drainage channels and electricity power lines are usually non-existent in an ailing economy, leading to urban decay.

Lack of competent managerial execution at the city governance level

Interview findings suggest that all the symptoms of urban decay are stemming from poor governance by the city management. This incompetence stems from a lack of skilled personnel who can handle service delivery challenges contributing to a decline in the city’s attractiveness as suggested during interviews. City management incompetence spans from poor financial management to failure to implement the city’s strategic plans and policies on different strategic areas. One interview participant had this to say:

“Urban decay at the city of Harare can attributed to management failure, for instance the city still grapples with waste disposal challenges despite having a well-crafted Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan (2021–2026). Additionally, there is a lack of a dedicated problem buildings unit and expert project manager at the city government, with enforcement capacity (managed, staffed and resourced).”

Govender & Reddy, (2020) underscored that, African cities continued reliance on urban planning, and practices which are still largely dominated by colonial policies without incorporating the indigenous principles of African urbanism and culture. Matai & Ndlovhu (2020) underscored that antiquated regulations are not in line with the contemporary urban landscape, this stems from failure by management to make concerted efforts to improve and update these regulations. Managerial incompetence can also contribute to urban decay if they have poor mechanisms for regulating activities in cities (Ndou & Nyamwanza, 2023).

Poor enforcement of by-laws

The study established poor enforcement of laws and regulations on urban development by the responsible authorities. There has been high occupancy rate of urban spaces which is a clear of the council's failure to enforce urban planning policies and laws on how businesses should operate in the CBD. Interview findings suggest that there has been a sprawl of informal markets, especially at bus stations and the occupied areas do not have proper health amenities like ablutions facilities. One interviewee also cemented the issue of street kids referring to them and a new "downtown menace". This is attributed to poor maintenance of buildings by owners which push the street kids to occupy these neglected spaces and buildings.

Moreso, interview findings indicate that there has been high disregard for the city council by law. This is evidenced by illegal transport operators establishing their pickup and drop-off points in some parts of the downtown area. According to Matai & Ndlovhu (2020) vendors tend to concentrate at the pick-up and drop-off points since there is high traffic. Interviews show that the vendors in the area dump their rotten fruits, vegetables and mealie cobs in the area contributing to waste management challenges being faced already by the city. Maturure (2023) suggests that this is caused by laxity and poor enforcement of by laws of the city 'inspectorate department. These by laws encompass a lot of things including property maintenance, construction, public utilities and amenities.

Key stakeholders for collaborative approach to urban regeneration at HCC

The following is presentation and discussion of study findings on the key actors for an effective urban regeneration approach for the city of Harare.

Private sector entities

Market participation, usually in the form of corporate involvement, is instrumentally significant for collaborative governance in public service delivery (Wang *et al.* 2022). One of the primary contributions of the private sector to urban regeneration is financial investment. Many governments face budget constraints and are unable to fund large-scale redevelopment projects independently. Private companies typically possess specialised knowledge and experience in various sectors such as construction, technology, and urban planning. This expertise is invaluable during the planning and execution phases of urban regeneration projects. By leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as smart city solutions that integrate Internet of Things (IoT) devices private firms can help create more efficient waste management systems, transportation networks, and energy solutions (Dissanayake *et al.*, 2020).

The private sectors can guarantee the effective investment in designated regeneration areas, while the governments can provide "flexible" support to help private sectors overcome obstacles during the implementation of regeneration projects. (Guiwen, Fu, Han, Huang, & Zhuang, 2020). The collaboration between public entities and private organisations through mechanisms like PPPs creates a synergistic approach that maximises resources available for transforming urban landscapes into thriving communities. One interview established that some

corporates are already playing their part through participating in National Clean Up Campaigns, donations of disposable bins as part of corporate social responsibility. Literature findings suggest that local government can benefit through partnering with private investors and private players who can contribute to regeneration projects in various ways. Partnerships are an important part of urban regeneration projects, as they provide the required financial support in the realisation of the projects as well as various other requirements, such legal provisions and technical assistance (Edzang & Darby, 2024).

Ministry of Local Government

The study established the Ministry of Local Government as one of the strategic actors for urban regeneration. Most participants were of the view that the Local Government Ministry is mandated to develop policies that guide urban regeneration efforts. This is achieved through the establishment of clear guidelines and objectives, while ensuring that regeneration projects align with broader governmental goals. In an interview, one participant suggested that the local government ministries often oversee the allocation of funding for urban regeneration projects. This is supported by a document search findings by Wang *et al.* (2022) underscoring that government has been highly active in serving as the primary organiser of the collaboration, guiding the collaborative process, and ensuring that different stakeholders could reach consensus on issues related to the projects. Moreso, in the context of Zimbabwe, the local government ministry can provide grants or subsidies to municipalities or directly fund specific initiatives aimed at revitalising neighborhoods. This is done through the Devolution Fund, and such finances can augment city council's funds meant for regeneration projects (Maturure, 2023).

Interview findings suggest that the local government ministry is responsible for establishing regulatory frameworks that govern land use, zoning laws, and building codes relevant to urban regeneration efforts. Urban regeneration initiatives require regulated support through multi-dimensional policies, including financial policies, national standards, legal policies, land-use regulations, supervision, and environmental governance mechanisms Zheng, Shen, Wang, Hong & Li (2017). Strong frameworks and structures are needed to guide regeneration projects through fragmented processes of engagement, planning, construction, and management. Once urban regeneration projects are underway, local government ministries monitor progress to assess whether objectives are being met.

The Harare City Council

The local government plays a crucial role in driving urban renewal and regeneration projects. A critical role which the City of Harare can play is the enforcement of the city by laws which regulate city occupancy patterns, waste management among others by laws (Thapa, 2020). Additionally, the council is obliged also to exercise its duties of ensuring effective delivery of various local services, hence addressing some of the challenges that are common, which are sewer waste disposal and proper management (Wang, Zhao, Gao, & Gao, 2021). Interview findings suggested that the city can also play a role in the provision of funding to regeneration projects by using its power to collect revenue from its various sources. To improve project efficiency and overcome the financial barriers, local governments tend to build partnership with private sectors in many cases. The private sectors can guarantee the effective investment in designated regeneration areas, while the city council can provide “flexible” support to help private sectors overcome obstacles during the implementation of regeneration projects (Wang *et al.*, 2020; Ndebele, 2022).

Residents' associations or communities

Community engagement is essential for successful urban regeneration (Edzang & Darby, 2024). It involves actively involving residents in the planning and decision-making processes related to their neighborhoods. This can take various forms, including public consultations, workshops, and surveys that allow community members to express their needs, desires, and concerns regarding proposed changes. Engaging with the community helps ensure that the developments reflect the aspirations of those who live there. Furthermore, regeneration financing largely depends on the capability of residents and the owners' committee, which is influenced by local economic, social, and cultural contexts (Wang *et al.*, 2021). The creation of an urban space that meets the needs of human habitation, living and production is an important goal.

Interview findings suggested that community engagement helped to build trust between the government and the community while ensuring that regeneration efforts reflect local needs and aspirations. Moreso, Zheng *et al.* (2017) suggested that community members often act as advocates for local needs during urban regeneration projects. One interviewee suggested that communities can identify specific issues within their neighborhoods such as lack of green spaces, inadequate transportation links, or insufficient public services and push for these concerns to be addressed in regeneration plans. Moreso, another participant added that communities play a vital role in collaborating with various stakeholders involved in urban regeneration, including government agencies, developers, and non-profit organisations. By forming partnerships with these entities, community members can help shape project goals and ensure that developments align with local priorities. (Wang *et al.* 2022).

In summary, community members are integral to urban regeneration through engagement, advocacy for local needs, collaboration with stakeholders, driving economic initiatives, fostering social cohesion, and participating in monitoring efforts.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study established that the urban decay challenge is caused by a constellation of factors which include poor, waste management, council incompetence, urban migration and poor enforcement of by-laws, owing to this challenge, it is imperative to adopt a collaborative approach towards urban regeneration. A collaborative approach allows multiple stakeholders to synergise efforts towards addressing urban challenges. Each actor brings different expertise, experiences and insight into the process. The government provides the policy that guides the work, the private sector provides the cash injection needed for the projects, and the voluntary group (which, in most cases, represents the community) provides the input of community members. The city council can play an active role in developing comprehensive plans for urban regeneration programmes. The benefits of a successful programme to rehabilitate and renew the inner-city could be rewarding, with renewed local economic development and investment, tourism development, property investment, increased property tax income for municipality, job creation and the creation of a smart and resilient city.

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