

MUGABE'S POLICY LEGACIES ON URBAN POVERTY AND INFORMALITY IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract: Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 and had Mugabe as its first black president. Thirty-seven years later, Mugabe was, atypically, ousted from office. There exist controversies around his thirty-seven-year term. This paper evaluates Mugabe's policy legacies on urban poverty and informality in the country's capital city, Harare. Desktop research was used to achieve the aim of the study. Key themes that emerged show that power and intolerance were the main factors behind Mugabe's policies and a key reason for the current levels of poverty and informality. Recommendations on urban management policies to address African urban poverty and informality were proposed.

Key words: urban poverty, urban informality, postcolonial, Mugabe, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

African cities are wedged in complex geopolitical circumstances owing to the colonial epoch and porous post-colonial structures. Current structures that mandate urban management imitate the colonial policies of inequality and

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segregation (Matamanda, 2020a, 2020b; Tendi, 2020; Makoni and Rogerson, 2023). Coupled with that, the power-mongering and 'life presidency' mentality of many African leaders worsen the situation as they [leaders] continue to alter policies in a way that favours their political pursuits while creating a legacy of dire magnitudes which is, unfortunately, faced by citizens (Tibaijuka, 2005; Onslow, 2017; Chipenda, 2020; Ndawana, 2018; Matamanda, 2020a, 2020b). Matamanda (2020a), for example, pins the urban situation in Zimbabwe on Mugabe, who he denounces for ignoring the urban well-being in his pursuit for political control in Zimbabwe's rural areas. Accordingly, "Mugabe's reliance on a rural constituency for sustaining his rule left a lacuna because during his tenure, in contrast to rural areas, the country had no urban policy; a situation that contributed to an urban malaise" (Matamanda, 2020a, p. 805). Today, a legacy of poverty and informality in the urbanscape of Africa is succumbed to by its dwellers (Makoni et al., 2023a). Such a situation has led Dube and Chirisa (2012, p. 16) to conclude that "Africa is haunted."

Statistically, 40% of the African population living in urban areas is poor (World Bank, 2020) and informality employs 86% of the continent's employed population (United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2021, p. 48). In Harare, capital of Zimbabwe, one in three people living in the city is poor, while 59% of the economy [highest in Africa] is informal (Ohnsorge and Yu, 2021). The cause of concern is that the country had a promise of a positive economic restructuring for the benefit of its people upon gaining independence in 1980 (Agere, 1998). This promise was never delivered in Harare, a city that was at the centre of African decolonisation and development dialogues in 1980, and today is home to urban poverty and informality (Dube and Chirisa, 2012). This study examines the causes of such a situation in the country. The study conducts a discourse of the post-colonial dialogues on Zimbabwe which, arguably, points to the direction of the country's prominent colonial and post-colonial political figure: Robert Mugabe and his thirty-seven-year rule.

Accordingly, this paper aimed at critically evaluating Mugabe's policy legacies on urban poverty and informality in the country's capital city, Harare. The paper argues that while there is a wealth of African scholarship on urban poverty and informality, research on their historical origins, particularly in relation to urban policy legacies, is still lacking (International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2018, 2020; Chirisa, 2007, 2008; Kamete, 2010; Dube and Chirisa, 2012). This omission has enhanced the complexities of examining and understanding the underlying factors influencing urban poverty and informality in Africa. The paper, therefore, attempted to close such a gap by grounding its discourse on the concept of Mugabeism and the postcolonial dialogues on Harare city's poverty and informality and provided policy implications on urban management in the city and similar destinations across the Global South.

MUGABEISM: CONCEPT AND DEBATES

Mugabeism is seen as one of the many ways used to personify Mugabe as both a celebrated Africanist and a villain who presided over economic collapse and bad governance (Mahomva, 2021). This is a concept that was developed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009, p. 1139) who described it as "a summation of a constellation of political controversies, behaviour, ideas, utterances, rhetoric and actions, which have crystallised around Mugabe's political life." Relatedly, Machingura (2012) refers to the concept as 'Mugabology', though it does not

change the narratives attached to the original term. It is noted that “Mugabeism draws significantly on the notion of power, authority and colonialism, central issues in the post-colonial theory and based of characteristics of deception, authoritarian and populism” (Matamanda, 2020a, p. 806).

Mugabeism is a concept that is crafted in line with Robert Mugabe’s life, more especially his rise to power and his thirty-seven years in power. The concept can be referred to as a “creature of colonialism.” As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) articulates, African nationalists and African nationalism are a product of colonialism. In this sense, it can be argued that Robert Gabriel Mugabe was politically produced by colonialism. Matamanda (2020) argues that from a different perspective, Mugabeism is associated with correcting colonial injustices linked with marginalization, oppression and segregation of the black populace. On the contrary, other scholars are of the view that Mugabeism is a form of racial chauvinism and fascism that centres on liberal governance with a focus on power and authority (Moore, 2015; Mamvura, 2020; Mpfu, 2021).

From its foundation, the concept of Mugabeism characterizes an idea of populism, and it enunciates people’s needs, demands and claimed rights (Laclau, 2005; Matamanda, 2020a). This implies that the concept attempted to fulfil the demands of the Zimbabweans through a promise of independence from British colonial rule. The concept, however, is conflicted and paradoxical, as Mugabe, during his reign, weaponised his policies against the very people he promised freedom. The concept is characterized by confusion as, “Mugabeism has articulated issues of liberation and oppression; peace and war; reconciliation and retribution; empowerment and dispossession; victimhood and heroism; social justice and injustice; social harmony and violence” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, p. 1141).

In concurrence, Mine (2013, p. 112) describes Mugabeism as “Janus-faced with contradictions, representing Africanist populism, leftist nationalism and patriarchal ruthlessness.” These contradictions exist because the concept of Mugabeism has evolved and differs based on the different phases of Mugabe’s era. For example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) indicates that Mugabe in his later years had complete disregard for the right of the white race to coexist with the native black population unlike the Mugabe of the 1980s who was tolerant and sought reconciliation.

During the first years of independence, Mugabeism represented populism ideologies as policy statements from Mugabe were focused on delivering on the demands of the people of Zimbabwe. This, however, changed in the years that followed, specifically during the early 2000s when Mugabeism began to be associated with tyranny and violence (Matamanda, 2020a). In this paper, the authors ground on the concept of Mugabeism because of the contested nature of cities, especially, during colonization as Africans were restricted access to certain areas and largely confined to rural areas (Mutamanda, 2020a). Given that the foundations of Mugabeism are centralized on redressing such issues on urban development, critically exploring the concept with the current urban outlook of Harare, especially regarding the city’s poverty and informality is crucial.

URBAN GOVERNANCE IN HARARE: AN URBAN POVERTY AND INFORMALITY DISCOURSE

Urban poverty entails the poor economic conditions that are faced by the people living in urban areas. The term is be associated with the wellbeing of the

urban citizens in terms of employment issues, and provision of communal services such as water, electricity and health services. In a developing context, poverty is a key characteristic, in which the poor are mostly marginalized and sidelined from the formal spheres of the urbanscape, resulting in a situation in which they must fend for themselves to survive (Makoni et al., 2023b). Thus, the existence of urban informality, a term referring to the informal economic activities taking place in urban areas, is inseparable from urban poverty because the earlier is largely the only survival option for the poor. Harare is such a city characterized by urban poverty and informality, with these two traits having evolved since the country gained independence in 1980 (Matamanda, 2020a). Until 2017, the country had only known one president in the name of Robert Mugabe for thirty-seven years. The policies and governance approaches adopted by Mugabe, as well as the legacies of such, are, undoubtedly, key in analysing the current conditions in Zimbabwe, especially the urban poverty and informality. Mugabe's policies played a big role in the mushrooming of the informal sector in Harare (Wekwete, 1989; Gumbo and Geyer, 2011; Marewo, 2020). Some of his many policies that are argued to be central for destroying the formal economy and growing informalisation include the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), awarding millions of dollars to liberation war veterans, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) and ZANU-PF conflicts with other political parties (see Table 1).

Table 1. Key Mugabe policies and decisions leading to urban informality and poverty in Harare
(Source: Adapted from Chirisa et al., 2020)

Period	Probable cause	General description	Comments
The early 1990s	Adoption of ESAP	ESAP presents the following prescriptions among others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deregulation of the transport sector • Privatization of companies • Withdrawal of state aid from some companies 	The reduction of state aid in diverse sectors exposed companies to heavy shocks and stresses that saw the downfall of many companies. Other retrenched workers found sanctuary in the informal trading sector
Late 1990s	Awarding of unbudgeted millions of dollars to ex-combatants	This left the economy in tatters	Appeasement of ex-combatants at the expense of addressing pressing issues is tantamount to misplacement of priorities. This strained and already overstrained economy. Various effects were pronounced in an increase in informal activities.
The early 2000s	Fast Track Land Reform Programme	Transfer of land titles from the white minority to the black majority	Being an agricultural-based economy, a significant percentage of upstream and downstream industries collapsed, leaving a substantial quantity of people jobless. This partly pushed employment-seeking citizens into informality.

Late 2000s	Political and socio-economic conflict among political parties	General lack of consensus among the ruling party, ZANU-PF, and two formations of the key opposing party, MDC-T and MDC-M, especially prior to, during and after the 2008 presidential elections	Protracted political and socioeconomic conflict melted the economy down to its knees. Nearly all systems became dysfunctional, and everything turned informal with high levels of clientelism and corruption more pronounced
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Norman (2015) claims that many people have failed to make sense of Mugabe. Since the time that urban people voted overwhelmingly for the MDC in the 2000 and 2002 parliamentary and presidential elections, urban Zimbabweans have increasingly been presented as not belonging to the nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, p. 151). It therefore becomes crucial to review Mugabe's policies and evaluate how they have exacerbated socioeconomic disparities and undermined the livelihoods of urban residents. By critically analysing the intersection of governance and informal economies, the long-term impacts of Mugabe's regime on urban poverty and informality can be uncovered.

METHODS

This paper utilized a qualitative research design based on biographical and historical methods. Using these methods, this study focused on analysing a biographical and historical account of Robert Mugabe, and the authors were able to gain insights and reflect into Mugabe's political life, especially regarding his policies and urban control approaches which shaped the current nature of poverty and informality in Harare. This focus on biographical and historical methods in this paper is in line with Matamanda's (2020a) work on Mugabe's Urban Legacy, who asserts that, "the life history of Mugabe narrated in different biographies provided insight into his life, governance approaches and tactics he used to manage cities" (Matamanda, 2020a, p. 807).

In that regard, books, and texts with historical and biographical accounts of Robert Gabriel Mugabe (see Table 2), were key in providing insights into the arguments, and conclusions made thereof, presented in this study.

Table 2. Historical and biographical accounts of Robert Mugabe
(Source: Authors)

Author(s)	Book Title	Remarks
Agere (1998)	Zimbabwe Post Independence Public Administration: Management Policy issues and constraints	This book lifts the lid on the contradictions, constraints and difficulties in pursuing policies for change within a rusting and out-of-date administration system. Drawing on the specifically Zimbabwean experience of researchers, academics, policymakers and administrators, the book explores several critical issues about the historical and current development of public administration as an instrument of the state.
Meredith (2002a)	Robert Mugabe: Power, Plunder and Tyranny in	The author gives an account of Mugabe's regime from the time of the country's independence.

	Zimbabwe	
Meredith (2002b)	Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe	The author gives an account of Zimbabwe as a country beset by violence, lawlessness and famine, regarded as a pariah among nations.
Raftopoulos and Savage (2004)	Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation	The book describes Zimbabwe as a country in crisis, precipitated by the Mugabe's regime. The book offers the views of a number of Zimbabwean commentators on key areas to transition out of the crisis.
Nyarota (2006)	Against The Grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean Newsman	This book records the author's early life as a school teacher caught in the crossfire of a guerilla war, his cadetship at a newspaper subsequently acquired by the Mugabe government, the official corruption and graft he exposed during his career, and how he eventually had to flee his homeland in 2003 to go to exile
Godwin (2010)	The Fear: The Last Days of Robert Mugabe	This book is a personal journey by the author through the country [Zimbabwe] he grew up in. At considerable risk, the author travels widely to see the torture bases, the burned villages, the death squads, the opposition leaders in hiding, the last white farmers, the churchmen and the diplomats putting their own lives on the line to stop the carnage.
Bourne (2011)	Catastrophe: What went wrong in Zimbabwe?	The author shows how a country that had every prospect of success when it achieved independence became a brutal police state less than thirty years later, plagued by hyperinflation and collapsing life expectancy and abandoned by a third of its citizens.
Compagnon (2011)	A Predictable Tragedy: Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe	The author reveals that while the conditions and perceptions of Zimbabwe had changed, its leader had not. The author indicates that from the beginning of his political career, Mugabe was a cold tactician with no regard for human rights. Through eyewitness accounts and unflinching analysis, the author describes how Mugabe and ZANU-PF built a one-party state under an ideological cloak of anti-imperialism.
Moorcraft (2012)	Mugabe's War Machine	This book tracks the rise of Mugabe and decodes his psychology in the context of Zimbabwe's military history. His leadership of a guerilla army against white rule explains how Mugabe continued to rule Zimbabwe as though he were still running an insurgency. The book explains that Mugabe used military power, police and the dreaded Central Intelligence Organization to enforce his will against a series of perceived enemies. The book also recounts South African attempts to keep the current government of national unity alive, despite the growing oppression.
Pilosof (2012)	The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Farmer's	The author explores Zimbabwean white farmers' voices in memoirs and interviews. The focus is on the Liberation War, Operation Gukurandi, and the post-2000 land invasion frames.

	Voices from Zimbabwe	
Nyarota (2018)	The Graceless Fall of Robert Mugabe: The End of a Dictator's Reign	The author evaluates the political and economic impact of Mugabe's presidency, showing how he managed to reduce a prosperous nation to a state of destitution through extreme misgovernance. The book describes the rifts within ZANU-PF as Mugabe sidelined anyone who might challenge his power.

In addition, to make a critical review of the subject under investigation, a triangulation method was employed, in which the biography and historical account of Mugabe were triangulated with multiple data sources. The purpose of doing so was to close any loopholes or gaps that could arise in using a few sources, because subjects of history may have altered narratives, and may omit some issues or forget some crucial aspects (Caetano and Nico, 2019). Accordingly, the biographical and historical accounts of Mugabe were triangulated with other sources such as, inter alia, journal articles, policy, and statutes documents, textbooks, and newspaper articles to boost the validity and substantiality of this study. The data obtained through this approach formed the foundation for the arguments presented in this research paper. This data was analysed thematically, and the resulting themes are detailed in the following subsections.

A PROMISE OF INDEPENDENCE: EXPECTATION VERSUS OUTCOME

Mugabe is considered a contested character viewed by some as an African icon and liberator while in other instances he is seen as a dictator and tyrant (Tshuma and Sibanda, 2024). He is counted among the first generation of African nationalists credited for spearheading colonial resistance in Zimbabwe and fighting inequality in the pre-independent Zimbabwe (Mahomva, 2021; Zvoushe, 2023). Upon assuming office, Mugabe showed signs of delivering the promise of independence to the Zimbabwean people. When independence was achieved in April 1980, "the Mugabe government had introduced populist policies, such as the provision of free education and health services with a promise to provide housing for all by the year 2000" (Nyarota, 2018, p. 60).

Mugabe's policies were centred on economic democratization, land redistribution, uniting Zimbabweans across the political divide and development-oriented (Mahomva, 2021). Public expenditure was directed towards improvement in rural infrastructure, social service provision and the reduction of inequalities (Banda and Ngwerume, 2014). This drive saw the country excelling in health care, education and agriculture production (Dorman, 2018). However, some argue that this was short-lived as the administration of such schemes is said to have been overspent without restraint, a system that continued throughout Mugabe's regime. Nyarota (2018) observed that in the context of urban areas, failure to provide basic services such as running water and a functional sewage system later became a constant feature, signalling bad governance by the Mugabe regime.

The turn of events in Zimbabwe a few years after independence was a big contradiction to the promises of prosperity made during the liberation struggle with the Rhodesian white settlers (Stone, 2022). The Rhodesian government, even though it was under sanctions, had a vibrant and self-sufficient economy (Makina, 2010). However, inequality and the oppression of the black majority

both politically and economically were the major drivers for the armed struggle with the colonial government (Nemuramba, 2017). For example, the Rhodesian government pursued a racist education policy that prioritised the white race (Zhou and Zvoushe, 2012). In addition, Africans were not allowed to own land in certain parts of the country reserved for whites only and in most cases, these were areas where commercial agriculture was viable (Mlambo, 2017). Thus, the land question was always a sticking issue in the pre-colonial era due to the disposition of the indigenous black people from their ancestral land by successive colonial governments (Mavhunga, 2018). Also, inequalities existed in access to capital as black entrepreneurs didn't have access to loans from financial institutions (Mlambo, 2017). In light of all these colonial injustices, the black people engaged in a liberation war hinged on the promises of equality and equity (Mavhunga, 2018).

HISTORICAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND THE URBAN INFORMAL ECONOMY

During the colonial era, urbanisation of native Zimbabweans was strictly governed, and it restricted them from obtaining permanent residency in urban areas (Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990). The urban areas were seen as a preserve of the whites and the blacks were only allowed in the urban space to provide labour (Chigudu, 2019). This resulted in many Zimbabweans having to return to overcrowded rural areas once their work was done in the urban areas. The political optimism of independence in the 1980s followed by urban regeneration saw an influx of people in urban areas in search of better economic fortunes (Groves, 2012). Economic migrants that had been previously restricted to the rural areas by colonial laws started occupying the urban landscape amid a growth in urban formal employment (Potts, 2016). However, over the years, several policies introduced by the Mugabe-led government resulted in an economic downturn and massive job losses. Most people in urban areas that had relied on the formal economy turned to the informal economy for survival giving rise to a highly informalized urban society.

Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) (1990)

The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was introduced in 1990 to liberalise the economy, reduce government spending and drive privatization (Matamanda, 2021). This was a World Bank-sponsored economic policy aimed at achieving a market-driven economy (Peter and Jephias, 2016). This policy was introduced against the backdrop of weaknesses of the controlled economic policies adopted by the Mugabe government in the first decade after independence. Notably, the introduction of the cost-sharing measures requiring the payment of user fees for service provision had dire consequences for mostly the poor and vulnerable members of society and led to a reversal of the gains made in the education and health sectors (Banda and Ngwerume, 2014). ESAP saw a significant increase in price levels and a rapid reduction in disposable income such that by 1995 an estimated 62% of the population was unable to afford basic needs and 46% were food insecure (Chirau and Chamuka, 2013). The programme generally failed to improve the economic prospects of the country, rather it led to massive loss of employment, dwindling job opportunities in the formal market, company closures and pushed people into the informal sector (Dlamini and Schutte, 2020). Inflation and unemployment characterized the economy as industries scaled down their operations or closed down (Nyarota,

2018). In general, ESAP is said to have had dire consequences on Zimbabwe's economy and the general welfare of people leading to an alarming growth of the informal economy, especially in the urban areas, as people sought alternative means of survival (Chirau and Chamuka, 2013; Mahomva, 2021).

Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) (1996-2000)

ZIMPREST was an economic policy tool that was introduced by the Zimbabwean Government to correct the failures of ESAP (Bonga, 2014). The main purpose of ZIMPREST was to stabilize the macroeconomic environment, improve people's standards of living, and facilitate public/private savings and investments (Peter and Jephias, 2016; Zhou and Hardlife, 2012). It sought to among other things achieve the broader social and political agenda of black economic empowerment, poverty reduction, indigenisation of the economy and land reform (Makina, 2010). In essence, ZIMPREST just like ESAP failed to achieve its intended outcomes (Nyoni, 2018). The success of ZIMPREST was hampered by numerous challenges bedeviling the country such as a growing budget deficit, high rates of inflation, recurrent droughts and foreign currency shortages (Banda and Ngwerume, 2014). The lack of financial resources is cited as one of the major reasons that affected the implementation of ZIMPREST (Zvoushe, 2023). During this period, the informal economy continued to grow and absorbed most of the people who suffered retrenchment due to the economic haemorrhaging (Dlamini and Schutte, 2020).

War Veterans compensations and the "Black Friday" (1997)

Due to a lack of delivering the promise of independence, in 1997 Mugabe faced protests from the war veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation war. The war veterans were said to have felt neglected by Mugabe's government, whose fortunes had been changing for the better while the war veterans were living in poverty. By this year, the number of war veterans had risen to 50,000. Mugabe experienced significant pressure from this growing powerful sector of his ZANU-PF party (Nyarota, 2018). As a result, the government of Zimbabwe awarded each war veteran an unbudgeted once-off payment of Z\$ 50,000 (US\$4300) and a monthly pension of Z\$ 2000 (US\$174) (Gaidzanwa, 2020). This worsened the economic situation of the country as these disbursements were unbudgeted (Dlamini and Schutte, 2020).

The payments led to the significant collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. On November 14 1997 the Zimbabwean dollar lost approximately 71.5% of its value against the US dollar in just over four trading hours (Mlambo, 2017; Nyarota, 2018). This day is synonymously known as 'Black Friday' in Zimbabwe, the day that the Zimbabwe dollar significantly lost value largely due to fiscal indiscipline and unplanned expenditures by the Mugabe-led government (Makina, 2010). The compensation to war veterans was one of the worst economic decisions made by Mugabe's governance, especially given that the economy was still recovering from the problems created by EASP. Compensating the war veterans put pressure on the already struggling economy leading to increased pressure on citizens.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) civil war (1998)

The arbitrary deployment of the military to the DRC in 1998 is argued to be another miscalculated decision that had dire consequences on the Zimbabwean economy (Mlambo, 2017). The Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) was deployed to assist the DRC government fight off rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda, albeit, without parliamentary or cabinet approval and without informing the population at large (Nyarota, 2018). This was regarded as a costly endeavour both politically and economically. The war, at one point, was estimated to cost the country US\$10 million a day (Gadiel, 2018). Other estimates point out that Zimbabwe spent not less than US\$200 million in unbudgeted funds in the two years it was involved in the DRC war (Nemuramba, 2017). This resulted in a rapid rise in inflation in the country, leading to the investors leaving. Due to many companies closing down, many people lost their jobs and had to struggle to survive, a situation that escalated informality and poverty in major cities, especially in Harare.

Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) (2000)

When Mugabe came to power, the economy was largely based on agriculture dominated by white farmers producing mainly tobacco among other cash crops (Dande et al., 2020). The willing-buyer-willing-seller concept introduced in the 1980s was slow in addressing the emotive land issue (Mlambo, 2015). However, in the year 2000 Mugabe initiated a chaotic Fast-track Land Reform Programme that saw a series of violent invasions and takeover of the white-owned commercial farmlands (Matamanda, 2021; Mlambo, 2017). This came against the backdrop of the formation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change Party which challenged Zanu PF's and Mugabe's hold on power (Chirau and Chamuka, 2013). Arguably, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was seen as a tool for political survival for Mugabe and his party (Zhou and Zvoushe, 2012). Despite being awarded the pension funds and lump sums of money three years earlier, the disgruntled war veterans, who had felt Mugabe had failed them, welcomed the FTLRP and were at the forefront of the farmland seizures (Helliker and Murisa, 2020).

Mugabe argued that the land reform programme was meant to empower the landless black people, yet critics point out that this was motivated by the need to consolidate power and appease Mugabe's loyalists. "In his rhetoric, the 'return' of the land to its 'rightful' owners marked the completion of the decolonisation process" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, p. 1140). The fast-track land reform is criticized for destroying the once vibrant agricultural sector in Zimbabwe and pushing farm workers into poverty. It transformed the country from being a net exporter to a net importer of maize resulting in food insecurity for millions of Zimbabweans (Gadiel, 2018). Moorcraft (2012) further argues that the loss of agricultural productivity accelerated the deterioration of the economy. In addition, the programme invited sanctions from the international community further worsening the economic conditions of the country which culminated in hyperinflation that reached its peak in the years 2008-2009 (Sabao et al., 2021). Further, the loss of employment, considering that the agricultural sector was the biggest employer in the country, meant that many citizens had to find alternative ways to survive. Hence the rapid increase of informality and poverty in urban Harare.

Urban control policies and the Operation Murambatsvina (Restore order) (2005)

The Mugabe government was characterized by fluctuation in the urban control policies. At one point informality was supported as one of the key sectors to curb poverty and unemployment, and at some point, treated as a nuisance. Urban control policies in Harare were formulated, initially, to address the urbanscape racial inequalities of the colonial era. Mutamanda (2020a, 2020b) indicates that Harare was preserved for the Europeans during the colonial period. This was typical to most major cities in colonised African, in which urban spaces were occupied by the Europeans and the natives were restricted to the rural areas, the only natives staying in the urban areas were those employed as either maids/helpers or in the industries within the cities (Potts, 2006). As the colonial segregation laws to city occupation were relaxed on the birth of independence, Harare city experienced a new wave of rural-urban migration (Mutananda, 2020a). Poor urban housing policy by the Mugabe government led to an increase in informal settlement within urban areas (Matamanda, 2021). This placed a strain on social services and an urgent need to create employment. In 2005, the government launched Operation Murambatsvina/restore order to clear the informal settlement and bring order within the urbanscape (Gaidzanwa, 2020). The operation destroyed home industries that had become the backbone of the informal economy further pushing most urban residents into poverty (Jones, 2010). Illegal housing structures and market stalls were the main targets of operation as the city further argued for the need to get rid of dirt and chaos in urban settlements (Nyere, 2016). Consequently, the United Nations reports that around 700,000 people lost their source of livelihoods and at least 2.4 million people were directly and indirectly affected by this exercise (Mutongwizo and Mutongwizo, 2023; Potts, 2006). Considering that the country's economy had become highly informalized, the destruction of structures used by informal traders robbed the majority of their means of survival further worsening the living standards of people in urban areas (Nyamudo, 2020).

Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Programme (IEEP) (2007)

The Mugabe-led government introduced the IEEP in 2007 requiring foreign-owned companies to cede 51% of their share ownership to locals (Gadiel, 2018). The policy aimed to give opportunities to black people who were previously marginalized during the colonial era to own companies and participate in the national economy (Zhou and Zvoushe, 2012). It sought to achieve redistributive justice for the native black Zimbabweans who were disadvantaged by the colonial governance system (Zvoushe et al., 2018). In addition, this was seen as a way of increasing local participation in the formal economy that was largely dominated by foreign white-owned companies (Saunders, 2023). This policy encouraged the growth of entrepreneurship and spearheaded the provision of loans for locals to start their businesses (Gunhidzirai, 2023).

The critics of this programme argued that this was another façade created by the Mugabe government to benefit only the politically connected (Chigudu, 2019). Again, this policy was seen in some circles as a political strategy to win votes in the run-up to the 2008 general elections (Mlambo, 2017). Also, policy inconsistency and confusion on the implementation and interpretation of the policy among government ministries did not help the situation (Zvoushe et al., 2018). Instead of achieving economic growth, the IEEP, however, resulted in investor flight, a reduction in foreign direct investment and economic isolation of the country from the rest of the world (Balisi et al., 2020). The policy is

recognised for its destructive effects on the economy which led to the closure of formal businesses further increasing poverty levels and pushing people into the informal economy (Balisi et al., 2020).

Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset) (2013-2018)

This economic policy followed the landslide election victory by Mugabe and his Zanu PF party on 31 July 2013 bringing to an end the Government of National Unity that existed between 2009 and 2013 (Peter and Jephias, 2016). ZimAsset was anchored on employment creation, indigenisation and empowerment (Nyoni, 2018). The policy was anchored on four clusters which are Food Security and Nutrition; Social Service and Poverty Eradication; Infrastructure and Utilities and Value Addition and Beneficiation (Bonga, 2014). ZimAsset is largely seen as another policy failure by the Mugabe government mainly because it emanated from the Zanu PF Manifesto (Shereni, 2022). Regardless of its promises, the weak institutional and operational systems hampered ZimAsset from achieving its intended outcomes (Gunhidzirai, 2023). By the time Mugabe was toppled from power on 17 November 2017, ZimAsset was yet to record any significant gains in improving the economic fortunes of the country and the livelihoods of the people.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Mugabe's policies markedly worsened urban informality and poverty in Harare, creating a persistent economic and social divide. The legacy of these policies has left many urban residents struggling with inadequate resources and precarious living conditions, highlighting the need for substantial intervention and reform. To address these issues effectively, several recommendations are crucial. First, it will be beneficial to relook current urban policies. The targeted economic policies should be implemented to support and formalize businesses operating in the informal sector. This could include providing microfinance options, simplifying registration processes, and offering training programs to help informal entrepreneurs transition to the formal economy. By doing so, the government can stimulate economic growth and improve job security for urban residents.

Second, investing in infrastructure and public services is essential to enhance the quality of life in underserved urban areas. Improving access to clean water, sanitation, and reliable electricity, as well as upgrading transportation networks, can alleviate some of the challenges faced by those living in informal settlements. Such investments can also foster a more inclusive urban environment, reducing the disparity between different socioeconomic groups. Lastly, strengthening governance and accountability is critical to ensure that resources are distributed fairly and that development projects are effectively implemented. Transparent and accountable governance can help to prevent corruption and ensure that policy interventions reach those who need them most. This approach will not only address immediate needs but also build long-term resilience and trust in public institutions.

By adopting these recommendations, African nations can better tackle the complexities of urban informality and poverty, paving the way for more equitable and sustainable development. This study is not without its limitations, firstly it is based on a review of secondary literature sources excluding the voices of key

informants that are critical in informing debates on the policy environment and urban informality. Also, the study is limited to the policy discourse during the 37 years of Mugabe's rule. Future studies can employ primary research methods involving policymakers to fully understand the link between economic policies, urban informality and poverty. Further studies can also be employed to understand the policy environment in the post-Mugabe era.

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