

Full Length Research Paper

Prospects for the asset-based community development approach in Epworth and Ruwa, Zimbabwe: A housing and environmental perspective

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This paper explores the dynamics of community building and development within the satellite towns to Harare, namely Epworth and Ruwa, based on a comparative analysis of the role of communities in the housing and habitat sector. That the poor are creative, co-operative and constructive in providing for themselves is undoubted. The 2 satellite towns of Epworth and Ruwa exhibit the multi-dimensions of self-aided housing and shelter provision. This article examines how the burgeoning populations of the 2 satellite towns can be accommodated in an increasingly 'shrinking' urban space where institutions can be formed to collaborate with the urban poor in the delivery of housing, environmental amenity and security within the study areas. This is to ensure that the urban sustainability agenda is achieved. The acknowledgement of the application of the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach shows that there is a considerable potential of self-sustenance in the poor.

Key words: Community building, housing delivery, sustainability, habitat, built environment, capital.

INTRODUCTION AND FOCUS OF THE PAPER

The paper examines 2 important strands of shelter development and community building, how they shape and influence the subsequent habitats and general built environment for the realisation of sustainable human settlements. The intricacies of the relationships between the social environment and the physical outputs are central to the urban housing agenda. Scott (1981) views community building as "... developing authentic relationships between people... a state of being difficult to describe." He concurs with Sparks (2008) who observes that "...community is a tricky word although it often connotes an inclusive and harmonious collaborative space; too often it signifies a site of struggle and negotiation, an attempt to find a common framework for conflicting and seemingly contradictory impulses." According to Scott people in a community feel peaceful, at ease with one another, accepting differences, differences are appreciated and even honoured. Institutions and institutionalisation play a critical role in community building. Ziller (2004) contrasts community development to community building. Ziller perceives planning as having a facilitating role in community building. He asserts that: "Unlike community development which has traditionally involved a community development worker in a long term capacity working in a place,

community building conveys the idea of a community managing its own development through people volunteering their time rather than through facilitation by an agent. This seems more consistent with the role of planning since the planner facilitates the setting of the scene rather than the step-by-step facilitated development of social networks and activities" (Ziller, 2004). From this assertion one questions what may be wrong in taking community development as a tool of community building. In effect, it is prudent and picturesque to view the two as mutually inclusive.

In the context of this paper, housing refers to the purposeful commitment to and the engagement of processes, mechanisms and efforts in a community or society in shelter provision, with its supportive infrastructure and services, for the whole or stipulated sections of a population, in a given spatial or temporal setting. Usually once houses are built, communities are also built. But Mohanty (undated) argues that houses are not enough, that they are neither an end in themselves nor can housing programmes be treated as separate entities. Community building and community development serve as the apparatus and mechanisms that complement the physical production of houses and the general built environment. Community building embraces the totality of processes involving citizens in a given locale in initiating and deliberating on projects shaping



Figure: 1. Locality Map for Epworth, Ruwa and Harare

Source: Google Earth, accessed on 27 April 2009.

their common destiny. In order to achieve its common destiny, the community must have the asset of common purpose, a shared vision and a spirit of collectivism. Usually it is the presence of a common problem and antagonistic force that gives the people the urge to collectively cope with it. There are usually external protagonists who may lobby and advocate the cause of the marginalised commonly ascribed to improving the living standards of the disadvantaged. As a case in point, the social components of the millennium development goals (MDGs), entail a social empowerment thrust specifically, MDG 1, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, MDG 3 promote gender equality and empower women MDG 7 ensure environmental sustainability and MDG 8 a global partnership for development.

It should be emphasised that community building is a cross-cutting paradigm encapsulating the related phenomena of gender, age, class, ethnicity and health or mental status. Also, community empowerment is epiphenomenal to community building (World Bank, 2000). But is community building a spontaneous mission or a social engineering venture? Generally speaking, community building embraces in its ambit, the conditioned actions of humanity in the production of outputs and outcomes as they radiate from the latent and natural capacities and aptitudes of people. Community building is an activity aimed at the modification of the environment by exploiting the 'unity-in-diversity' philosophy and channelling of the unified forces of humanity and sociality in the production of habitats. This paper contextualizes these ideas in the

application of the community building aspects in housing and habitat agenda in both Ruwa and Epworth, Zimbabwe.

Overview of peri-urbanity and the housing situation in Zimbabwe

Major urban centres in Zimbabwe tend to provide more modern basic services than the small rural service centres. This has been shown in the history of the country's urbanisation as is common in most of the rapidly urbanizing developing countries. This is because of the process of rural-urban migration in which urban centres draw excessive populations resulting in urban primacy. In Harare, the stagnating economic growth of the capital city and its declining capacity to address the housing, infrastructure and employment needs of its rapidly growing population has witnessed its excess population relocating to Harare's satellite towns of Chitungwiza (40 km south of the city), Ruwa (23 km to the east), Norton (60 km west), Beatrice (60 km south-west) and Epworth, 15 km south east of the capital (Locality map, Figure 1).

The major reasons cited by the rural migrants for resettling in Harare's satellite towns were closely related to their desire to put their children in better schools in the urban areas, the search for better employment opportunities and affordable transport to work, the shortage of affordable housing, availability of affordable housing stands in the informal housing sector of the peri-urban areas, loss of reliable source of income after retrenchment, re-

tirement, death of parents or spouse, divorce, a desire for privacy and eviction or relocation by government. The majority of the migrant respondents felt that they would be much better off starting out in their newly found home towns (Mulenga et al., 2004). The study revealed that most of the rural people households that had migrated to the urban centres desired urban lifestyles albeit most of them ended up 'squatting' on the fringes of the major cities such as Harare.

The urban development control policies of both the white settler governments of Rhodesia and independent Zimbabwe shunned squatter settlements. In 1980/81 the government demolished a squatter settlement on the outskirts of Harare, Chirambahuyo culminating in relocation of its estimated 30,000 people residents to a planned site and service scheme (Patel and Adams, 1981). Another squatter settlement at Russeldene (between Harare and Chitungwiza) with a population of 10, 000 people was also demolished in 1983 (Butcher, 1993). The only squatter settlement of Epworth was tolerated by the post independence government of Zimbabwe on the grounds that a far larger number of residents in the area had settled there well before independence when they had acquired the requisite tenure of security to live there on purchasing their plots (ibid).

Operation clean-up of 2005, dubbed 'operation Murambatsvina' in the local language, which saw the razing down of illegal developments in the country's urban centres by the government of Zimbabwe did not go down well with most of the hard-pressed residents who were rendered homeless or had their only source of livelihood in the thriving informal sector destroyed in the name of urban sanity. In its wake operation Murambatsvina targeted mainly those building structures deemed illegal developments as provided by the country's regional, town and country planning act (1996) notably the backyard shacks, flea markets and the havens of home industries such as Siyaso in Harare's Mbare high density suburb raising much public ire against the government.

In its pacifying response to the public outcry, government followed up operation clean-up with 'operation restore order', dubbed 'operation Garikayi/Hlalani Kuhl' (OG/HK) in local nomenclature that was designed as an upgrading programme for all urban centres. The existing building structures in the country's cities and towns demolished during operation clean-up included kiosk shops in the frontyards of residential stands and on street pavements, ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrines and the paraphernalia of illegal residential outbuildings that provided shelter for the generality of the poor who cannot otherwise afford any decent housing by the country's housing standards Act of 1977.

The sequel of the phenomenal bottlenecks in housing delivery in the country's major urban centres prompted self-help housing initiatives that have been instrumental to community-building culminating in the production of state-of-the-art built urban fabric of Zimbabwe albeit cen-

tral government attempts to control the space for community initiatives for political gains.

How has community building evolved as a housing aspect?

Amirahmadi (2003) defines community building as "... a process whereby various community capitals are brought together to build a community of experience and interaction." Important aspects of community capital include:

- Geographical location.
- Endowment of resources.
- Natural and business climate.
- Traditions and customs.
- Quality of life.
- Agglomeration economies.
- The importance of regional investment, as well as
- "Untraded interdependencies" including understanding, conventions, informal rules and trust systems, solidarity, mutual assistance.
- co-opting of ideas (Amirahmadi, 2003).

All these aspects, configuring into community capital, are the requisite for sustainable communities.

Kretzmann (1995) laments that "...every community is built by the contributions of its residents. Yet in most communities, only a small percentage of local citizens are involved in community building activities". The asset-based community development (ABCD) approach is premised on the principles of appreciating and mobilizing individual and community talents, skills and assets rather than the problems and needs of the community. The asset based community development approach is purely community-driven and not by external agencies (Cunningham and Mathie, 2002; Kretzmann, 1995; World Bank, 2000). The mapping of capacities and assets of the community is more than gathering data hence it is essential that its members and their associations conduct the asset mapping that guides them in building new relationships, learning more about their contributions and talents and identifying potential linkages between different assets (Table 1).

The ABCD approach demands knowledge of the talents, skills and capacities of individual community members. Kretzmann (1995) has affirmed that to rediscover the skills and resources of all community members, "over 100 community groups have utilized some form of a "Capacity Inventory". This capacity inventory is simply a questionnaire designed to identify:

- i. A person's skills.
- ii. Areas of knowledge and experience, commitments.
- iii. The willingness to be involved in community building or economic development activities.

The capacity inventory also goes beyond the human capital involved in local development. It goes on to include

Table 1. Building blocks of the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach.

<p>The ABCD builds on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An appreciative inquiry that identifies and analyses the community's past successes. This strengthens people's confidence in their own capacities and inspires them to take action. - The recognition of social capital and its importance as an asset. It focuses on the power of associations and informal linkages within the community, the relationships built over time between community associations and external institutions. - Participatory approaches to development based on the principles of empowerment and ownership of the development process. - Community economic development models that place priority on collaborative efforts for economic development targeting the optimum use of the available local resources. - Efforts to strengthen civil society. The efforts focus on how to engage people as citizens (rather than clients) in development, and how to make local governance more effective and responsive. <p>Source: Cunningham and Mathie (2002).</p>

the other capitals enshrined in the sustainable livelihoods framework including:

- i. Natural capital (the natural endowment like rainfall enjoyed in a particular place).
- ii. Social capital (assets of social relationships and networks in place).
- iii. Human capital (including health, knowledge and skills by the local people)
- iv. Physical capital (including the hard infrastructure – roads, dams, buildings, in place).
- v. Financial capital (including lines of credit and institutions for lending in place).
- vi. Political capital (including the ability of the citizens in place to freely engage in democratic dialogue and the ability of the leadership to grant political will to issues of local progression), and
- vii. Spiritual capital (including the capability by the local leaders to motivate and inspire the local citizens into progressive action for local development).

The ABCD approach contrasts the opposite of a "needs survey". In Zimbabwe focus is mainly on community needs. This may be attributed to the fact that the socialist egalitarian approach adopted at independence by the government, still influences the lives and directions of most communities. Yet, community building implies that planning authorities discharge their duties professionally for the public good albeit initial community resistance. The planning authorities work to 'grease' relationships with the citizens in their jurisdictions towards greater social cohesion and greater common visioning for making their places of habitation better. In the ABCD, appreciative enquiry is very critical in the making of a place.

Spatial contextualisation of community building: Reflections on Ruwa and Epworth

The satellite town of Epworth, situated 15 km south east of Harare, comprises Muguta, Makomo, Chinamano and

Zinyengere villages. Epworth has reportedly grown from a township that was commissioned by the then British South Africa company when it granted the Methodist Wesleyan Mission the Epworth farm in 1892. In 1908 the mission acquired the adjoining farms occupied by the present day expanse of the satellite town. The nucleus of Epworth town initially comprised an estimated 5,000 homesteads to the present day 20,000 informal settlers largely concentrated in Gada with the 'political blessing' of the ruling ZANU-PF party government.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s the town experienced a large influx of people as evidenced by the leap of inhabitants from 20,000 inhabitants in 1980 to 35,000 in 1987. Since the town had not been planned as an urban residential area, the rapid increase in population and pressure on the town without any water supply and sanitation facilities became a nightmare for the resident households, most of whom were self-employed as street vendors and cobblers. The town has no street names and most of the estates have no addresses making the task of revenue collection cumbersome. Since most the houses found in the town were built of sunburnt bricks, the structures are not durable and are prone to falling under heavy rains. After independence in the 1980s, government decided to upgrade rather than demolish the informal housing units that had sprung up in the town. As provided under the urban councils act, a local board comprising members elected by the community has been responsible for managing the area including the collection of rates as stipulated by central government.

Ruwa Township, situated 23 km east of the city of Harare along the Mutare road was established as a growth point in 1986 and a local board to manage the township was appointed by government in 1991 according to section 14 of the urban councils act. Before 1991, the Goromonzi rural district council and the urban development corporation jointly administered Ruwa.

The provision of infrastructure in Ruwa is mainly private sector driven. This is particularly true in one of the consortia in the town where private landowners have been

seeking approval to subdivide their land. Since the Ruwa local board faces difficulties such as the shortage of plant and equipment, financial resources and skilled manpower in providing adequate infrastructure, it has established a partnership with the northern consortium, group of private companies for provision of the needed infrastructure. All prospective developers in Ruwa are required to contribute a development charge for the installation of off-site infrastructure such as roads, water and power. In Ruwa's up-market residential estate of ZIMRE park, largely serviced by the Zimbabwe reinsurance corporation, the local board issued its developer, the national real estate, with a planning permission to develop 2,500 medium density residential stands. The developer was also obliged to provide water and upgrade the pump station. In addition, the developer paid the Board Z\$19 million endowment fund (Odero, 2003).

Currently the Ruwa local board has a waiting list of more than 5,000 housing applicants following the last allocation in 1995 (RLB, 2007). According to the records of the RLB, the number of serviced stands was, estimated at 10,000 and only 0.5% of the stands are council-owned on state land. The operation Garikayi/Hlalani Kuhle ("Restore order") scheme benefited 110 households recommended by the local ward councillors of Ruwa. The government of Zimbabwe provided funding for the development of the superstructures particularly the housing stocks (RLB, 2007).

In response to the upsurge in crime in Ruwa township such as house burglaries and the late night mugging of residents, neighbourhood committees have been set up to oversee the safety of both homes and the local residents of the township. In sharp contrast to the neighbourhood security measures that the formal property owners in Ruwa township have put in place, the occupants of the old informal settlements of both Epworth and Ruwa have left their plight to the individual. The petty politicians who indulge in ensuring that such problems remain unresolved indefinitely have always sought political mileage from the confusion.

From a conflict management perspective, it is asserted that sustainable communities can be built through engaging consensus building techniques in tackling their common challenges and the underlying problems. Thus, the setting up of the Epworth local board enabled the community to become more defined through an institutionalised common identity. A stronger relationship between the board and the community was created which hitherto had not existed. In the wake of the Epworth upgrading programme, the evictees initially harboured misgivings against the programme but the betterment measures put in place by the local authority ultimately held sway. McDonnell (1998) writes that "...an incremental approach offers the best way to reduce the destructiveness of confrontations over intractable issues. This approach begins with efforts of helping the contending parties to identify their areas of divergence that tend to

magnify the damage of the conflict threatening the parties' capacity of making realistic decisions in advancing their interests.

The effects of operation Murambatsvina

In May 2005, the Government of Zimbabwe demolished more than 700,000 housing and small business units throughout the country's urban centres in an exercise code-named operation Murambatsvina (Operation clean-up). Its critics argued that operation clean-up was nothing but a fiesta of the government's resentment of informal settlements, slums and the informal sector. Both Ruwa and Epworth were considerably negatively affected in the wake of the exercise that became synonymous with the grieving of the emerging communities. Admittedly, as is characteristic of matters relating to the various definitions and perceptions of the 'national interest', the impacts of operation Murambatsvina (Operation clean-up) on the socio-economic and environmental fabric of the country's urban settlements were considerably polemized. The subsequent follow-up operation restore order (Operation Garikayi) effectively sought to redress the collateral damage inflicted on the gains of informality while addressing the interests of public safety, health, functionality and amenity. Proponents for OM and have indicated the need for cognizance that unbridled informalization should be guided and controlled firmly but sensitive to the quest for sustainable urban development.

The negative impacts wrought by operation Murambatsvina on the efforts invested in community building in the country's urban centres were debated. The government, since independence in 1980, tacitly encouraged the informalisation of the economy ostensibly in its initial policy of 'liberalization' in response to the erstwhile structural readjustment programme that it later abandoned. Taking their cue from the de-regularisation of the economy by government, most of the urban poor successfully set up co-operatives and associations to carve themselves a niche in the country's liberalized market economy. The provision of affordable housing units and the related infrastructure facilities on self-help basis was publicly claimed as the success of the government's policy of indigenization. The housing cooperatives hired the professional services of town planners, land surveyors, architects for the development of their estates so that they could ultimately earn their own homes on secure tenure. As the informal sector became vibrant, government's condescending stance of silence was deemed consent by the generality of those desperate for shelter.

The fact that Ruwa local board partnered with the private landowners in providing services such as grass-cutting and the custody of neighbourhood security earned it plaudits from the ratepayer. The Epworth local board, likewise, successfully courted NGOs to support employment creation projects which brought relief to the youth drafted into the town's cleaning services.

It has been observed that a habitat par excellence should not be judged by its large quantity of architectural artefacts but rather by the quality of effort invested - small is beautiful (Schumacher, 1999). It was observed that in Epworth, a great number of stands were designed on paper (more than 2000), but remained idle due to financial constraints. The engagement of irreputable land developers in building and installation of housing infrastructure together with the hoarding of stands for speculative designs attributed to some of the delays in the implementation of local development plans for Ruwa.

Community building and the environment

The peri-urban biophysical environments are often subject to degradation threats. Natural resources in the region have to be strategically managed so that they do not get extinguished as the ecological footprint problematique manifests itself. Among the environmental challenges in and around the small settlements of Epworth and Ruwa include but not limited to

- i. Decrease in woodland resources as residents poach firewood especially in times of power cuts, as well as developers destroy forests to build houses and related superstructures and infrastructure.
- ii. Increased siltation of dams and streams.
- iii. Non-collection of household garbage due to local authority constraints,
- iv. Decreased capacity of local authorities to cut grasses during the rainy season.
- v. Loss of farming land due to housing estates' development.

Each of the problem highlighted constitute a thematic area upon which different community groupings can come together and foster synergies for problem solving. In Epworth some group of youth organised themselves with the help of a non-governmental organisation working in the area to clean the streets. In Ruwa, residents were noted in the middle-density areas to engage in grass cutting as a mitigation measure against mugging. In most cases, community building becomes possible as sections or whole communities face some environmental challenges which they have to solve together. It must be underscored that with financial capital in availability, it becomes very possible to mobilise different requisites for the community projects.

The practice of ABCD: A synthesis

Various modes of the asset-based community development exhibiting the following features were practised in both Epworth and Ruwa

Gender and inclusive community building: This involves mainstreaming gender into housing and community development projects so that the traditional marginalised

classes, especially women, are included (Commonwealth Foundation, 2005). Although Zimbabwe has made many strides towards gender mainstreaming, the subject remains practicably taxing especially in local governance spheres

Generational community building: The ABCD approach is inclusive in nature insofar as the age of the member - the children, youth, the middle-aged and the aged will de-terminine specific cohort-based projects for housing and habitat development and maintenance every member will be assigned. In this respect everyone has a role to play, for example, the pensioners and retiree are expected to contribute their technical and professional skills to the development of the built environment. The youth 'pick on the button-stick' from the older generations, hence inter-generational equity for sustainable community building. The youths also learn from each other (intra-generational equity) through peerage.

Community building by facilitation and continuous learning: This component taps external expertise and resources including technical advice and donor contributions to disaster preparedness. The use of new technology such as geographic information systems (GIS) can assist in community advancement (Elwood, 2002, cf. Prieto-Díaz, 2002). In effect, it is the acknowledgement by locals that they are not an island that may catapult them to new innovations and discoveries. A community that shuns new knowledge in its endeavours for betterment will head at nothing but disaster and demise. Falk and Kilpatrick (2002, 2008) define social capital as "... an accumulation of the knowledge and identity resources drawn on by communities-of-common-purpose." They further assert that social capital originates in micro-interactions that are embedded in a meso- and macro-social order.

Holism in community building: Community building for the development of housing, habitat and the built environment should be comprehensive and integrative. Hart (1998 - 2006) asserts that piecemeal and disjointed approaches tend "... to create opposing groups...and to focus on short-term benefits without monitoring long-term results" as partial solutions sometimes tend to be destructive. It is, therefore, critical that both Ruwa and Epworth take into consideration the relevant social, political, ecological and economic factors in community building initiatives. By so doing, the ideas of inclusiveness for all social groups, economic elements, biophysical matters, and political capital are harnessed for sustainable community development (Table 2).

It must be noted that while Ruwa has a strong 'business base', Epworth has a stronger 'popular base'. This means that community builders' upon identifying each place's strengths, obtained through appreciative enquiry will be able to drive the local economies using the appropriate asset base or combinations as elaborated in the sustainable livelihoods framework. The ABCD and the sustainable livelihoods frameworks presuppose that stable communities are those that maximise on the existing

Table 2. Steps in resource mobilisation.

Step 1 Develop strategic plan	Step 2 Review resources situation	Step 3 Research mechanism
(a) Review strategic plan	(a) Identifying resources needed	(a) Conduct potential donor research
(b) Develop program	(b) identifying immediate resources needed	(b) Identifying relevant request for proposals
(c) asset needs		(c) Submit unsolicited general proposals

Source: Mukute et al. (2006).

and readily available indigenous resources. Taking this presupposition to Epworth and Ruwa, the implications are that Epworth's defined regional economic base lies in the 'sweat equity' (human capital) sphere due to abundance of labour or human capital, Ruwa's is that of financial capital given its 'growth point' status which seem that it grew by its attraction of a multiplicity of private investors. By extension, Epworth has managed, over a period of nearly a century now, to attract more and more populations but of a poor background, perhaps it should be dubbed a 'refugee town'. The miserable and economically deprived of society tend to find refuge in this small town. The best way is to find means and modalities to turn the poor people in Epworth build a stronger, stable and growing economy. It must be stressed, building a community, in any case, should reflect the true foundation of community participation because this is a key determinant for its sustainability.

Conclusion and Prospects

The following measures are recommended for coping with the challenges in community building, housing development and management in Ruwa and Epworth Urban planners and housing practitioners should play a facilitative role in the control of development and the management of housing estates. The preparation and implementation of local development plans should assist all key stakeholders in identifying and mapping areas prone to further informal settlements and in fostering smart partnerships between local authorities for efficient land management and administration on a sustainable basis.

Adequate space for good governance should be created and jealously guarded for the involvement of local communities in making decisions that directly affect them. More importantly local communities should effectively be involved in the budgeting of resources and overseeing expenditure.

The empowerment of local communities through building their capacity in all the facets of community building should occupy the centre stage for sustainable development. Admittedly, all stakeholders should be acquainted with the management and administration of residential estate development relating the key aspects of the positive role and functions of estate developers, property taxation and compensation for the benefit of sustainable ur-

ban environments.

It would be imprudent to equate housing delivery merely with the construction of houses. The envelope of housing delivery holds more than just the provision of shelter but equally the related instruments of governance, stewardship, management and maintenance of infrastructure and habitats. The aesthetic values and vibrancy of habitats are enmeshed with the sustainability agenda. Sustainability also connotes the liveability of a place. Community building involves reconciling the divergent interests of the disaggregate groups of people within a given locale so that they can speak with one voice and identify themselves with one solitary community to yield some measurable success to their collective endeavours. They then learn to empathise with one another. Ultimately planning acts as a vehicle for consensus building in the development of a community in all its facets.

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