Urban and Regional Planning Analysis of Building Conditions in Shamva: A Strategic Call to Action for Local Authorities Within Zimbabwe's Transformation Agenda.

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ABSTRACT

Urban and regional planning in Zimbabwe has long grappled with the dual challenge of deteriorating building conditions and rapid urbanization, particularly in small mining towns such as Shamva. The town's legacy of extractive industries has left behind aging infrastructure and poorly maintained public facilities, while informal housing expansion continues to strain limited resources. This study critically examines the state of building conditions in Shamva within the framework of Zimbabwe's Transformation Agenda (Vision 2030), which seeks to modernize infrastructure and promote sustainable urban growth. Evidence suggests that weak enforcement of the Regional Town and Country Planning Act (1976, revised 2016) has contributed to unregulated development and structural decay. Furthermore, outdated building standards inherited from colonial planning systems have failed to adapt to contemporary socio-economic and environmental realities. Scholars argue that resilience and sustainability in Zimbabwe's built environment remain undermined by financial constraints and governance gaps, leaving many towns with unsafe and non-resilient structures.

This analysis calls for a strategic intervention by local authorities, emphasizing the rehabilitation of public buildings, enforcement of modern building codes, and integration of climate-resilient design. The study highlights the need for participatory planning approaches that engage communities in shaping urban renewal, while leveraging public-private partnerships to mobilize resources. Aligning Shamva's building rehabilitation with Zimbabwe's Transformation Agenda will not only improve safety and service delivery but also position the town as a model for rural-urban transformation. Ultimately, this research underscores that addressing building conditions is not merely a technical exercise but a strategic imperative for achieving sustainable development and inclusive growth in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Urban governance, regional development, Spatial planning, Land-use management, Zoning regulations, Participatory planning, Infrastructure decay, Informal settlements, Housing quality, public facilities rehabilitation, Mining legacy structures, Structural safety, Local authorities, Regional Town and Country Planning Act (1976; revised 2016), Building codes enforcement, Public-private partnerships, Institutional capacity, Governance gaps, and Vision.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Urban and regional planning in Zimbabwe is at a pivotal juncture, as local authorities grapple with the dual challenge of managing rapid urbanization and aligning development with national transformation goals. In this context, the built environment particularly the condition of public and private buildings serves as both a barometer and a catalyst for sustainable development. Shamva, a peri-urban district in Mashonaland Central Province, exemplifies the infrastructural and institutional challenges facing small towns across the country. Despite national policy frameworks such as Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), which emphasize inclusive and resilient urban growth (Government of Zimbabwe, 2021), the physical state of

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buildings in Shamva remains largely neglected, under-regulated, and misaligned with contemporary planning standards.

This research seeks to critically analyse the condition of buildings in Shamva through the lens of urban and regional planning, identifying gaps in policy implementation, institutional capacity, and community engagement. It further aims to analyse the state of building infrastructure in Shamva and propose strategic planning interventions aligned with Zimbabwe's New Urban Agenda and Vision 2030 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2023). It further aims to propose a strategic call to action for local authorities, grounded in Zimbabwe's transformation agenda and the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By focusing on Shamva as a case study, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how localized planning failures can undermine national development ambitions (Chirisa et al., 2020).

Zimbabwe's urban planning landscape has undergone significant shifts since independence, yet many local authorities continue to operate within outdated colonial-era frameworks that are ill-suited to contemporary socio-economic realities (Tibaijuka, 2005). The decentralization of planning responsibilities to local governments, while theoretically empowering, has often been undermined by limited technical capacity, inadequate funding, and weak enforcement of building regulations (Chirisa, 2013). In towns like Shamva, these systemic issues manifest in the proliferation of informal settlements, dilapidated public infrastructure, and unregulated construction practices.

The National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025) and Vision 2030 articulate a clear mandate for infrastructure renewal, spatial equity, and sustainable urbanization (Government of Zimbabwe, 2021). However, implementation at the local level remains fragmented. Shamva's building stock comprising schools, clinics, markets, and residential units suffers from poor maintenance, lack of resilience to climate change, and non-compliance with modern planning codes (UN-Habitat, 2022). These deficiencies not only compromise public safety and service delivery but also hinder economic development and social inclusion.

Moreover, the absence of integrated regional planning has led to spatial inequalities between urban cores and peripheral areas, exacerbating poverty and environmental degradation (Muronda, 2019). A critical analysis of building conditions in Shamva, therefore, offers a microcosmic view of the broader structural and policy failures in Zimbabwe's urban planning system. It also presents an opportunity to reimagine local governance through participatory planning, data-driven decision-making, and alignment with national transformation goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the New Urban Agenda emphasize inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban development (Government of Zimbabwe, 2023). Scholars argue that the built environment must be reimagined to meet these goals, particularly in small towns like Shamva (Chavunduka & Chirisa, 2024). Urban planning in Zimbabwe faces challenges such as fragmented governance, limited funding, and weak enforcement of building codes (Cambridge University Press, 2023). This study builds on existing literature by focusing on localized planning strategies. Urban and regional planning in Zimbabwe has evolved through a complex interplay of colonial legacies, post-independence policy reforms, and contemporary development agendas. Scholars have consistently highlighted the disconnect between national planning frameworks and local implementation, particularly in small towns like Shamva, where institutional capacity and infrastructure investment remain limited (Chirisa, 2013; Matamanda et al., 2020).

Urban Planning and The Built Environment In Zimbabwe

The built environment is a critical component of urban planning, influencing not only spatial organization but also social equity, economic productivity, and environmental sustainability. In Zimbabwe, however, the condition of buildings especially in peri-urban and rural towns reflects decades of underinvestment and weak regulatory enforcement (Tibaijuka, 2005). Chirisa (2013) argues that many local authorities continue to rely on

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outdated colonial-era planning models that fail to address the realities of informal urban growth and climate vulnerability. This has led to a proliferation of substandard structures, particularly in marginalized areas.

Transformation Agenda And Vision 2030

Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) emphasize infrastructure renewal, spatial equity, and sustainable urbanization as key pillars of national transformation (Government of Zimbabwe, 2021). These frameworks align with global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda, which advocate for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities (UN-Habitat, 2022). However, implementation remains uneven, with local authorities often lacking the technical and financial resources to translate national goals into actionable urban planning strategies (Chavunduka & Chirisa, 2024).

Challenges in Local Urban Governance

Local authorities in Zimbabwe face a myriad of challenges that hinder effective urban planning. These include limited fiscal autonomy, inadequate staffing, and political interference (Matamanda et al., 2020). In Shamva, these constraints are particularly acute, resulting in poor building maintenance, unregulated construction, and a lack of spatial planning integration (Muronda, 2019). The absence of participatory planning mechanisms further alienates communities from decision-making processes, weakening the legitimacy and sustainability of urban development initiatives.

Building Conditions and Spatial Inequality

The condition of buildings in towns like Shamva is both a symptom and a driver of spatial inequality. Poorly constructed and maintained infrastructure disproportionately affects low-income residents, limiting their access to quality housing, education, and healthcare (UN-Habitat, 2022). Muronda (2019) notes that the lack of regional planning coordination exacerbates disparities between urban cores and peripheral settlements, undermining efforts to achieve balanced territorial development.

Towards Strategic Urban and Regional Planning

Recent scholarship advocates for a shift toward integrated, data-driven, and participatory planning approaches that align local development with national and global agendas (Chirisa et al., 2020). This includes the adoption of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), community-based planning models, and performance-based budgeting to enhance transparency and accountability. For Shamva, such approaches could provide a roadmap for improving building conditions while advancing broader transformation objectives

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to critically analyse building conditions in Shamva and evaluate their alignment with Zimbabwe's transformation agenda. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods ensures a comprehensive understanding of the spatial, structural, and governance dimensions of urban and regional planning in the local context (Creswell, 2014).

Research Design

A case study design is employed, focusing on Shamva as a representative peri-urban locality facing infrastructural and planning challenges. Case studies are particularly effective in urban planning research as they allow for in-depth exploration of localized phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). Shamva's unique socio-political and spatial dynamics offer valuable insights into broader systemic issues affecting small towns in Zimbabwe.

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Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Methods

Building Condition Surveys: Structured surveys were conducted to assess the physical state of public and private buildings, focusing on structural integrity, compliance with planning codes, and resilience to

environmental stressors.

Gis Mapping: Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were used to spatially analyse the distribution and typology of buildings, highlighting patterns of inequality and infrastructural decay (Muronda, 2019).

Qualitative Methods

Key Informant Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with urban planners, local government officials, community leaders, and residents to gather insights on planning practices, institutional constraints, and perceptions of building quality.

Document Analysis: Planning documents, building regulations, and policy frameworks such as Vision 2030 and NDS1 were reviewed to assess alignment between national goals and local implementation (Government of Zimbabwe, 2021).

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling technique was used to select buildings and stakeholders that are most relevant to the study objectives. This includes public infrastructure (e.g., schools, clinics), informal settlements, and key actors involved in urban governance. The sample ensured representation across different wards within Shamva to capture spatial diversity (Chirisa et al., 2020).

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and spatial analysis tools to identify trends and disparities in building conditions.

Qualitative Data was subjected to thematic analysis to extract recurring themes related to planning challenges, policy gaps, and community engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Triangulation of data sources enhanced the validity and reliability of findings, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the interplay between physical infrastructure and planning governance.

Research Findings

Deterioration Of Building Conditions In Shamva

- Field observations and secondary literature reveal that residential housing in Shamva is largely informal, overcrowded, and poorly serviced, reflecting weak enforcement of planning regulations.
- Many public buildings such as schools and clinics are dilapidated, with inadequate maintenance budgets and outdated construction materials (Chirisa, 2014).

- The mining legacy has left behind abandoned structures, contributing to urban blight and unsafe environments.

Weak Enforcement Of Planning And Building Regulations

- The Regional Town and Country Planning Act (1976, revised 2016) provides a framework for orderly development, but enforcement in smaller towns like Shamva remains inconsistent.
- Scholars note that colonial-era building standards are still applied, despite being misaligned with contemporary socio-economic realities (Chirisa, 2014).
- Zoning laws, while critical for separating land uses, are often undermined by informal settlements and political interference (Generis Online, 2024).

Governance And Institutional Gaps

- Local authorities in Shamva face financial constraints, limited technical expertise, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, which hinder proactive urban planning (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
- The lack of community participation in planning processes has led to mistrust and non-compliance with building codes.

Socio-Economic Implications

- Poor building conditions exacerbate social inequality, as marginalized groups are forced into unsafe housing.
- Inadequate infrastructure reduces economic productivity, discouraging investment and limiting Shamva's potential role in Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 transformation agenda.
- The absence of climate-resilient designs exposes the town to environmental risks such as flooding and soil erosion.

Strategic Opportunities For Transformation

- Rehabilitation of public buildings can improve service delivery and restore confidence in local governance.
- Repurposing abandoned mining structures into community facilities or industrial hubs offers economic revitalization potential.
- Adoption of green building technologies (solar energy, rainwater harvesting) aligns with sustainability goals under Vision 2030.
- Strengthening participatory planning can foster community ownership and compliance with urban regulations.

  The research findings demonstrate that Shamva's building conditions are symptomatic of broader national urban planning challenges, weak enforcement, outdated standards, and governance gaps. However, aligning local strategies with Zimbabwe's Transformation Agenda (Vision 2030) provides a pathway for renewal. By rehabilitating infrastructure, enforcing modern codes, and embracing sustainability, Shamva can be repositioned as a model for rural-urban transformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Acknowledge The Urgency

Shamva's built environment reflects national-level gaps in regulation, financing, and capacity. Recommendations below prioritize feasibility, governance realism, and measurable impact, aligning with Vision 2030 while correcting colonial-era legacies and institutional weaknesses.

Governance And Regulatory Reform

Modernize Local Planning By-Laws And Building Standards: Update municipal by-laws to incorporate performance-based, climate-responsive standards and context-appropriate materials, replacing rigid colonial-era norms that inflate costs and hinder compliance (Chirisa, 2014; Government of Zimbabwe, Regional Town and Country Planning Act, 1976/2016).

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Establish A Unified Development Control System: Create a single, transparent approvals pipeline with published timelines, digital tracking, and public registers of permits to reduce transaction costs, curb political interference, and increase compliance (Chirisa, 2014).

Strengthen Enforcement With Graduated Compliance Tools: Combine warnings, minor penalties, and negotiated compliance plans for low-risk infractions reserving demolition for high-risk cases to improve safety while avoiding punitive displacement (Government of Zimbabwe, Regional Town and Country Planning Act, 1976/2016)

Financing And Delivery Mechanisms

Launch A Building Rehabilitation Fund For Priority Public Assets: Ring-fence municipal revenues (e.g., rates surcharges) and crowd in private finance via PPPs for schools, clinics, and civic buildings; use performance contracts and output-based aid to ensure delivery (Government of Zimbabwe, Vision 2030, 2018; Chirisa et al., 2020).

Adopt Value Capture And Land-Based Finance: Implement betterment charges and development impact fees in growth corridors; earmark proceeds for local infrastructure and building upgrades, with transparent audits to maintain trust (Chirisa, 2014).

Incentivize Compliant Private Construction: Offer time-bound fee reductions, fast-track approvals, and density bonuses for developments meeting updated codes and green building criteria (Chirisa et al., 2020).

Upgrading, Resilience, And Green Building

- **Implement Targeted Informal Settlement Upgrading:** Prioritize in-situ upgrades with serviced plots, incremental housing support, and risk-informed layout planning to reduce overcrowding and improve safety without mass eviction (Chirisa, 2014).
- **Repurpose Mining Legacy Structures:** Convert safe, structurally sound assets into multi-use community hubs, SME workshops, or training centers; decommission unsafe structures through phased remediation (Chirisa et al., 2020).
- **Mandate Basic Resilience Features In All New Builds:** Require site drainage plans, flood-resistant siting, wind-resilient detailing, and rainwater harvesting; incentivize solar integration and passive design to reduce operating costs (Chirisa et al., 2020).

Capacity, Data, And Participation

- **Establish A Multidisciplinary Built Environment Task Team:** Pool engineering, planning, environmental, and social expertise across district and provincial levels to remedy technical capacity gaps and coordinate delivery (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
- **Create A Building Conditions Registry And Risk Map:** Conduct rapid assessments of structural integrity, service deficits, and environmental risks; publish dashboards to guide budgeting and inspections (Chirisa, 2014).
- **Institutionalize Participatory Planning:** Use ward-based forums and co-design charrettes to socialize plans, negotiate trade-offs, and co-produce maintenance agreements, improving compliance and stewardship (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Implementation Roadmap And Accountability

Phase Actions With Clear Milestones:

- **0–6 MONTHS:** Registry setup, by-law revisions drafted, pilot audits of public buildings.
- **6–18 MONTHS:** Rehabilitation fund operational, three priority assets upgraded, informal settlement pilot.

- **18–36 MONTHS:** Mining asset repurposing, scaling green standards, value capture instruments implemented (Government of Zimbabwe, Vision 2030, 2018).
- **Adopt Performance Contracts And Public Scorecards:** Tie senior management incentives to measurable outcomes (permits processed on time, buildings rehabilitated, inspections completed); publish quarterly progress to build credibility (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
- **Mainstream Anti-Corruption Safeguards:** Introduce third-party technical audits, e-procurement, and disclosure of PPP terms to prevent capture and ensure value for money (Chirisa, 2014).

Expected Outcomes

- **Safety And Service Delivery:** Reduced structural risk, improved functionality of schools and clinics.
- **Economic Revitalization:** New space for SMEs and community facilities via repurposed mining assets.
- **Compliance And Order:** Faster approvals and clearer rules increase formal development.
- **Climate Resilience:** Lower flood and heat risk through site-sensitive design and green features.
- **Institutional Credibility:** Transparent financing and participatory processes rebuild public trust.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of building conditions in Shamva underscores the urgent need for a paradigm shift in urban and regional planning within Zimbabwe's Transformation Agenda (Vision 2030). Evidence shows that deteriorating infrastructure, informal housing expansion, and weak enforcement of planning regulations have created unsafe and unsustainable urban environments (Chirisa, 2014). The persistence of outdated colonial-era building codes, coupled with governance and financial constraints, has further undermined the resilience of Shamva's built environment (Government of Zimbabwe, Regional Town and Country Planning Act, 1976; revised 2016).

Critically, the findings highlight that building conditions are not merely a technical issue but a strategic development challenge. Poor housing quality and dilapidated public facilities exacerbate social inequality, reduce economic productivity, and weaken community trust in local authorities (Cambridge University Press, 2021). At the same time, opportunities exist to leverage public-private partnerships, participatory planning, and green building technologies to rehabilitate infrastructure and repurpose abandoned mining structures for community and economic use (Chirisa, Chinozvina & Mandaza-Tsoriyo, 2020).

Aligning Shamva's urban renewal with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 requires decisive leadership from local authorities, supported by national policy reforms and community engagement. By modernizing building standards, enforcing zoning regulations, and prioritizing climate-resilient design, Shamva can be repositioned as a model for rural-urban transformation. Ultimately, the strategic call to action is clear: addressing building conditions is central to achieving sustainable development, inclusive growth, and the realization of Zimbabwe's transformation agenda.

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