

Chapter 56

Past, Present and Future Population Growth and Urban Management in Zimbabwe: Putting Institutions into Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The central focus of this chapter is to analyse the urban population growth–urban management nexus in Zimbabwean cities. These cities are registering rapid population growth rates, due mainly to massive rural to urban migration and natural increase. Ideally, rapid urban population growth rates should be proportionate to urban infrastructure, facilities and services. This is not in the case in Zimbabwean cities, where the development of informal settlements, rising urban poverty, dilapidated urban infrastructure and other urban developmental challenges are rampant. Drawing from Malthusian theory, the current conditions in Zimbabwean cities represents that stage where the positive and negative checks are expected. In putting together this chapter, we used archival sources such as newspapers, government reports and other secondary sources. We conclude that planning initiatives and population control measures need to be used in Zimbabwean cities to address inefficiency and urban management challenges, which may be compromising urban sustainability. This study provides evidence-based information that urban local authorities may use to formulate policies to manage urban problems.

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INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwean cities have been experiencing rapid population growth since Independence (Rakodi, 2006) in 1980, associated with the increased movement of the black population into urban areas. This is attributable to a number of factors, including the removal of the influx control legislation and the migration of the families of 'single' men who had previously been confined to rural areas owing to legislative restriction and economic reasons. Additional factors include the population pressure in most communal lands, the stagnation of employment opportunities on commercial farms, the relatively higher average incomes for blacks in urban areas, and the perception that employment opportunities were greater in such areas. Finally, the drought of 1992 had affected rural areas and there was increased security of urban living owing to the Mugabe government's extension of home ownership to occupants of formerly publicly owned rental-housing stock (Patel, 1988).

The growth of cities is not a problem for as long as it is proportionate to the availability of facilities. However, the growth of Zimbabwean cities after 1980 is creating a plethora of urban problems. Rakodi (2006, 47) is of the view that the urban management system in the post-colonial cities is failing, as evidenced by poor urban facility provision and governance (i.e. failure to respond to rapid population growth). Rapid population growth has increased the demand for utilities in urban areas, limiting the capacity of local authorities, who are unable to raise finance to invest in utilities and infrastructure and carry out maintenance on the dilapidated, inadequate infrastructure (Mushamba *et al*, 2014). Urban problems are a result of urban management that is not carried out in coordination with urban population control institutions. Mukheli *et al* (2002) support this view, arguing that service provision must be linked to urban population growth and urban population control institutions if urban management is to be effective. This concurs with the assertion by Rakodi (1990:105) that "unless government responds in a realistic way to urban population growth, the welfare in the urban areas continues to deteriorate". Against this background, this chapter examines the population growth-urban management discourse on Zimbabwean cities.

THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on Malthusian theory, the Optimal City Size hypothesis propounded by Cannan (1924) and advanced by Robbins, Dalton and Carr-Saunders (Getz 1979, 204), and the Carrying Capacity Concept in planning by Bishop and others (1974). The central thesis of the Malthusian theory is that when population growth exceeds the rate of food production, this gives rise to negative and positive checks. Similarly, when urban population growth exceeds the rate of urban infrastructure provision, urban problems start to manifest. This theory highlights the need to link urban population control institutions and urban management. In contrast to these theories, the Marxist and the neo-Marxist theories point out some of the loopholes of Malthus's arguments, including its neglect of the labour aspect in population increase. Marx upholds the view that population increases mean an increase in work force, and consequently an increase in productivity (Gimenez, 1973). This means that population increase in urban areas is not necessarily a negative development but rather a likely contribution to urban productivity. Moreover, Malthusian theories fail to foresee the effects of improvements in technology and transport. Notwithstanding these criticisms, the Malthusian theory, the Optimal City Size theory and the carrying capacity concept remain essential in urban management, specifically in developing countries like Zim-

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