

## Chapter 19

# The Political Economy of Land and Urban Development: The Case of Epworth, Zimbabwe, 1980–2012

**Kudzanai Bvochora**

*University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe*

**Bernard Kusena**

*University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe*

### ABSTRACT

*Many urban areas which have sprouted around the world owe their economic and social origins in growth points and market centers. Situated about 15 kilometers south-east of Harare, Epworth became one of Zimbabwe's largest peri-urban settlements due to the combined effect of demographic, political, and socioeconomic factors, among others. This chapter interrogates the various forces behind this unprecedented population growth. It demonstrates the relationship between Epworth's ballooning population and the various pull and push factors of urbanization. For example, immigration contributed immensely to this rise, although natural increase in births also contributed fairly significantly. This chapter examines the impact of population dynamics and other variables that were linked to the rapid expansion of Epworth on the overall development processes, arguing that economic and social infrastructure became conditioned by such dynamics.*

### INTRODUCTION

A big number of urban centres that continue to sprout around the world originated from growth points and market centres. The increasing numbers of rural to urban migrants in sub-Saharan Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular have prompted this proliferation of urban settlements. Zimbabwean cities such as Chitungwiza, and town centres like Norton, Ruwa, and others have emerged due to the impact of both rural-urban and urban-peri-urban drift. In the process, this has had an effect on the utilisation of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-4165-3.ch019

land and contestations over boundaries between and among local and urban councils. It has also sparked debate on policy issues affecting urban development, with the Government torn between expanding such emerging urban settlements and improving existing infrastructure in already established towns and cities. Contestations have also arisen over environmental issues. The burgeoning settlements have interacted with the immediate and remote environments in a number of fascinating, but sometimes disturbing ways, including degradation of land and rivers due to extraction of sand and clearance of bushes in pursuit of settlement spaces. However, the development of new settlements has also brought good news to the local government fiscus, with new land owners faced with the mandatory tasks of settling rates and bills; hence, raising new income levels of municipalities and town councils alike.

Situated about fifteen kilometres south-east of Harare, Epworth became one of Zimbabwe's largest peri-urban settlements due to the combined effect of demographic, political and socio-economic factors, among others. An interrogation of the various forces behind this unprecedented population growth was made possible by tracing statistical data recorded by population agencies in the particular period. Despite differences and inconsistencies in the figures obtained, Epworth's population continued to rise in response to a wide range of factors. Immigration contributed immensely to this rise, although natural increase in births also contributed fairly significantly. This chapter examines population dynamics and other variables that were linked to the rapid expansion of Epworth, arguing that economic and social infrastructure became conditioned by such dynamics. Notable also is the fact that civic organizations, the private and public sectors have converged to rethink ways of regularising and upgrading the mostly informal settlement of Epworth to modern urban and rural planning standards. This formalisation process has, however, been a recent effort which was marked by policy shift in terms of squatters. In the early years of independence in the 1980s decade, Government approach to urbanisation was underpinned by a policy which characterized informal settlements as economically unproductive, unhealthy, and riddled with criminal activities and, thus, subject to forceful removal. Nonetheless, the long and unique history of Epworth, first as a Wesleyan Methodist Church land and later in 1983 as a Government local authority area, shaped the development path that Epworth took in time and space as a force to reckon with.

The chapter makes further historical analysis of the economic and social developments that the Epworth settlement went through from 1980 to 2012. It demonstrates how the residents sustained themselves, particularly considering the limited means of production available to them in the face of demographic pressure. It provides an enquiry into the livelihood dynamics of the Epworth community at the household level and the forces affecting the development of the urban sector. Such factors include, inter alia, economic engagements like sand extraction, small-scale business enterprises (mostly food and clothes shops) and urban agriculture (Epworth Profiling Report, 2009). However, the Epworth Local Board (ELB), the responsible authority for the area, enacted by-laws to govern and regulate the informal economy as well as matters of housing and education. Applying the Human Development Index (which measures shelter, health, education, and sanitation levels of residents, among other welfare variables) would reveal debilitating social standards marked by extreme poverty and unsustainable household incomes for the general populace in Epworth. In general, vulnerable social conditions which are mapped by widespread poverty evolve from fragile economic options available to people (Obhudho and Mhlanga, 1985:77). In light of this assertion, developmental patterns in Epworth were not only affected by local conditions, but also social, economic and political dynamics at the national level. Introduced in the early 1990s, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), for instance, brought about far reaching effects on the national economy (Mlambo, 1995). Similarly, other national campaigns like 'Operation Clean Up' (dubbed 'Murambatsvina', meaning 'No to Dirty'); explain both the effect of population explosion and

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-political-economy-of-land-and-urban-development/204759](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-political-economy-of-land-and-urban-development/204759)

## Related Content

---

### Preparing African Higher Education Faculty in Technology

Wanjira Kinuthia (2005). *Encyclopedia of Developing Regional Communities with Information and Communication Technology* (pp. 576-580).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/preparing-african-higher-education-faculty/11444](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/preparing-african-higher-education-faculty/11444)

### Exploring Ways to Use 3D Urban Models to Visualize Multi-Scalar Climate Change Data and Mitigation Change Models for e-Planning

John Danahy, Robert Wright, Jacob Mitchell and Rob Feick (2013). *International Journal of E-Planning Research* (pp. 1-17).

[www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-ways-to-use-3d-urban-models-to-visualize-multi-scalar-climate-change-data-and-mitigation-change-models-for-e-planning/78888](http://www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-ways-to-use-3d-urban-models-to-visualize-multi-scalar-climate-change-data-and-mitigation-change-models-for-e-planning/78888)

### Challenges and Prospects for E-Planning in Lusophone African Countries: Evidence from the UN E-Government Survey 2012

Carlos Nunes Silva (2013). *International Journal of E-Planning Research* (pp. 60-69).

[www.irma-international.org/article/challenges-and-prospects-for-e-planning-in-lusophone-african-countries/78892](http://www.irma-international.org/article/challenges-and-prospects-for-e-planning-in-lusophone-african-countries/78892)

### Political Online Communities in Saudi Arabia

Yeslam Al-Saggaf and John Weckert (2005). *Encyclopedia of Developing Regional Communities with Information and Communication Technology* (pp. 557-563).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/political-online-communities-saudi-arabia/11441](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/political-online-communities-saudi-arabia/11441)

### Smart City Planning: Complexity

Ulrik Ekman (2018). *International Journal of E-Planning Research* (pp. 1-21).

[www.irma-international.org/article/smart-city-planning/204622](http://www.irma-international.org/article/smart-city-planning/204622)