

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN ZIMBABWEAN CITIES: EXAMINING THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN THE CAPITALIST URBAN SPACES

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Abstract

While poverty has always been viewed as a prominent characteristic of the rural areas, it is also a reality for a lot of people in cities in the world, more so in Third World countries. In Zimbabwe 33 percent of the total population resides in urban areas and cities while the majority is in the rural areas. This article argues that there are very slim chances of reducing the inequality gap found in Zimbabwean cities since the rich continue to have an advantage over the poor as there is no effort to create programmes to effectively redistribute the wealth and the means of production like land and minerals. The influential, the powerful and the well-connected people in the large cities continue to dominate even those programmes meant for the poor, for example scholarships, farming equipment, land and mining rights, making the chance of equity and equality an illusion for the urban poor. Recommendations are therefore made that the decision makers and policy makers should be inclusive in policy formulation to include the poor at planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages so that lessons can be drawn from previous policies and improvements made for the benefit of the urban poor and reduction of inequality in cities. A comparative analysis will be made between the standards of living for people in Mbare a high density low income community and Glen Lorne, a low density residential area in Harare.

Keywords: poverty, inequality, basic needs, social inclusion

Introduction and Background

The issues of poverty and inequality continue to be major development topics on the international agendas as evidenced by their inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While Anriquez and Stamoulis (2007) maintain that poverty is a rural phenomenon, Chirisa and Matamanda (2016) assert that urban poverty is now becoming more significant than rural poverty, considering that rural people do not have to rely on cash for survival on a daily basis. The high rates of unemployment in the urban areas have therefore left the urban dwellers without much disposable income while at the same time their well to do counterparts have a better life thus exhibiting high incidences of poverty and inequality in towns and cities. While SDG number 1 (no poverty) and goal number 10 have direct bearing on this article, some of the goals like goal number 2 (zero hunger), goal number 6 (clean water and sanitation) are also significant since they

are critical measures and indicators of human welfare and wellbeing. The rest of the goals are complementary to each other, thus achieving one without the rest will not have much impact on sustainable development.

Winning the war on agenda 2030 will remain elusive unless the battlefield is drawn in Third World countries, since this is where more than 70 percent of the poor people are found. This article examines the state of poverty and inequality in Harare using measurable indicators like the number of meals consumed per day, the type and standard of housing in terms of size, sanitation levels and number of people per room as well as the type of schools children attend. The United Nations measures poverty using the Poverty Datum Line of \$1.25/day or \$2/day. While this is an international measure, it may not be applicable for most developing countries considering that most poor people do not even have access to the

currency indicated thus it may be best for each country to use their own poverty datum line using the most basic pragmatic standards. In addition the state of inflation in some states like Zimbabwe means the minimum amount set is not enough to buy the basic bread basket each family needs for at least one day. It is therefore crucial that each country sets its own poverty datum line measure.

However within the same country or city, some people still afford to buy luxurious goods and fancy houses while some cannot afford a decent meal. This ugly face of inequality is the main gist of this article in a bid to find out how best the leaders can reduce this gross inequality in Zimbabwean cities. The inequality is also expressed along age and gender lines, making the scenario even worse for children and women. While some factors maybe beyond an individual's control like the economic situation in the country, historical elements like biased land ownership systems in developing countries for example, few theories of poverty examined in this article also show that eliminating poverty is not an easy process since it hinges on so many factors, like the will and efforts made by the individuals at household levels. This needs a change in attitude and intrinsic motivation. Four theories of poverty will be examined in this article to find out how they explain the poverty and inequality in the world.

Theoretical framework

This article borrows from the Marxist-Geographic theory which argues that inequality and poverty are functional components of the capitalist mode of production: capitalism necessarily produces in egalitarian social structures. Inequality is transferred from one generation to another through the environment of services and opportunities which surrounds each individual. The social geography of the city is made up of a hierarchy of community environments reproducing the hierarchical class structure. It is this same structure which is dominant in the cities in Third World countries like Zimbabwe. Inequality and poverty cannot be eradicated without fundamental changes in policy

formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation strategies and the overhaul distribution systems and access to the means of production.

Literature review

Inequality is different from poverty but related to it. Mckay (2002) makes the distinction between the two critical measures of development and avers that inequality concerns variations in living standards across a whole population, while UNRISD (2010) contends that poverty and inequality must be considered as interconnected parts of the same problem. By contrast, poverty focuses only on those whose standard of living falls below an appropriate threshold level (such as a poverty line). This threshold may be set in absolute terms (based on an externally determined norm, such as calorie requirements) or in relative terms (for example a fraction of the overall average standard of living). Intuitively relative poverty is more closely related to inequality in that what it means to be poor reflects prevailing living conditions in the whole population. But the degree of inequality will have implications for both conceptions of poverty. Just as living standards and poverty are multidimensional in nature, the same must also apply to variations in wellbeing between people (or groups of people) – that is inequality. The author implies that inequality is an inevitable phenomenon at global, national, community and even household level due to the fact that skills, efforts, levels of motivation ability and so on, are always heterogeneous in people. This heterogeneity appears to be inherent in communities making elimination of inequality a mirage and in concurrence is Development Initiatives (2016) who posits that poverty is a multidimensional concept that seeks to measure levels of deprivation encountered by a person, household or community.

While allowing for variations in indicators of unmet basic needs, poverty is generally considered to be a measure of deprivation of the basic needs that a person, household or community requires having a basic standard of

living. Deprivation can be measured either in terms of a lack of resources (e.g. income, assets), capabilities (e.g. skills, knowledge, and technology) or both. This approach shows that there are basic standards of living each society uses for its people depending on the level of development. Those differences in the measurement of the poverty itself also indicate that societies will never be equal. However, McKay (2002) goes further to explain why it is important to address inequality by stating that inequality matters for poverty eradication and economic growth. Why the question often asked is equality of what, and whose standards are used to measure 'reasonable' it matters to address inequality on ethical grounds so that the majority of people have the same self-esteem. High inequality rates increases crime rates and violation of human rights as the rich takes advantage of the poor, which is morally wrong. Being one of the 17 sustainable development goals, addressing inequality is also key to achieving all the 17 SDGs.

Sulemana et al. (2019) aver that the United Nations notes that the fastest urbanising regions in the world are Africa and Asia and projects that by the year 2050 these regions would become about 56 percent and 64 percent urban, respectively. The statistics here indicate that the continued rise in the number of people have also been met with a parallel increase of poverty in towns and cities due to different factors. At the same time, over the last several decades, many countries and regions have recorded rising income inequality. While some scholars have argued that urbanisation worsens income inequality, others contend that the relationship is non-linear and dependent on the stage of development. According to Glaeser et al (2009) inequality within cities is equally bad as inequality within countries. It is a bad state in which other people will always feel discriminated or at the mercy of the rich but without capacity to empower themselves to be at par with their rich counterparts. The causes of inequality in cities range from heterogeneous access to opportunities like education, skills acquisition, better paying jobs and so on. Due to this difference in status and access to resources and opportunities, the rich and

the poor have settled in different suburbs where some form of homogeneity exists.

Teiz and Chapple (2001) argue that the poor are not much different from the rest of the population. They have less money, but their poverty status will usually not be permanent as their life circumstances change. While these statements may be true as a broad generalisation, the experience of the inner cities suggests that the story in the ghettos is very different. Their inhabitants find it much harder to move out of poverty, their incomes are lower, and they are much more often detached from the labour market than other populations. Clayton (2018) argues that the 70-year global trend towards capitalism, together with the deeper labour markets and pools of capital that exist in cities, have inevitably increased the rewards to those at the top. The problem is that these unprecedented levels of inequality are suppressing social mobility, segregating communities, raising the price of private sector goods in poorer neighbourhoods and stratifying society. Five steps are therefore offered as ways to address inequality in cities and these include:

- Partnership between mayors and governments to address inequality,
- Delivering more and better jobs for those at the bottom of the ladder,
- Promoting conditions necessary for school enrolment to involve all people from all societies,
- Using public transport which the writer called getting everyone on the bus or train, and
- Joining with other cities and form global alliance against inequality.

These ideas were developed for American and European cities, they may also apply in Third World countries if tailor made to cater for the spatial differences between the cities.

According to McKay (2002, p.1) the following figures indicate gross intra state inequalities:

In 1998 the average consumption levels of the richest 10 percent of Zambians were 37 times those of the poorest 10 percent. In India in 1990, 56 percent of those aged 15 years and above were illiterate, while the 3.6 percent that had attended tertiary education had received around 16 percent of the total number of person years of formal education. In Venezuela in 1996/97, 48.4 percent of land holdings were of 5 hectares or less, representing in total 1.6 percent of agricultural land; 2.2 percent were of 500 hectares or above, collectively accounting for 59.7 percent of land area.

In addition, the World Bank Global Monitoring Report (2015) in Development Initiatives (2016) also gives statistics which shows that while there is inequality within states; the poverty graph is negatively skewed against Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa:

Poverty levels remain high globally, and are particularly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Global poverty is concentrated in lower middle income countries and countries dependent on natural resources as well as in fragile and conflict-affected states. Looking beyond the income measure, 1.6 billion people are considered poor across measures of access to social services and security, with the largest global share of poor people being in South Asia and the highest intensity in sub-Saharan Africa. Among other factors, demographic growth is a major challenge to poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa.

The facts and figures show that Third World countries have a lot of poverty and inequality which needs to be prioritised by global leaders if agenda 2030 has to be achieved. Issues to do with climate change for example do not respect any borders thus everyone should take cognisance of the fact that poverty is an environmental degradation agent. Ochieng (2016), posits that Africa has a lot of work to do to accomplish any meaningful development policies for its people without having to copy what happened in the 1970s and 1980s but developing unique region specific policies in harmony with their environment and level of skills development. This makes a lot of sense because development policies

cannot be homogeneous and there is need for region specific policies for Africa to be able to eliminate poverty and inequality within countries and within their cities.

Along the same line of thinking is UNRISD (2010) who posits that persistent poverty in some regions, and growing inequalities worldwide, are stark reminders that economic globalisation and have not created an environment conducive to sustainable and equitable social development. Even now, when poverty reduction is relatively high on the international policy agenda and governments are launching direct assaults on poverty through various programmes, poverty and inequality are proving intractable foes. At national level, they conclude that when a substantial proportion of a country's population is poor, it makes little sense to detach poverty from the dynamics of development. This is an indication that poverty eradication and inequality reduction have remained difficult targets to achieve despite efforts by the international community to do so. Governments should therefore prioritise these essential measures of development on their policies.

UNRISD (2010) suggests ways to reduce inequality and posits that countries can adopt a number of redistributive policies to tackle the multiple dimensions of inequality which include: providing the poor (differentiated by gender, ethnicity and other relevant characteristics) with greater access to productive assets, such as land; investing in social infrastructure to reduce the drudgery of domestic work; pursuing affirmative action policies for disadvantaged groups within a framework that incorporates all citizens in national development and welfare provision; stimulating investment in rural infrastructure, creating public works programmes and increasing access to credit; pursuing fiscal reforms that improve tax administration, prevent tax evasion, and limit opposition to progressive taxation and redistribution; and creating a stable global economic environment that responds to the needs of low-income countries.

Methodology

This study used observation and interviews for data gathering. Thirty people from each of the chosen suburbs were interviewed. The interviews solicited information on the state of wellness within the household against the number of people in each family. During the interview process, the researcher managed to observe the state of affairs in the household against the chosen indicators, giving a lot of information to satisfy the objectives of the research.

Findings

1. Absolute poverty is high in Harare with most people going without meals.

In Harare, more than 70 percent of the residents cannot afford the basic physiological needs like food, shelter and water. The majority of people are found in the southern high density suburbs like Mbare and Budiriro, while the politicians and the elite are found in the northern suburbs like Borrowdale. As a result, students, teachers, vendors and other ordinary people on the street are only having a single meal in the evening, exhibiting a high degree of food insecurity and high levels of hunger. There are limited options for the poor in urban areas because the modern, urbanised and individualistic society does not look at the problems of the neighbour next door, increasing chances of starvation and malnutrition as opposed to the rural area where food can be shared and the challenges of a neighbour can become a community challenge and solved communally. The situation is worse for street children, women, the elderly, the disabled and other vulnerable groups of the population who depend on well-wishers to donate something for their day's meal.

2. A smaller proportion of the population (about 10 percent) is rich and is not affected by the poverty across the urban space.

Politicians, land barons and money launderers are the ones making it in the harsh Zimbabwean economy and they wish the status quo remains horizontal. They have access to all the local currency, the foreign currency and all the different food stuffs in the market no matter what the cost is. As expressed by some interviewees during the data gathering process, "those in the northern suburbs like Borrowdale, Glen Lorne and Shawasha Hills appear surprised and remain indifferent to the plight of those in their neighbouring suburbs of Mbare, Glenview and Epworth just to mention a few". This is an unfortunate observation because these are suburbs in the same country and better still in the same city. This big difference was observed in the shopping patterns of some of the northern suburb dwellers and as compared to the shoppers in Mbare. The type of commodities in their shopping baskets were found to be expensive and luxurious including wine bottles, air fresheners and cereals, commodities which are now history for high density shoppers whose baskets were only found to contain basics like cooking oil, vegetables and bread. The trollies were heavily loaded and in many cases they had more than one.

3. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer in Harare and the inequality gap is not closing.

The current state of affairs in Harare is such that influential well connected people are easily accessing resources like food, fuel and clothing while the majority of the population are suffering. The type of cars they drive and their absence from fuel queues as compared to their poor counterparts tell a story of inequality. These include land barons, politicians and foreigners. They are the ones with all the access to resources while the rest spend most of the day in long fuel queues which do not yield anything at the end of the day. In addition, the rich own most of the houses and the rentals are exorbitant and out of reach for the poor and marginalised communities who end up in shacks along

Mukuvisi River and other related sites. For those in the middle of the equation, their salaries are just enough to pay rentals and the rest of the commodities they secure through other means like selling some basic commodities like fruits, groceries and clothing to supplement these meagre salaries. It is however sad to note that the United States Dollar which is not the country's is being used by the elite while the majority relies on plastic money through Ecocash which attracts high service charges when one wants to source the cash for other services like travelling fares in commuter buses. This leaves the ordinary people in a struggle for survival. The haves in the northern suburbs also own the shops for food and clothing as well as control the money market determining the black market rates at their own pace and will. Everything is to their advantage and to the detriment of poor people in the urban areas.

4. **Vulnerable groups are the worst affected in the poverty and inequality scenario in Harare.**

Women, children, the disabled, the elderly, the mentally challenged and other vulnerable groups in society bear the worst effects of the poverty and inequality in Zimbabwean cities. In Harare it is rare to find even the parliamentarians stopping to debate issues to do with the mentally challenged; while in actual fact the rights based approach calls for accountability for the welfare of all individuals irrespective of race, gender status, age or health condition. This renders the policy formulators and implementers ineffective if a certain sector of the population is not considered in the harsh economic conditions. The by-laws and pieces of legislation only affect the poor since they are the ones at the lowest level of the inequality ladder. Vendors, who mainly constitute women and the youths, are always being hounded by the municipal police as they try to make a living along the streets of Harare. This rids them of any human dignity and respect proposed by the human rights framework, increasing their

vulnerability to poverty and inequality along lines of gender and age. If they cannot sell to put food on the table then they may end up engaging into risky behaviours like prostitution, intergenerational sex with the richer males in society. In most cases, bribery is the only way as the poorly paid police officer seeks a little extra cash from the victims so that they can be released, inevitably fuelling corruption even further.

5. **There is overcrowding in dilapidated houses in Mbare and other high density suburbs as compared to the spacious accommodation in Glen Lorne and other surrounding low density suburbs.**

A single room in Mbare can accommodate as many as 15 or more people and one wonders how they manage to sleep. A respondent alluded to sharing a two roomed house with 25 others who refused to be interviewed. The occupants have to take turns to sleep and some of them are couples. When others are at the market during the day some will be sleeping or finding a chance to take care of other private business like exercising their conjugal rights, especially when the children are at school. The same applies to some commonly known flats in Mbare where curtains and ceiling boards are being used to divide the rooms so that the people can have a certain degree of privacy. Such rooms are being shared with young children, who are exposed to different vulnerabilities including sexual abuse, illicit relationships and lack of privacy promoting high levels of moral decency. This is not the situation in the northern suburbs where each child may have their own room, thus the rights of the child cannot be exercised universally even at national level due to poverty and inequality in cities.

Discussion

The state of poverty and inequality in Harare is not unique to Zimbabwe alone but similar to the status

quo in most African cities. While poverty is also a characteristic of the rural area, it becomes more evident in urban areas because of the proximity and dwellings and the concentration of people in a small area. The centralised sources of resources like supermarkets and service stations make it easy to identify congestion, shortage and inaccessibility of resources as compared to the rural areas where sources of resources are far away from each other and people's dwellings are widely spaced.

The fact that vulnerable groups like street children and the mentally challenged depend on resources from well-wishers and left overs means their lives become more difficult as their sources dwindle due to lack of extras on the part of the well-wishers. It is very rare for the rich people to visit or donate to very needy and disadvantaged members of the community, save for the donations coming from the Government through social welfare offices. Sometimes the food hand-out packages are not enough and miss some of the very basic commodities like sanitary pads and skin lotions for those living with albinism. It is also sad to note that the social welfare department only deals with registered clients, who are supposed to travel to the food distribution points irrespective of financial, physical, mental status or age. One can imagine how many vulnerable people are left to fend for themselves when in actual fact they deserve the help from the relevant ministries or the city fathers. A similar situation is the absence of amenities which are user-friendly to the disabled. Many ZUPCO buses which are prying the urban areas in Zimbabwe, which have become a solution to avert high transport costs for most commuters, are not convenient for those in wheelchairs to board; so are public toilets and other places offering services like schools and universities. This leads to challenges and social exclusion for the disabled who should also be leading a normal life just like everyone else.

The mentally challenged have always been an excluded group because they do not benefit from any development initiatives unless they are in institutions. While such institutions for the mentally challenged are available in Zimbabwe, the streets of Harare continue to be lined with

mentally challenged men and women who should be taken into houses and institution. It is sad to note that some well to do people have abused these vulnerable people by raping them for the sake of rituals and other traditional beliefs. Observations have been made on the number of mentally challenged women who are pregnant or those with small children by their side. One wonders if the biological fathers of those children are actually their mentally challenged counterparts. The interviews indicated that most of them are impregnated by rich people who drive into town at night to pick them up and drop them back in the early hours of the day. Surprisingly nothing much is being done to take out the mentally challenged out of the streets of Harare and they continue being exposed to sexual abuse, STIs, hunger and malnutrition not to mention the dirty environment they live in. Their sexual and reproductive rights are being neglected since they also need condoms and family planning methods just like everyone else. It is therefore disappointing to find out that they are never given a priority or meaningful considerations.

Inequality in Harare can also be observed along partisan lines where other privileged people can access resources like land, market spaces and job opportunities or residential stands depending on the political parties they are affiliated to. Everyone does not have to be a politician or related to a politician in order to be able to get access to opportunities. It fuels corruption and continued inequality due to unfair practices in public offices which are supposed to be benefiting everyone. From a rights based approach, every person deserves equal access to opportunities and basic resources like food, shelter and water. Depriving others of amenities on the basis of political affiliation is a violation of human rights which should be eliminated at all costs. All these emanate from the type of governance being practised in the country. Good governance entails involvement, accountability, transparency and inclusiveness of all groups in development activities so that poverty and inequality, especially along lines of gender, age; political affiliation or ethnicity is eliminated at all costs. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is encouraged as opposed to

Gender Inequality and Social Exclusion (GISE) which erodes social gains of development by channelling resources to only a privileged few.

The rich people who constitute only a small percentage of the total population have access to 90 percent of all the resources in the country while about 90 percent of the population use only 10 percent of the resources, a situation which is not divorced from the global inequality figures. While inequality is relative depending on geographical location, the scenario becomes worse in Third World countries where corruption and unemployment rates are so alarming, thus the poverty and inequality gaps affect the disadvantage people so much. If the leaders in the country are in the small elite population, it means they do not care much about the problems of the very poor people who are the majority. Amartya Sen has a lot to say about poverty and inequality and avers that leaving majority of people to ail in poverty is one of the greatest ways to violate their rights. It is unfortunate that the leaders of Third World countries are found in the capital cities where the minority is found, thus efforts should be made to reduce poverty and inequality in urban areas and the whole nation. The situation in Mbare and other high density suburbs in Harare is one that has violated the rights of children, especially the rights to privacy and protection from abuse.

Women are also one of the marginalised groups as they are found lining the streets selling vegetables or in the evenings selling imported cooking oil and other basic needs from the floors or the boot of their cars for those in a better situation. This is done to curb the high shop rentals and the cat and mouse games with the municipality police who take away their wares, destroying their only opportunities of putting food on the table for their children and paying school fees for their children. This means their customers are also other poor women who have to delay their trips home so that they can purchase these basic needs at lower prices thereby risking theft, rape and other gender based abuses at night in the struggle for survival. The youth are also another marginalised group which does not have access to resources while the grownups have all the resources. Most young people struggle to start their own families or pay

rentals and they have to stay with their parents or stay in buildings in a deplorable state which they can afford. Most of the means of production are in the hands of a few adults who own properties and have paying jobs and access to cash, leaving the youths to sell airtime, fruits and vegetables with their mothers. Some have gone to extreme ends to find elderly women and men who need sexual favours in exchange of gifts and money, and such young people you may find renting expensive flats within the Central Business District, to the surprise of many.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This article concludes that poverty and inequality is very high in Harare just like in other African cities. The status quo is being fuelled by corruption and poor governance. While those who occupy the flashy suburbs of the capital city are the rich minority, it is also not surprising to find some of these rich people in medium density suburbs or to find very poor people in the low density suburbs working as maids and gardeners. This may affect them since some programmes may skip them as they are overshadowed by the rich around them. The poverty and inequality is shown along lines of gender, age, status, and political affiliation. The means of production like land, buildings and industries are being run and operated by the lucky few who happen to be well connected to the haves of the city. The rest of the people cannot even afford decent meals, a situation even worse for the disabled, elderly and the sick. In order to create a just society where everyone enjoys equal rights, the leaders and implementers of development policy have to consider the voices and cries of the majority rather than prioritising only a small percentage of the population.

Agenda 2030 which is an international instrument for sustainable development makes special reference to zero poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), good health (SDG 3), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), reduction of inequality within countries (SDG 10) and clean, inclusive cities (SDG 11). All these goals may never be achieved if

the status quo remains the way it is in cities like Harare. The situation calls for an integrated approach in development where developed countries contribute financially and the developing countries contribute through responsibility, accountability and reduction in thefts and corruption as well as respect for human and people's rights. This article therefore makes the following recommendations:

- Development policy should include everyone in a social inclusion strategy from planning implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Priority should be given to pro-poor policies since they benefit the majority.
- Every sector of the population should be represented in decision making forums so that no strata of the population is neglected.
- There is need to promote sustainable livelihoods by increasing small scale projects at a micro household and community level.
- A rights based approach is necessary to development so that basic needs and like food and water are taken as rights and letting people go without becomes a violation which City councils have to explain to the state. Expanding water and sanitation facilities as well as more serviced residential stands will then be a priority and critical to reduce overcrowding and related disease outbreaks like cholera and typhoid.
- Addressing poverty and inequality in cities requires a multi stakeholder “Unity in diversity approach”, in which people come together irrespective differences in beliefs, political affiliation or individual

perceptions in favour of common national goals which develop cities and the whole nation at large.

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