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The Efficacy of Rental Housing in Addressing Housing Challenges in Zimbabwe: The Case of Vundu Flats Makokoba Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

The strong negative correlation between housing demand and supply in Zimbabwe. Has resulted in many urban home seekers devoting themselves to rental housing. The paper sought to draw attention to central government and local authorities in order for them to formulate rules and regulations that promote the efficient and effective operation of rental housing. Rental housing has been identified as an alternative approach to addressing housing crisis in developing countries. The study was carried out on Vundu flats in Makokoba, Bulawayo, which is located in the Southern part of Zimbabwe. The housing crisis has escalated especially after the land reform programme of 2000. Social policy interventions have targeted housing provision especially for low income earners in order to come up with an egalitarian housing model. Vundu flats in Makokoba Bulawayo has immensely reduced housing crisis in the city of Bulawayo. A mixed method approach was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. According to ZIMSTAT (2012) the total population in Makokoba is 36 756, however the research was conducted at household level out of a total population of 520 households 40 were randomly selected. Data were collected using questionnaires, observations, key informant interviews and secondary sources. The quantitative data were presented in the form of graphs, and tables using MS Excel 2013. Whilst a thematic approach combined with content analysis were used to analyse the qualitative data. The researcher concluded that rental housing has managed to address housing shortages in Bulawayo. Furthermore, tenants in Vundu flats are exposed to various challenges such as overcrowding, living in substandard flats, high crime rate, leaving the community prone to erratic health problems. Therefore, the study recommends Bulawayo city council in conjunction with central government. To formulate sustainable housing policies, that promote the efficient and effective operation of public rental housing in order to protect tenants in rental housing. This requires investment in infrastructure planning and service delivery.

Keywords: Public housing, Rental property, Tenants, Rental vacancy rate

1. Introduction

“One of the main challenges of the Third World City is that of providing adequate shelter to its people” (Mapira, 2004:80). With affordable, suitable land becoming scarcer, especially in urban areas, poor people find it increasingly difficult to find the resources to build houses of their own or to buy or rent houses built by professionals. Access to housing land is at the centre of solutions that can solve the housing problem in most third world cities, and increasingly so in Zimbabwe. Thus “access to land has generally been shown to ensure access to housing for even the poorest household in urban areas of developing countries” (Mutembedzi, 2012:1). This problem finds its roots in the colonial era. Before the 1950s, colonial legislation regarded blacks as temporary rural-urban migrants; hence, there was no need to provide them with family accommodation (Auret, 1995). However, Rhodesian towns and cities continued to grow due to the urbanization processes, so did the problem of housing (Rakodi, 1995; Chenje and Johnson, 1994; Swanepoel, 1997). This paper seeks to examine how rental housing has reduced the housing crisis.

Most poor Zimbabweans lack access to decent and secure housing. The majorities who have devoted themselves to rental housing to fulfil their needs for shelter are exposed to various challenges. According to Mutembedzi (2012) Zimbabwe is battling a serious problem of housing demand amounting to over one million names on the housing waiting lists of the countries urban settlements. Available evidence shows that the supply of housing and the associated settlement services lags behind demand. This has resulted in long waiting lists and straining of existing settlement facilities. For instance, in the 1990s annual supply was less than 10% of targets at 12 000 to 14 000 units per year versus a target of 162 500 units (Auret, 1995).

2. Aim of the Study

To assess the contribution of rental housing in addressing housing shortages in Makokoba, Bulawayo.

2.1. Specific Objectives

- ❖ To identify urban livelihoods for tenants in Vundu flats.
- ❖ To assess how rental housing has managed to address housing shortage in Bulawayo.
- ❖ To examine the challenges being faced by the tenants.
- ❖ To recommend strategies for the sustainability of rental housing.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Housing Crisis an Overview

Urban housing provision is a major problem at both global and national levels. In recent years, an increasing number of people have become homeless even in developed countries (Hartshorn, 1992). While reasons for this problem tend to vary from one country to another, there is evidence that most major cities are failing to cope with the demand for shelter, especially among the poor. According to Tevera and Chimhowu (1998) between 35% and 50% of urban dwellers in black Africa are tenants or lodgers who occupy rented accommodation that is privately owned and lacks electricity and piped water. In Zimbabwe, the provision of housing has been one of the most critical issues of government social policy especially since after independence in 1980. In most urban areas in Zimbabwe there has been a critical shortage of housing and the backlog continues to increase with the most affected being the low-income earners (Chitongo, 2017). Throughout the three decades of independence the scale of the housing problems in Zimbabwe has increased unabated. Chirisa (2012) sees this as happening despite increased efforts by the poor themselves and by government to improve housing conditions in the cities. The Habitat Agenda, a worldwide system on human settlements which was ratified by over 250 national governments in Istanbul Turkey in 1996 perceives housing as a fundamental need and human right (UNCHS, 2000). In this regard housing is now widely viewed as a basic need and a human right. Thus, access to sufficient and safe housing should be taken as a national priority. Owen (2000) argues that governments must concentrate on guaranteeing that this privilege is observed, by setting up foundations that make housing cheap and available to every citizen.

3.2. Rental Housing a Global Perspective

Across the world, most governments have attempted to supply rental accommodation to some parts of the society. Governments have housed some of their own employees, most often its armed forces (Ball, 2002). Public employees have often been provided with rental accommodation, mainly when they have been asked to work in cities where there is limited shelter. Rental housing provides shelter for low income earners and it reduces operation costs and hence provides less of an obstacle to mobility, a fact economist take note of because it speeds the adjustment of the labour market when the geographic pattern of labour demand changes (UN HABITAT, 2003). Rental housing is a basic housing alternative and one which government and the nearby powers ought to have an enthusiasm for creating, it gives sanctuary to low pay workers (Aaron, 1966).

Globally rental housing has been a solution to housing problems (UNCHS, 2000). According to Gilbert (1999), the principle conveyance component of moderate rental housing in England was through Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This act provides housing targets, affordability and procedures in order to ensure efficiency in housing provision targets. With limited land available for the ever-increasing population, England has had a significant growth in rental housing. As indicated by Norris and Shiels (2007) in Europe national legislation was presented through the Planning and Development Act (2000) to empower private developers to contribute to socio - economic housing development. The legislation utilizes arranging a system to convey housing for renting to the low income earning group. Under the act, institutions in housing provision incorporate housing systems that point to the interest on how future housing demand should be addressed. According to Watson (1996), in Delhi India, public rental housing accommodated 6 % of all households in the city and 13 % of all tenant households in 1981.

3.3. Rental Housing in Africa

Many people in African urban areas are tenants (UN HABITAT, 2003). Rental housing is a solution to urban housing issues, since it is a vital housing option for poor people especially in circumstances where individuals are not prepared or ready to purchase or build places of their own (Amis, 1994). Regardless of this, legislatures in Africa have done little to support the development of rental housing which already exists or the expansion of affordable rental housing (UN HABITAT, 2008).

According to Mwangi (1997) Kenya experienced rapid urban development in a setting of constrained economic development and limited land supply. This brought about the introduction of rental housing on the grounds that numerous individuals did not have access to residential stands. In Nigeria, the government offers cheap rental accommodation to most professional employees, parastatal organizations, like the Nigeria Railways, have also housed their workers (Bond, 2000). However, in Zimbabwe, most poor people lack access to decent and secure housing. Others live in settlements that lack basic infrastructure and sustainable services. Some neighbourhoods are overpopulated and infrastructure constantly falters. Studies show that some high-density stands are shared by as many as 22 people instead of the suggested 8 (National Housing Policy, 2012). Proof of partial meeting of infrastructure provisions is seen in informal settlements and as well as in existing formal settlements where services are strained. The strain is found in sewer blasts, water blackouts, awful street systems, and among others, overloaded health and education facilities. There is a gigantic housing backlog, delivery of housing has been inhibited by a number of factors. Structural constraints at sector level has slowed down land delivery, dried up housing finance, made development of trunk services nearly impossible and drained capacity in key institutions. (National Housing Policy, 2012).

3.4. Rental Housing in Zimbabwe a Historical Insight

Three decades since independence it is fair to argue that both colonial and post-colonial housing policies have proved inadequate as evidenced by serious under-provision and decaying neighbourhoods (Chatiza, 2010). In Harare the Zimbabwe's capital city, population in 1969 was 385 000, accommodated in segregated, white low-density residential areas broadly to the north of the city centre and separately-administered African high-density townships to the south-west and south. The rising war of the 1970s resulted in rapid in-migration, leading to an officially estimated populace in 1977 of 610 000, of which 79 % were black (Davies, 2006). While construction of official townships continued, the in-migration of people with few resources led to increased overcrowding and rapid growth of squatter settlements this resulted in increased rental housing. The government has failed to provide adequate home ownership to the public. Thus, many people have been forced to adopt rental housing as a coping strategy. Rental housing is in the form of private properties, flats owned by the government, and local authorities. This paper examines rental housing provided by Bulawayo City council (BCC).

3.5. Challenges in Rental Housing Provision

Any meaningful planning requires accurate data. Housing demand data has been a challenge in developing countries. Mwangi (1997) argues that the challenge of public housing provision in Kenya and Nairobi emanate from poor records on the present state of both quantitative and subjective terms of housing needs. Rental affordability is another critical issue found among tenants. In most instances, it requires subjective judgments about how much should be paid by tenants on housing (UN HABITAT, 2008). Another challenge involves high crime rate. Rental properties frequently have more criminal action than owner occupied residences, but contrasts also exist among rentable houses. For instance, public housing has been observed to be connected with more crimes (McNulty and Holloway, 2000). Thus, proper rental management is essential in order to increase security in rented apartments. Eck and Wartell (1998:27) maintain that "drug dealers select spots that have weak management like in public rental housing". Weak management is regularly recognized by lower levels of property support, less successive visits by the proprietors and chiefs to the property, and less endeavours to screen tenants.

3.6. Upgrading of Rental Housing

Urban renewal strategies are an important way to improve rental housing conditions. The incremental improvement in infrastructure services such as water, power and refuse collection help to attract many tenants and support the formation of more rental housing (UN HABITAT, 2003). Studies from numerous nations have exhibited that tenants prefer to move into liveable enhanced neighbourhoods (Adrease, 1996; Amis, 1994; Chirisa, 2012; Rakodi, 1995). Unfortunately, infrastructure upgrading programmes are very frequently overlooked by policy makers. This is coupled by poor local governance structures which lack transparency and accountability in service delivery.

4. Methodology

The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Heppher, 1992). The qualitative methodologies gave the researcher an insight on the different challenges which tenants in rental housing face. This was essential since most of the issues raised were highly subjective. This enabled the research to come up with practical solutions which help to make rental housing sustainable. Out of a population of 520 households a sample of 40 was randomly selected. Forty questionnaires which comprised of open-ended, multiple response and dichotomous questions were self-administered by the researcher. This is in line with Best (2000) view that a smaller sample, carefully chosen, is generally unbiased and sufficiently enough to make satisfactory inference conceivable than a large sample carelessly chosen. Key informants included the Bulawayo City Council (BCC) housing director, health director and an official from the Ministry of Public Works and National Housing. Data were validated through observation. Tuckman (1994) argues that, 'the critical aspect of observation is looking, and taking in as much as you can without influencing what it is that you are looking at'. The physical qualities of the properties through observation are translated into visual objects and first-hand data is obtained through this method. The researcher observed the quality of buildings most of these buildings were substandard, some of windows were broken and solid waste was disposed almost everywhere. Photographs were taken to show the quality of infrastructure available. Quantitative data were presented as tables and graphs through the aid of MS Excel 2013. Qualitative data were grouped into themes were document analysis was adapted to derive meaning.

5. Research Findings and Analysis

The majority 63% of the respondents were females. Vakil (1994:8) noted that "As in many of the low-income countries, Zimbabwe is experiencing a dramatic rise in the proportion of women household heads, particularly in the urban areas. Although official figures place the number of female-headed families at about 15%, it is generally assumed that the real proportion is much higher. These women are among the poorest of the city dwellers, often employed in the informal sector (as market or street traders), or as domestic workers". Urban women in particular are at the strategic centre of reducing hunger, malnutrition and poverty as they play a significant role in household food security thus they are more concerned with household consumption and welfare. Rental housing in Makokoba has also attracted students from the National University of Science and Technology (NUST). Compared to other rented apartments in Bulawayo they are relatively cheaper. Eighty eight percent of respondents found it affordable to stay in these rental houses because services such as electricity and water are affordable and separate from the rental fee. This concurs to findings by Levinson and Niemann (2004:53) who argue that, "More than one-fourth of rental apartments in the United States (US) have the cost of utilities included on their rentals. Thus, tenants in these apartments have no price incentive to conserve energy, and therefore use more energy

than tenants in otherwise similar individually metered apartments. Moreover, the cost of the extra energy use, if added to tenants' monthly rent, will be more than tenants would be willing to pay for that energy separately." All the respondents were literate making it easier for the researcher to conduct the research.

5.1. Livelihoods of Tenants in Vundu flats

The majority of respondents are into vending figure 1: shows livelihoods of respondents

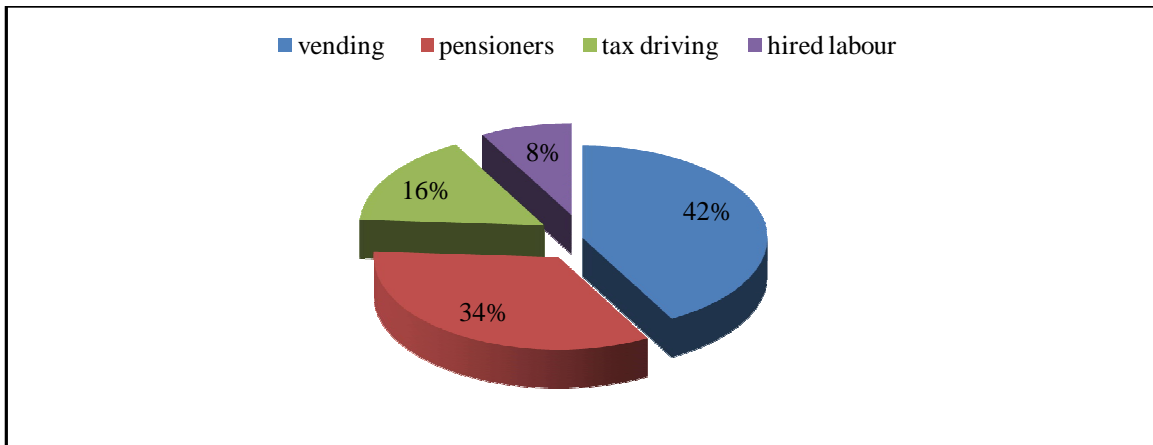


Figure 1: Livelihoods of tenants in rental housing
Source: Field Survey (2016)

The pensioners occupied the flats in the 1970s, however because of poor social security systems the pension is low US\$150-200. Thus, they rely on other livelihood diversification strategies. The availability of affordable and appropriately located rental accommodation provides a large population density. This influx of people provides an opportunity to pursue a multiplicity of urban livelihood strategies. However large population densities also lead to social ills such as crime and prostitution.

5.2. Average Income per Month for Tenants in Makokoba

No of respondents	Actual income per month US\$	Percentage %
15	\$100	37,5
9	\$150	22,5
6	\$200	15
10	\$250 and above	25

Table: 1 Average Income of Tenants
Source: Field Survey (2016)

The majority of the tenants earn \$100 per month, this amount is only sufficient to buy food only. This entails that tenants will never be able to invest money to build their own houses. Adreassen,(1996) indicated that, 'rental accommodation in Kenyan towns has usually been associated with low-income households but it has also become the main form of housing for middle-income households and new urban residents of all income levels. In the 1980s, nearly 90% of annual housing production in Thika, a typical small town, was private rental accommodation. 'A responded from a focus group discussion noted that:

➤ Sometimes we spend a week without even earning \$5 so it is difficult for us to earn more than \$100 per month.

As an adaptive strategy, some tenants have resorted to subletting. In a study in Kenya Shehembetsa (1995) highlighted that, 'the demand for rental accommodation, combined with Pumwani's prime location which is close to the centre of Nairobi, has made housing units extremely competitive in the rental housing market. Residents have taken advantage of this situation to earn extra income by sub-letting'.

5.3. Occupancy Rate Analysis in Vundu flats

The majority of respondents have more than 10 years staying in Vundu flats. Table 2 shows the duration tenants have stayed in rental housing.

Period	Number of respondents	Percentage
5 months +	10	25
1 year +	8	20
5 years +	9	22,5
10 years +	13	32,5

Table 2: Duration of Stay in Vundu Flats
Source: Field Survey (2016)

The major reason tenants continue staying in the rented apartments is that they do not have money to buy their own houses.

Since the flats are council owned there is an element of public interest in management of flats. Thus, making payment of rentals flexible occupancy can go up to 6 months without paying rent.

Noted a Key Informant from Bulawayo City Council

5.4. Contribution of Rental Housing to Housing Provision in Bulawayo

Housing crisis in the City of Bulawayo has undergone evolution since 1995. Between 1995 and 2000, the City of Bulawayo did not allow construction of housing units on un-serviced stands. In this regard, beneficiaries were selected according to the pace at which the council supplied serviced stands or houses (Gumbo, 2014). From 2001 to 2005, the city council was incapacitated because of the hyperinflationary environment which plagued the Zimbabwean construction sector. Consequently, it failed to provide serviced stands. In 2003, after the government embarked on a clean-up exercise *Operation Murambatsvina*, it became government policy that city and town councils were supposed to provide virgin land to resettle victims of the exercise who were originally settled in illegal backyard developments and in squatter settlements under a project known as *Operation Garikai* (Gumbo, 2014). These dynamics entail that low-income earners have not been able to access decent housing, creating a huge housing backlog. Thus, many residents have resorted to public rental housing. The housing backlog of Bulawayo City is over 100 000 (BCC Report, 2015). Rental housing has contributed to the reduction of housing crisis in Bulawayo.

An official from the Ministry of Public Works and National Housing emphasised that:

- They are also seasonal variations in housing demand in Bulawayo. Ever since the year 2000 government has slowly liberalized institutions of higher learning, this has seen a rise in the number of students seeking accommodation off campus due to higher accommodation fees demanded by National University of Science and Technology which is charging 350 US\$ per semester. The increased enrolments also imply an increase in housing demand.

5.5. Challenges Faced by Tenants in Vundu Flats

As the scale of the housing challenge in the developing world increases at an alarming pace, the need for real action to address affordable housing supply is becoming increasingly critical. To deal with this challenge governments and local authorities need up-to-date knowledge on global housing policy approaches in order to formulate effective policy instruments (UN HABBITAT, 2008). Figure 2 below shows the challenges faced by tenants.

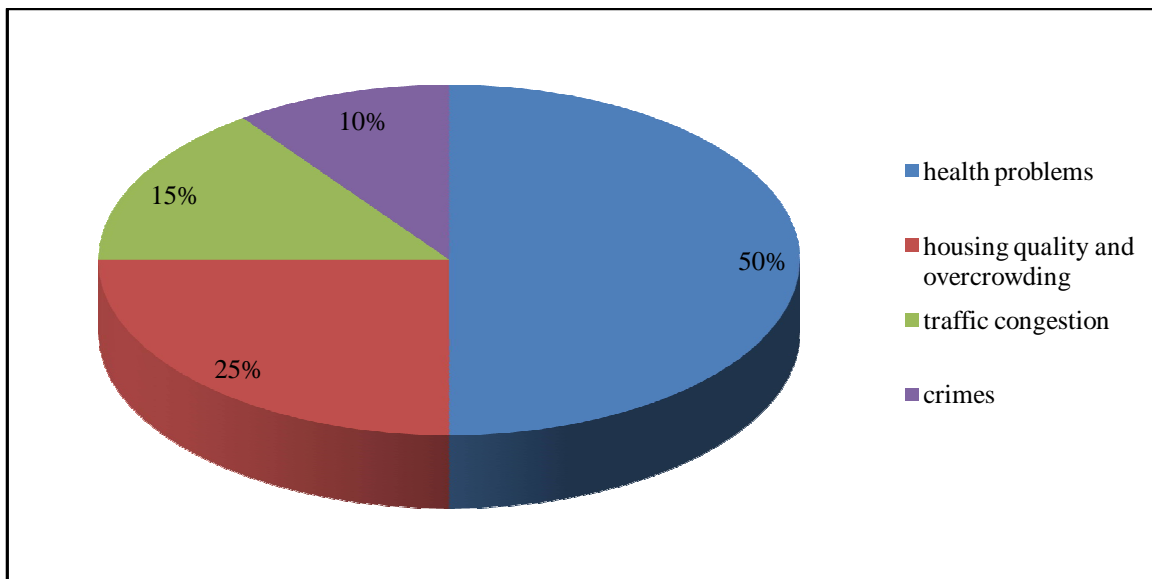


Figure 2: Challenges Faced by Tenants
Source: Field Survey (2016)

5.5.1. Health Problems

Bulawayo falls into natural farming region 5 which receives total annual rainfall of less than 250mm (ZIMSTAT, 2012). Thus, it is a semi-arid region which has scarce water supply. Therefore, the provision of adequate portable water and sanitation has been a major problem in service delivery (WHO, 2003). Residents at Vundu flats are vulnerable to water borne diseases. Overcrowding has also led to the spread of tuberculosis, whilst accumulation of indoor pollutants and dampness, has led to the development of allergies and asthma. The researcher also found out that tenants are encountering injuries due to poor maintenance of the Vundu flats.

The Health Director of BCC noted that:

- Some of the children of the tenants are suffering from kwashiorkor due to poor sanitation and shortages of body building foods.

This is a reflection on the poverty level of the tenants who are failing even to provide basic needs such as food to their households



Figure 3: Sidojiwe Flat in Makokoba
Source: Field Survey (2016)

5.5.2. Housing Quality

Aesthetics is simply an advanced term for beauty and attractiveness, but this would ignore some important aspects of moulding a city. It includes the feel, design, layout, and description of a city. It is a desire to create a place that is functional and productive along with being attractive, relaxing, and reflective of the city's history and culture. It involves the planning of parks, open spaces, and other public areas along with positioning the city's buildings and streets in such a way that are visually pleasing, easy to use, and promoting of healthy living. In essence, aesthetics represents the soul of the city and how it influences the city's organs and limbs. Vundu flats are located near the city they degrade the value of Bulawayo. The quality of shelter available for occupation of the people reflects the development of the country. Sufficient healthy liveable dwellings, clean surroundings of minimum acceptable standards of spaces and environment with essential facilities are particularly lacking in core areas of towns and cities in Zimbabwe (Chirisa, 2012). Figure 4: shows poor infrastructure



Figure 4: Vundu flats in Makokoba
Source: Field Survey (2016)

6. Conclusion

The majority of households in Vundu flats are female headed. Most of tenants in Vundu flats are low income earners with vending being the main livelihood strategy. The study population symbolises an ageing population where there is a plethora of pensioners aged between 50 and 70 years. These flats were built during the pre-independence in the 1930s. Rental housing is an important component of any functioning housing market since more people particularly in the urban setting rely on it for their housing needs. Makokoba residential area has played a major role in addressing housing crisis in Bulawayo. The socio-economic environment has forced many people to stay in rental housing because they cannot afford to own houses. Rental housing has a plethora of challenges such as, spread of diseases and high crime rate. Traffic congestion is also another problem which tenants are facing because some tenants are practicing pirating in order to earn a living therefore there is higher traffic density. There is lack of recognition of rental housing by the government and the local authority whilst rental housing has the potential of freeing the government from social pressure of providing housing for the populace.

7. Recommendations

Local authorities in Zimbabwe have failed to finance infrastructure and service delivery in urban centres. Thus, housing provision has not been spared leading to the deterioration of existing buildings both commercial and private. The researcher recommends good governance principles such as accountability and transparency in order to enhance a sustainable housing model for the city of Bulawayo.

8. Authors' Contributions

SS conceptualized the topic and did the data collection. LC revised the paper and worked on the comments from the reviewers before SS and LC revisited the whole manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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