

Transforming Urban Policy to Combat Wetland Degradation in Harare

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Abstract

The city of Harare set itself the ambitious goal of being a world-class city by 2025 and vital to this goal is a transformation of the urban policy charting the way towards a more environmentally sustainable path. Based on the status quo this is a pipe dream. Tourism and Environment Minister Mangaliso Ndlovu has given a chilling warning that all wetlands in Zimbabwe's towns and cities will disappear within 20 years if municipalities continued on their current model of development. This paper posits that a radical transformation of Harare's urban policy can aid in combatting wetland degradation. Data were derived via a critical review of legislation, city by-laws, a case study analysis of Harare and an analysis of a plethora of reports. By arresting rampant corruption within government and the city's administrative structures, strengthening protections on wetland ecosystems through robust legislation, better management of inter-party contestations (ZANU-PF and MDC) wetlands in Harare can be utilised sustainably.

Keywords

Urbanization, Wetland Degradation, Urban Policy, Land Barons

1. Introduction

One of the most significant issues faced by African cities in the modern era is, without doubt, vanishing urban wetlands as a result of urbanization and the construction of infrastructure (Chirisa, 2019; Matamanda et al., 2018; Matamanda, 2020; Goodfellow, 2013; Kalanzi, 2015; Nemutamvuni et al., 2020; Schuijt, 2002). This is especially the case in cities that are expanding their urban areas at a rapid rate. According to Tafadzwa Muguti a Provincial Town Planner approximately 115,000 ha of predominantly wetland land in and around Harare is occupied illegally with corruption being a major driving force. In this perspective, it is vital

to assess the contributions made by local governments, or the lack thereof, in the construction of sustainable cities through the maintenance of wetlands, which are crucial for water supply in cities. Wetlands are essential for water supply in cities (Ahn & Schmidt, 2019). This paper examines the crucial role that urban municipalities play in the management of urban wetlands as well as the impact that this role has on the sustainability of cities (or lack thereof). The question of what involvement, in terms of legislation, policy, and action, local governments can have in protecting urban wetlands in Zimbabwe is the central theme. The focus of this study will be on the city of Harare in Zimbabwe. By providing an answer to this topic, the paper's prime objective is to make a contribution to both public policy and academic scholarship on the environmental responsibilities and tasks of local governments in the management of wetlands and their influence on global sustainability (Muziri et al., 2019; Nemitamvuni et al., 2020; Richardson, 1993; Kalanzi, 2015).

From **Table 1**, it becomes apparent how dire the wetlands crisis is in Harare and if mitigatory measures continue to be flouted soon, Harare will run out of wetlands and possibly water in general. The need for transformation becomes even more apparent as this City-wide emergency snowballs out of control. The primary argument is that Zimbabwe's urban municipalities, rather than being the guardians of urban land on which wetlands can be located, are the primary offenders of wetland degradation through willful contempt for wetland norms and laws. This is the key allegation of the argument. They are, on the other hand, intended to play the role of guardians or leaders in the field of wetland preservation. When it comes to urban land use, legislation, and governance, such a paradox encapsulates the contradictions and responsibilities that come with having influence over the local government. This is due to the fact that local administrations

Table 1. Loss of wetlands.

| Wetland Area | % Loss |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Prospect | 15.7 |
| Kuwadzana | 30 |
| Mbare | 30.8 |
| Warren Park | 30.8 |
| Dzivarasekwa | 32.5 |
| National Sports Stadium | 36.4 |
| Tafara | 46.2 |
| Budiriro | 49 |
| Houghton Park | 71 |
| Epworth | 78.8 |
| TOTAL | 49.6 |

Source: Moyo, L. and Cunliffe, R. 2020. Loss of wetlands in Harare, 2008-2019. Unpublished report prepared for Harare Wetlands Trust, Harare.

in Zimbabwe are tasked with the responsibility of controlling urban space, which includes regions of marsh. In addition to this, both the federal and municipal governments of Zimbabwe are mandated by the constitution to uphold citizens' rights to a clean and healthy environment ([Government of Zimbabwe, 2013](#)). The same constitution also gives residents the right to protect the environment in their own communities; however, it does not specifically specify wetlands as a type of habitat that should be protected. It is important to keep in mind, however, that wetland areas fall under the broader category of urban ecology and environment, which is in turn governed by the constitution in addition to a number of different rules.

Before moving on to the broader topic at hand, it is important to first present a working definition of the term "wetlands". According to the report, "Zimbabwe does not have its own definition of wetlands...but has accepted the Ramsar concept." In the absence of a country-specific definition, Zimbabwe decided to accept the Ramsar definition and make some modest modifications to it. According to this definition, a wetland is "any region of marsh, fen, peatland, or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish, or salt, and includes riparian land adjacent to the wetland." Whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is fresh, brackish, or salt ([Government of Zimbabwe, 2003: p. 11](#)). This definition is consistent with the Ramsar definition, which defines wetlands as "areas of marsh, fen, peatland, or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish, or salt, including areas of marine water with a depth of less than six meters at low tide" (Wetlands are defined as "areas of marsh, fen, peatland, or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary (Article 1.1 of the [Ramsar Convention, 1971](#)).

Under the Ramsar Convention, "smart use" of wetland areas has also been highlighted as an important concept ([Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2007](#)). Such calls have been echoed in policy circles as well as scholarly circles, which is evident by the fact that the push to protect wetland areas has gained pace in recent years (see, [Richardson, 1993](#); [Farrier & Tucker, 2000](#); [Nelson et al., 2017](#); [Marambanyika, 2015](#)). The global commitments that certain states have made to improving environmental management have directly led to an increase in the demand for wetland areas that are sustainable and "wisely used" ([Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2007](#)). This includes Zimbabwe's commitment to fully complying with, implementing, and enforcing environmental law in accordance with regional and international statutes, agreements, and conventions. Some examples of these regional and international statutes, agreements, and conventions include the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and the Ramsar Convention on the Protection of Wetlands. In light of the fact that Zimbabwe is a party to both of these treaties, the administration of wetlands needs to be incorporated into urban policy and planning in order to accomplish sustainable urban expansion.

Harare's wetlands have already experienced a significant reduction in size and considerable degradation of the remaining areas. Despite the introduction of ex-

PLICIT legislation to protect wetlands in 2007, development has resulted in the conversion of roughly half of all wetlands. Harare's access to both surface and groundwater is being negatively impacted by this. More than 250 locations currently have recent or ongoing wetlands development, which is a problem that is still present. The last remaining wetland areas must be protected from construction and farming, restored to their original state, and especially maintained for water harvesting. Failure to address this issue will exacerbate the city's future water issues.

Keeping the preceding information in mind, there is a lot of value in researching local governments and the management of wetlands in cities located in the Global South such as Harare. To begin, the inquiry's applicability is connected to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and their vision for sustainable urban development (cities), which can be seen in Goals (SDGs) 6, 11, 13, 14, and 15. This is where the inquiry's relevance lies. When viewed as a whole, these Goals demonstrate that wetland regions inside urban settings are absolutely necessary for implementing climate action in accordance with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ([Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 2018](#)). Second, it is essential to obtain an awareness of the role that African local governments play in the conservation and management of urban wetland areas at an era when biophilic city design is becoming increasingly popular in the field of urban planning. Biophilic cities are those that combine an intimate and everyday touch with nature into the design and development of urban architecture in a variety of different ways ([Beatley & Newman, 2013](#)). In conclusion, the study makes a contribution to both academic and policy knowledge of the role that environmental policy, law, and local bylaws play in fostering sustainable wetland management in fast urbanizing cities.

The following is a breakdown of how the article is organized: I will first provide an overview of the methodological methods before discussing the theoretical perspective that drives the inquiry. After that, there is a detailed analysis of the previous research that has been done. After that, I will describe the advantages of wetlands in broad strokes while making specific references to Harare City, and then I will go into detail about the state of the wetlands in Harare. An analysis of the laws and rules that regulate the protection of wetland areas, as well as the challenges encountered when seeking to preserve wetland areas in Harare, is carried out prior to the completion of the project.

2. The Subject of Research

The management of Zimbabwe's urban wetlands is the subject of this study, with Harare City serving as a case study and taking up the majority of the attention. According to the website for the city, Harare City "was founded on the headwaters of the Manyame and Gwebi Catchment basins, a region predominantly covered by wetlands." This is significant since Harare City gets its water from sub-

terranean aquifers (Matamanda et al., 2018: p. 1). It is composed of wetlands that have been designated as Ramsar sites, but there are also a great number of smaller ones (Cunlife, 2020). As a consequence of this, and taking into consideration the numerous anthropogenic activities that take place within the city and its environs, the city provides a vantage point from which to examine the role of local government in regulating and protecting urban wetland areas.

3. Research Methodology

The data for the study was derived from a number of different sources, including a review of legislation and city bylaws, a case study analysis of Harare, and a critical analysis of reports that were produced by the Harare City Council and environmental organizations such as the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR). The definition of a case study is “an empirical examination of a current phenomenon in its real-life setting, particularly when the borders between phenomenon and context are not immediately obvious” (Yin, 1994: p. 13). Scholars opine that a researcher is better able to conduct an in-depth and relevant investigation of a phenomenon if they use a case study methodology (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). These are some of the reasons and explanations that led me to make the methodological decision to use Harare City, Zimbabwe, as the case study. Harare City is located in Zimbabwe, which is gradually experiencing high levels of wetland degradation.

As part of the process of collecting data for the study, I also review and analyze policy documents from the Harare City Council (HCC), debates from Parliament (known as “the Hansard”), reports and policy documents from the Ministries of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing and Environment, Climate Change, Tourism and Hospitality Industry, as well as several Acts of Parliament that govern the management and protection of wetlands. During various workshops and seminars, various organizations, including the Harare City Council, Open Council Harare, Open Parliament of Zimbabwe, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), such as the Conservation Society of Monavale (COSMO) and Birds of Africa, amongst others, presented data.

In addition to this, I depend on empirical evidence derived from a critical review and content analysis of grey literature produced by citizens’ organisations such as the Harare Wetlands Trust (HWT), the Dzivarasekwa Residents Trust, and the Budiro Water Foundation. The location of the researcher, their living experiences, and the observations they made in various suburbs of Harare all had an impact on the studies of wetland loss.

The Overarching Plan for Municipal Sustainability

Recent research has been centered on the question of whether or not “city planning systems, on their own, would be able to achieve the transformation required to address climate change and sustainable development,” particularly in

developing nations (see for example [Gibberd, 2017: p. 200](#)). In order to accomplish this, they have made it a requirement that the city sustainability indicator frameworks, which are detailed in the city capabilities framework, be completely integrated in the municipal planning and governance ([Gibberd, 2017](#)). It is envisaged that the implementation of such indicators will result in an improvement to the city planning process provided that the requisite conditions and the will required from local government officials and city planners are met ([Gibberd, 2017](#)). However, for the purposes of this article's analysis, I contend that even though the city capability framework helps in examining legal inadequacies such as spatial, legal regimes, environmental policies, and council by-laws, it falls short of effectively analyzing how unregulated and irregular urban developments continue to pose an existential threat to urban ecosystems. This is because the city capability framework helps in examining legal inadequacies such as spatial, legal regimes, and environmental policies and by-laws. In this regard, I turn my critical eye to the Urban Sustainability Framework (USF), which was published by the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC) in the year 2016 ([World Bank, 2018](#)). The Urban Sustainability Framework (USF) is a four-stage process that focuses on a variety of topics, including city diagnosis, visioning and setting objectives for action toward achieving urban sustainability, funding urban sustainability actionable plans, and the monitoring and evaluation framework for urban sustainability ([World Bank, 2018](#)). In this way, the framework places a strong emphasis on integrated urban planning and governance, which is consistent with the primary question posed in the article.

Using this framework, I intend to show how the loss of wetlands, which has occurred despite environmental rules, urban planning laws, processes, and council by-laws, is a microcosm of city authorities' weak governance and failure to apply the Urban Sustainability Framework. One could make the case that if local and central government officials are truly committed to sustainable urban planning, they will adhere to legal, institutional, and policy frameworks that include sustainability in land use, human settlement planning, and other urban infrastructure improvements. This is an argument that has the potential to be supported ([Matamanda, 2020](#)). The City Master Plan, the Regional Town and Council Planning by-laws, and the local environmental plans (LEPs) in Zimbabwe need to be adhered to in order to accomplish this ([Community Water Alliance, 2021](#)). On the basis of this principle, the USF upholds the sustainability of cities through practice, law, and policies, particularly those enacted by urban governments.

I hope that by utilizing the analytical capabilities of the USF, I will be able to demonstrate how and why legal and policy regimes alone, without a practical commitment to achieving urban sustainability, will continue to result in the loss of urban ecosystems such as wetlands in many developing countries, including Harare, Zimbabwe. This is because legal and policy regimes are not accompanied by a practical commitment to achieving urban sustainability. This observa-

tion takes on a new level of relevance and significance when it is considered in the light of urban sprawl and the process of urbanization. An engagement of this kind is crucial for academic research, but it is also important for policy dialogues about urban planning and sustainability in the context of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 11. According to World Bank research, “The Urban Sustainability Framework provides tools and methodologies that cities of all sizes and levels of development can apply to improve their sustainability over time” (World Bank, 2018: p. 4). When viewed from this angle, the USF of the future can be utilized to gain an understanding of the numerous facets of sustainability, including actions, achievements, and setbacks, as well as the role that cities play in ensuring, maintaining, and securing greener, healthier, more resilient, and sustainable cities.

A Critical Analysis of the Literature on Wetland Preservation and Urban Community Governance

This component of the review of the relevant literature is broken up into two parts. It is a collection of debates that can be found in published works about the best way to safeguard wetland areas through legislation and policy. In addition to this, it investigates the practical relationship that exists between local governance and the management of wetlands. Nevertheless, it is of the utmost importance to identify substantial gaps in existing research, which is a topic that is at the core of the literature review.

There is a lot of literature on a variety of topics pertaining to the protection of wetland areas all over the world, particularly in countries such as Brazil, which appear to have robust environmental laws and legislation (Junk et al., 2014). When it comes to the regulation of wetlands, such literature makes a number of allusions to the environmental responsibilities and obligations of both the central government and the local governments. Even in Brazil, however, there are differences of opinion, with some researchers condemning the country’s wetland legislation, in particular the Federal Environmental Laws [or Forest Code]. [Citation needed] (Rosolen et al., 2015). The case study of the United States of America (USA) is notably highlighted in the current body of research, and it appears to have served as a model for the implementation of legislation and policies that support the responsible use and management of wetlands. The United States Clean Water Act is in effect there. More importantly, the case *Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County v. US Army Corps of Engineers*, which was heard by the Supreme Court in 2001 and resulted in the SWANCC verdict, has had a considerable impact on judicial activism in the United States for the preservation of wetland areas (Goldman-Carter, 2005). Even while it is helpful, the literature on the legal aspects of wetland protection suffers from a major problem in that it strives to give juridical answers as a means of preventing wetland loss as a goal in and of itself. This is a flawed approach (Sutton, 1998). Although legal concerns are extremely important, protecting wetland areas also requires political will, the commitment of local and national governments, and the par-

ticipation of citizens working together.

As a consequence of the aforementioned, a body of legal literature has developed on a global scale, providing a sound basis for comprehension of international environmental law and how it relates to the protection of wetlands (Farrier & Tucker, 2000; Shine & de Klemm, 1999). The assumption that underpins this research is that a robust legislative environment is beneficial to the process of wetland conservation. It is important to note that even while most jurisdictions have strong legal frameworks in place, urban wetland areas are nonetheless typically exploited in a manner that is not sustainable. This is proven by past academic research (Nelson et al., 2017). The current investigation, which is centered on Zimbabwe, contributes empirical insights into wetlands protection by explaining why, despite an enabling policy and legal environment, successful and long-term wetlands protection remains elusive. These findings were gleaned from the country's role as the focal point of the investigation (Matamanda et al., 2018; Cunlife, 2020). This leads to a discussion about the role that important government players, particularly decision-makers, play in ensuring compliance with wetlands legislation and regulations, as well as the level of commitment that they have in this regard. It is underlined in the research that, for instance, in the United States, local government has been a trustworthy player for supporting proper wetlands management and restoration (Schauwecker, 2008). On the other hand, local administrations in some jurisdictions are at the forefront of violating the regulations and norms pertaining to wetlands.

There is a trend in the academic literature to view legal remedies as the cure for reversing wetland loss. This is despite the fact that certain countries, particularly developing countries, can learn from how strong legislation can promote sustainable wetland management in cities. However, this is not the case (Armstrong, 2009). There is a growing body of literature that describes how society (urban residents) interacts with the law (and vice versa), as well as how the intersection of capital and politics occurs in the context of wetlands management. This literature was produced in response to the faults described above (Matamanda et al., 2018; Sithole & Goredema, 2013; Mutisi, 2014). This literature is consistent with scholarly work done in Uganda and Kenya, which helps enhance our understanding of how improper management of wetland areas affects citizens in a variety of temporal and spatial circumstances (Schuyt, 2005; Nelson et al., 2017).

In addition, there is a substantial amount of empirical study on the disappearance of wetland areas in Zimbabwe (Cunlife, 2020; Murungweni, 2013). Despite the breadth of this research, the majority of it has concentrated on factors that lead to the disappearance of wetland habitat as a result of a wide variety of human activities (Matamanda et al., 2018; Mandishona & Knight, 2019; Muziri et al., 2019; Mutisi, 2014). However, there is a paucity of knowledge regarding the role that local government policies play and their efforts in the protection of wetland areas. In the sense that they pay attention to the challenges that wet-

lands provide from a variety of vantage points, these bodies of literature are susceptible to criticism from the academic community (see [Marambanyika, 2015](#); [Muziri et al., 2019](#)). As a consequence of this, a precise and detailed comprehension of the function that local governments play in the destruction of wetlands is typically watered down, if it receives any scholarly or policy consideration at all ([Sithole & Goredema, 2013](#)). Literature, on the other hand, has a tendency to concentrate on how common people go about their daily occupations, such as farming, and how it effects the presence of wetlands ([Marambanyika, 2015](#); [Sharai et al., 2020](#)). One may make the case that this is just one aspect of a significantly more nuanced and difficult scenario that involves a number of different aspects. As a consequence of this, we need to focus our analytical efforts on legislation, policy, and practice, and investigate the ways in which the actions of local government officials, who contribute to the destruction of wetland habitats through both intentional and unintentional acts, impact the viability of urban environments.

Again, there is a glaring hole in African studies to this day, as evidenced by the paucity of evaluations on how and to what degree local governments are complying to environmental regulations in paving the way for the conservation of urban ecosystems through planning, design, and enforcement. This is a visible gap in African studies that has existed for quite some time ([Swanepoel & Barnard, 2007](#); [Richardson, 1993](#)). However, there are some notable deviations from the rule in the published research. Even though they are difficult to find, there are a few pieces of academic writing, particularly in Uganda (see [Kabumbuli & Kiwazi, 2009](#); [Richardson, 1993](#)) and South Africa (see [Richardson, 1993](#)), that provide a clear outline of the role that local governments play in advocating for the preservation and protection of wetland ecosystems (see, for example, [Irlich, n.d.](#); [Pasquini & Cowling, 2015](#)). In spite of the availability of this body of knowledge, there is relatively little academic research on the role that local governments play in the preservation of urban wetlands and the failures that they have committed in this area ([Kalanzi, 2015](#)). As a direct consequence of this, our understanding of the interplay among municipal administration, legal systems, political systems, and the preservation of wetland areas in African towns is quite limited.

Positive outcomes that can result from protecting Harare's urban wetlands.

Wetlands provide a vast array of functions, some of which include the provision of water in urban areas, the filtration of water, and the sequestration of carbon dioxide (for the latter, see, for example, [Pant et al., 2003](#)). In addition to the regulatory value of carbon dioxide sequestration, they are essential for a variety of other reasons as well. Harare City's wetland areas are responsible for recharging the water supply that feeds Lake Chivero, which in turn provides water to the people that live in the city ([Cunlife, 2020](#)). Since the beginning of time, agricultural practices that take place in wetland environments have been asso-

ciated with both siltation and eutrophication. Because of this, additional filtration chemicals need to be purchased, which raises both the quality and cost of Harare's water treatment (Gweshe, 2020). The municipal administration of Harare, Zimbabwe and the Environment Management Agency (EMA), both bemoan the high rate of eutrophication and contamination of the downstream lakes Chivero and Manyame, which are the city's primary water sources (Kutaura, 2018). Because wetlands act as carbon sinks that purify water, Harare City stands to benefit from the sustainable management of wetlands both inside and outside of the city borders. This is because of the city's commitment to environmental protection.

However, wetlands also affect the livability of cities by lowering the concentrations of heat islands, which results in cities being cooler, fewer food and storms occurring, and providing habitat for biodiversity by serving as a refuge for mammals, amphibians, invertebrates, and birds. These factors all contribute to a city's ability to attract and retain residents (de Groot, 1992). This is especially true in Harare, which contains a variety of water-dependent habitats that attract tourists, as evidenced by the fact that the Monavale Vlei and Mukuvisi woodlands are frequently visited by tourists. In a similar vein, urban wetlands serve as urban green spaces that provide chances for recreation and tourism, which contributes to their aesthetic value in the city. This is the case in Harare's Monavale vlei, which is popular among tourists for its bird watching opportunities (BirdLife International, 2015). Once more, Harare's urban wetlands contribute to the overall atmosphere of the city.

Wetlands are essential sources of water in a world that is progressively being impacted by the effects of climate change, including increased temperatures, heat waves, a rise in sea level, and decreased rainfall combined with ongoing droughts (Schuijt, 2002; Turner et al., 2000). Due to the fact that most cities are experiencing water shortages, there is an increased requirement for the protection of wetland regions, particularly in urban areas that are dependent on wetland areas for their water supply. As a consequence of this, the viability of the city is improved in terms of maintaining a consistent supply of water. It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of conserving Harare's wetland areas, as shown by the negative effects that degraded wetland areas have had on the water table beneath the city, which has led to a lack of available water (Gweshe, 2020; Cunlife, 2020). In spite of the numerous attributes, purposes, and benefits that they offer, wetland ecosystems are currently facing extinction threats, not only in Zimbabwe but also across the globe (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 2018). As a consequence of this, it is accurate to assert that wetland ecosystems are the most imperiled on the entire planet.

According to the Ramsar Agreement (UNESCO.ORG, 2013), seven of Zimbabwe's wetland areas have been designated as being of "Wetlands of International Importance." The agreement mandates that these areas be preserved in accordance with its provisions. There are three of these located in Harare, while

the remaining ones are located outside of the city. In addition to Cleveland Dam (site no. 2102) and Victoria Falls National Park (site no. 2108), other sites include Monavale Wetland (site no. 2107), Mana Pools National Park (site no. 2106), Lake Chivero and Manyame (site no. 2105), Driefontein Grasslands (site no. 2104), Chinhoyi Caves (site no. 2103), and Driefontein Grasslands (site no. 2104) (Ramsar, 2016). In spite of the fact that they are on the Ramsar List, these wetland areas are fragile and susceptible to being exploited by humans, which presents an existential risk to their continued existence. The status of several additional wetland areas in Harare, including those not included on the Ramsar List, has also been negatively impacted. It is anticipated that the wetland areas in Harare will cover a total area of 21,750 hectares (Cunliffe, 2020: p. 2).

In recent years, the Harare City Council has given residential stands to people living in urban areas in wetland regions such as Glen Norah, Budiriro, Mabvuku, Warren Park, Waterfalls, Belvedere, Msasa Park, and Ruwa. This practice has come to be characterized as “disorderly expansion”. The building of wetland structures has, in the majority of cases, made areas more susceptible to abrupt flooding. This was the case, for example, in certain areas of Budiriro and Chitungwiza in the year 2021. Wetlands are currently being investigated for their potential role in the food mitigation process. On the other hand, the fact that the trend of changing land use and converting wetland areas into housing has persisted for such a long time speaks volumes about the local government’s commitment to preserving and maintaining wetland areas for future generations, in addition to supporting urban sustainability in terms of water quality and availability. It is indisputable that the protection of Harare’s urban wetlands is an investment that is well worth making.

The condition of Harare’s Urban Wetlands

New legislation to protect wetlands was brought into effect in 2007. Despite this the loss of wetlands continues unabated. Analysis of recent Google Earth imagery resulted in the identification of over 250 sites where there are ongoing or recently initiated developments on remaining wetland areas in Harare (Figure 1). The message is clear, the development of wetlands is continuing at a rapid pace.

The Monavale wetland, where homes now stand, and the Belvedere wetland by the National Sports Stadium are two of the several wetlands that can be seen in and around Harare that have subsequently been transformed into stands where a school was being built while a multipurpose center (hotel and wholesale) was only recently finished constructed on a wetland at Ashdown Park. Balantyne Park, Borrowdale, has wetlands (opposite the race course). Many people in Chitungwiza, Budiriro 3 and 4, Tynwald, Glen Lorne, and Budiriro 4 all face immediate risk of construction activities occurring there. Although it is impossible to differentiate the status of the wetlands in Harare from the condition of the wetlands in the rest of Zimbabwe, it does appear that Harare has a distinct pattern of acquiring regions that contain wetlands. In contrast to neighboring cities,

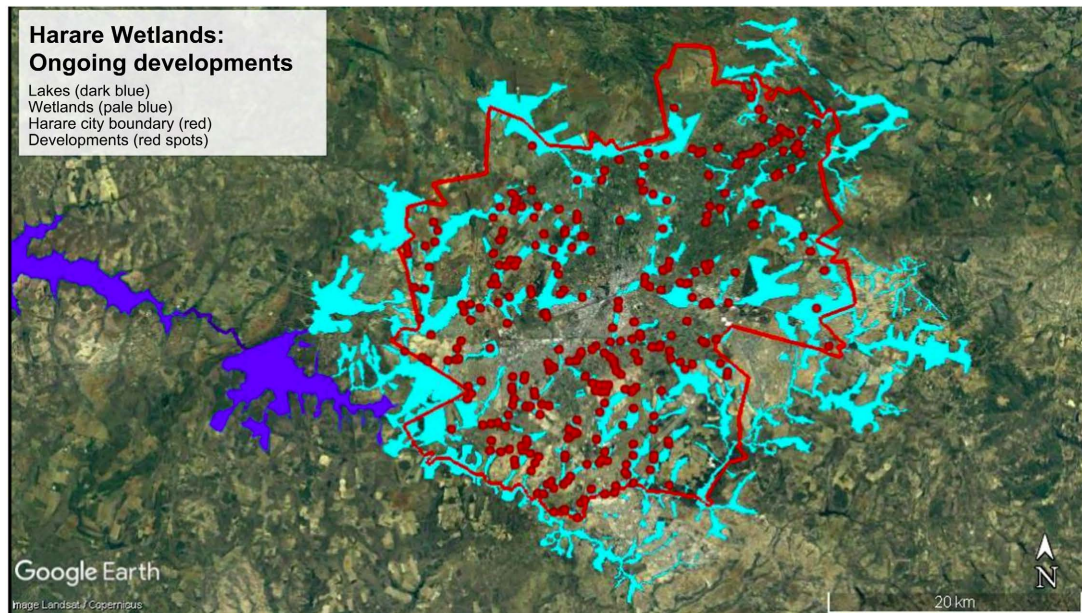


Figure 1. Current extent and location of wetlands in Harare (Source: HWT, 2020).

Harare has undergone rapid urbanization and is currently experiencing a significant shortage of housing (Sithole & Goredema, 2013; Matamanda, 2020). As a direct consequence of this, the bulk of Harare's wetland regions face the prospect of being transformed into residential areas. On the other hand, not all of them are transformed into residential neighborhoods. Others have been transformed into a "hive of commercial operations," with gas stations, housing communities, and other facilities associated with commercial enterprise taking over the area (Ruzvidzo, 2020).

To support the above, Mr Percy Toriro, a Zimbabwean urban town planner, stated in Harare that by 2020, roughly 43% - 49% of wetlands would have been damaged by diverse human activities (Toriro, 2020; Toriro, 2020). Given the unpleasant nature of the situation, it begs the issue of how and why this pattern persists, in particular in light of the fact that the Harare City Council (HCC) and the Environment Management Agency are keeping a close eye on the situation (EMA). The convergence of a number of factors, including urban sprawl, initiatives for city growth such as the construction of urban infrastructure, rubbish disposal, and farming in wetland areas, is both a contributing factor and a potential answer to this problem (Muziri et al., 2019). In this regard, there is a growing consensus among scholars that wetland areas in Zimbabwean cities, particularly Harare, are in danger of extinction due to the stresses placed on urban land by human activity (Murungweni, 2013; Muziri et al., 2019). It is possible to make the case that, in the absence of a change in the actions taken by local governments, this pattern will persist. This is demonstrated by the ongoing destruction of wetland areas in a variety of residential suburbs, namely Kuwadzana, Warren Park, Belvedere, Malbereign, Epworth, Mabvuku, and Waterfalls, amongst others. One could argue that this pattern will continue. To better man-

age the human-built environment-nature nexus, academics from other countries have urged for the implementation of the Built Environment Sustainability Tool (BEST) and its widespread use (Gibberd, 2015).

In 2013, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environment voiced concerns about the survival of urban wetlands in Zimbabwe, particularly in the country's capital city of Harare, to highlight the precarious nature of these wetlands in the face of ongoing human activity in urban areas. Specifically, the Committee was concerned about the survival of urban wetlands in Harare, which is a prime example of the vulnerability of urban wetlands (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2018). Regrettably, large infrastructure projects in human settlements have taken place since then, and they continue to degrade wetland habitats in Harare. This is related with the construction of infrastructure for industrial places and leisure facilities, as seen by the acquisition of Harare's Hillside Wetlands by former Cabinet Minister Petronella Kagonye (Gweshe, 2020). It is essential to keep in mind that the appropriation of wetland areas by influential political elites must be understood in the context of Harare City Council-supervised land-use corruption and mismanagement. This is something that must not be forgotten (Chiweshe, 2020). This pattern, on the other hand, is not new because it has been there for a long time and has been firmly established by the municipal bureaucracy and elected councillors in the distribution of both residential and commercial lots (see Muchadenyika & Williams, 2017; Uchena, 2019). The beginning of this fashion trend can be traced all the way back to the year 2021. According to a news program from Aljazeera from the year 2021, "Harare City Council is battling an increase in unauthorized settlements that have developed as affluent businesses known as land barons have parceled out land without proper planning and approval."

An environmental law organization that has been at the vanguard of fighting for wetland conservation in Zimbabwe has provided a brief summary of the current situation of urban wetland areas, which reads as follows:

Despite the existence of a legal framework that is intended to protect Zimbabwe's wetland ecosystems, the country's agricultural expansion, rapid urbanization, quarry extraction, borehole drilling, and pollution, as well as commercial and residential development; road construction; resource extraction; industrial siting processes; waste; dredge and disposal, are all threats to the country's wetland ecosystems. The most significant threat to Harare's wetland areas is posed by the city's residential and commercial building initiatives (ZELA, 2020).

In addition, it is abundantly obvious that the need for housing in Harare is growing in tandem with the city's expanding population. As a direct consequence of this, the persistent pattern of land barons appropriating wetlands for the purpose of settling home seekers in cooperation with officials from nearby cities is exacerbated (Muguti, 2020). Worse yet, such anomalies in human settlement patterns, together with other abnormalities in human settlement pat-

terns, are in contravention of official bylaws on housing and infrastructure development, including the City Master Plan. On the other side, analysts have discovered faults in the city rules, most notably in the City Master Plan. According to the perspective of one industry expert, “one of the causes of wetland depletion in Harare is archaic legislation on urban land use that is generally quiet on wetlands and their critical contributions to the City of Harare.” As a result of the lack of an up-to-date Master Plan, the city of Harare’s plans for land use do not take into account the fact that it is necessary to maintain wetlands. This leads to a continual depletion of water supplies.

Because of these loopholes in the law, the effectiveness of the restrictions that are currently in place to protect urban wetlands is called into question. The fact that the current bylaws are not strictly enforced or followed, despite the fact that these bylaws have defects, is an issue that raises more concerns. As a direct consequence of this, the city officials do not adhere to the regulations that are outlined in the Urban Sustainability Framework (USF).

Even though the Zimbabwean constitution (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013) and accompanying legislation, such as the Regional Town and Planning Act (Government of Zimbabwe, 1976) and the Urban Councils Act (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996), give the local government the responsibility of administering urban land, successive Ministers of local government have heavily interfered in this process. It has been suggested that the extensive engagement of the Zimbabwean government in matters pertaining to the autonomy and independence of local governments constitutes an unlawful takeover of such authorities by the central government. Over the course of the past few decades, there has been a significant amount of intrusion from the central government in the governance and administration of urban local councils (Magaisa, 2020). As a direct consequence of this, successive ministers of the local government have supported land barons and cooperatives who construct and issue residential home stands in wetland regions. There are a number of neighborhoods in Kuwadzana, Glen Norah B, Budiro, Chitungwiza, Mufakose, Westlea, Crowborough, and Epworth that are all under the watchful eye of the city council. A few examples may be sufficient to highlight the trend of “illegal” and irregular settlement of urban dwellers in these neighborhoods (Ruwende, 2018; Kutura, 2018). This opinion was verified by Mr. Precious Shumba, who is the Director of the Harare Residents Trust. He stated, “These stands are...handled through partisan and blatantly corrupt systems that have benefited the corrupt councillors well” (Kutura, 2018).

In spite of the fact that the previous argument is quite perceptive, it is of the utmost need to stress the fact that the settling of home searchers in areas that have been designated as wetlands in the larger part of Harare is necessitated by a chain of players. Those individuals include local land barons, housing cooperatives, members of the local political leadership, city administrators, land developers, and prominent politicians (Uchena, 2019). This problem has been made much worse by the fact that local government employees in Zimbabwe routinely

give in to the dictates of the Minister when it comes to the illegal acquisition of urban land (African Centre for Cities, 2015). In this regard, a certain legal specialist is of the opinion that the act has placed an unreasonable amount of responsibility on the local government minister. According to him, the legislation, more especially the Urban Councils Act, is the source of the significant powers that are granted to the Minister of Local Government. Because of these capabilities, the Minister is able to exert dictatorial control over the various local administrations (Magaisa, 2020). When it comes to transferring urban residents who live in wetlands, there is more to the blame game that surrounds the local government than meets the eye in terms of who is to blame.

The responsibility cannot be exclusively assigned to the Minister's unconstrained and discretionary powers in his capacity as a member of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front, which is the party now in power (ZANU-PF). This does not imply that he or she is not guilty; but, if you only concentrate on the Minister, you will be forced to settle for the answers that are the least difficult to understand because it only provides a portion of the overall picture. There is not a single entity that can be held solely responsible for the complexity of urban land governance (Matamanda & Chinozvina, 2020; Chiweshe, 2020). The control and governance of urban areas are significantly influenced by local politics, notably those that take place within the city of Harare. Particularly illuminating is the following comment made by a councillor in Budiro named Sydney Chirombe: "In my ward, we have witnessed a high quantity of land grabs, all of which is due to corruption." As a direct consequence of this, homes are being constructed in blatant defiance of the law regarding wetlands. It is concerning that this behavior persists despite the fact that there are ordinances in place for the city and that the competent councillor is keeping an eye on everything. The strong involvement of opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) councillors in the process of allocating housing and commercial stands in areas that are designated as wetlands is one example of party politics entering into the process of urban land governance.

In the year 2021, the MDC maintained authority of 28 of the 32 urban municipalities. It gives the impression that they have complete control over the decisions made by the council, particularly with regard to the distribution and utilization of urban land. However, the "battle over the use of administrative powers between the central government and local authorities" has not improved the situation at all (Magaisa, 2020). This conflict is manifested in the ownership and administration of urban state land, particularly in the city of Harare; this includes areas that are designated as protected or wetland zones of the country.

There is a lack of clarity regarding who is accountable for the control and management of these wetland areas in Harare, which is another issue that contributes to the loss of wetland areas in the city. There is no clear demarcation between the central government, local government, and governmental agencies, the most prominent of which is the Environmental Management Agency, in terms of who is in charge of and responsible for regulating the domain that wet-

land ecosystems fall under (EMA). Despite the fact that the Urban Councils Act and the national constitution make local councils the final authority on urban state territory, this is the case (Muguti, 2020). In keeping with the assertion made before this one, it is essential to mention an official from the EMA who indicated that the agency carries out ecological assessments without charging any fees. On the other hand, the agency does not distribute land; rather, it ensures that any proposed development would be socially acceptable, ecologically safe, and environmentally sound. The local government is, however, ultimately accountable for the environmental management function of open spaces and wetlands. This responsibility lies with the local government (Sithole & Gorede-ma, 2013: p. 196). This does not mean, however, that issues pertaining to the control of state land should be totally delegated to the respective municipal administrations, particularly when environmental concerns are involved. The responsibility for the protection of the natural world is with the central government, and more especially with the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). As a direct consequence of this, it is not incorrect to assert that the law imposes joint duty for the upkeep of wetlands. As a part of this dual management, government agencies such as the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), which is a part of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, have a legal mandate to regulate land developments in cities, particularly in matters relating to the environment and sustainable land use, as outlined in Chapter 20:27 of the Environmental Management Act. This mandate was passed in order to comply with the Environmental Management Act (Government of Zimbabwe, 2003).

However, a general lack of cohesion, collaboration, and coordination between central and local government, as well as other government entities, in the field of wetland protection is the primary cause of the ongoing depletion of Harare's wetland regions. This is due to the fact that central and local governments are both responsible for wetland protection. A good illustration of this is the Chinese company known as Anhui Foreign Economic Construction. The Long-Chen Plaza Mall was constructed in 2012 with the approval of the Harare City Council and the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. It was opened to the public in 2013, despite the protests of environmentalists who claimed that the construction was built on a wetland site. The approval of the Harare City Council and the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing was necessary for the project (Mawire, 2015). The fact that the Harare City Council continues to prioritize such and other large development projects despite being penalized by the Environmental Management Agency demonstrates a high level of disdain for environmental law on the part of city planners and designers who are acting in the name of capital. These kinds of actions and behaviors on the part of local governments and businesses demonstrate the role and impact of corruption. Corruption is linked to the absence of collaborative urban development planning approaches that aim to

maintain sustainable land uses (wetland management) in cities in accordance with the Urban Sustainability Framework.

Challenges Facing Harare's Attempts to Protect Its Wetlands

The attempts of the Zimbabwean government to preserve the wetland areas in and around Harare, as well as in other areas, are undoubtedly hampered by a variety of impediments. This is largely attributable to the fact that it is difficult to regulate wetland areas in Harare as a result of the problems that beset the local administration. This is in reference to the form and architecture of the local government, more specifically the contestations that have evolved as a result of the two primary political parties, the ruling ZANU-PF and the opposition MDC, fighting for power, dominance, and control (Chiweshe, 2020). The former oversees the Local Government and Environment and Climate Change Ministries, in addition to the bureaucracy of the council, while the latter is responsible for the councillors. It is common for the bureaucracy and line ministries to water down council decisions involving municipal planning and governance, particularly choices pertaining to land use and distribution, which may include wetland areas. As a consequence of this, municipal governance becomes inherently political rather than administrative. It then becomes necessary to strike a balance between competing party, political, and commercial interests, as well as power, positions, and dominance. This occurs at the expense of efficient environmental planning. To bolster this point, consider how the government led by ZANU-PF blamed the opposition in the following words from one of its officials, Patrick Chinamasa: "Under the watchful eye of the MDC-A local authorities, houses were built in wetlands, over sewer lines, sometimes under electricity pythons, and space left for amenities was also not spared." This statement was made in reference to the fact that houses were built in wetlands, over sewer lines, and sometimes under electricity pyth. In connection with the discussion that was just had about corruption in land transactions and "illegal" colonies in Harare, the following is a quote from an authority figure: "Incorrect land distribution has been the outcome of corruption and misuse of authority." Land barons in Harare have also been known to acquire land through the use of political connections and corrupt practices, and they have not spared the wetland areas (Gweshe, 2020).

In spite of continuous efforts, Zimbabwe still does not have a National Wetlands Policy, which presents yet another barrier to the country's ability to take concrete steps toward the preservation of wetland ecosystems in both rural and urban settings (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2018). This does not mean that the city of Harare's increasing trend of destroying wetland areas and continued encroachment on wetland regions can be justified because there is no Wetlands Policy in place. Instead, the establishment of such a strategy will, at the very least, spell out the policy directions that should be followed in the preservation and rehabilitation of wetland areas on both the local and national levels. This will be the case because the strategy will have been developed. This is the normal

operating procedure in some countries (see for example, in South Africa, [Pasquini & Cowling, 2015](#)). However, it is impossible to predict whether the existence of a wetland policy and ongoing efforts to map wetland areas in the country in order to create a wetland inventory would result in effective wetland conservation at the local and central government levels in Zimbabwe. This is because it is impossible to predict the future. This is due to the fact that, up until this point, there has been very little or no commitment on the part of local governments to adhere to existing city bylaws. Some examples of these bylaws include the City Master Plan and the Regional Town and Country Planning Act ([Community Water Alliance, 2021](#)).

In addition, there is an apparent lack of responsibility for the conservation of wetlands across multiple ministries at the local government level, which makes it difficult for the Harare City Council to successfully manage the wetland areas that are located within the city. Among these are the Environmental Committee, the Department of Physical Planning, the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Tourism and Hospitality Industry, and state-owned corporations (SOEs) such as the Environmental Management Authority (EMA). The unclear lines that demarcate who is responsible for managing wetland areas continue to stymie efforts made at the level of local government to adopt a unified approach to the administration of wetland management. The Environmental Management Authority (EMA) appears to have been given all of the obligations that are connected with the management of wetlands and marshes by the Harare City Council, according to a reasonable and unbiased evaluation of the situation ([Government of Zimbabwe, 2003](#)). However, it does have authority and oversight over the regulation of urban land ([African Centre for Cities, 2015](#)). To put it another way, the local government ought to be the first line of defense in the fight to preserve the environment. However, this is not the case at all until you go down to the ground level. Both the Environment and Climate Change Agency (EMA), which is subordinate to the parent Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and the City Council, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works, and National Housing, are responsible for the administration of urban land. This could be the source of the previously mentioned complication ([African Centre for Cities, 2015](#)). This is not, however, an attempt to find a convenient scapegoat on which to pin the council's indifference toward urban wetland areas' lack of preservation. It is unfortunate that Harare does not have a coordinated and synchronized policy for the conservation of wetlands across all three levels of government (local, provincial, and central). This would be a better way to solve the issue.

Wetlands: Priority for conservation efforts in Zimbabwe, driving the development of new laws and policies.

Zimbabwe has, at the national level, altered international environmental instruments so that they are more appropriate for the local environment. The question that needs to be answered is whether these legal tools are successful in

the regulation of urban wetlands in Harare City, and to what extent they are successful. Multiple multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) talk in a more general sense about the management of biodiversity and the preservation of ecosystems on a global scale. Zimbabwe has put its name on the dotted line for a few of these agreements. One example of a multilateral environmental agreement that deals with biodiversity is the Convention on Biodiversity (*Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 2018*). The Ramsar Convention is the only international legal instrument that expressly and explicitly addresses global wetland management policies and measures. The Ramsar Convention, which also guides wetland conservation in Zimbabwe as evidenced by the country's wetlands being classified on the Ramsar List, is the only international legal instrument (*Mata-manda et al., 2018*). Contracting parties to the Ramsar Convention are required by the convention's "wise use" regulation to make efforts at the national, regional, and international levels to protect and promote the conservation of wetland areas and smart use (*Farrier & Tucker, 2000*). The legal frameworks that pertain to wetland areas in Zimbabwe are consequently developed from these international treaties. The question of whether or not the nation conforms with all of the provisions of the Ramsar Convention has not been resolved, and the response that would paint a grim picture remains unanswered. This is evident in the city authorities' wilful disregard for the standards of the Convention, as demonstrated by their wanton devastation of wetland zones. "This is clear in the city authorities' willful contempt for the obligations of the Convention. To demonstrate its global commitment to the protection of wetland areas, Zimbabwe submitted its instrument of accession to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Particularly as Waterfowl Habitat, which was enacted at Ramsar in 1971 and revised in 1982, on January 3, 2013. This action was taken in order to comply with the convention's revisions (*UNESCO.ORG, 2013*). In the years that followed, it became clear that such an act is insufficient since it is not backed by a comparable commitment to the management of wetlands on the part of both the national and the local governments. It is important to note that Zimbabwe not only ratified the Convention in 2011, but also took the necessary steps, both policy and legislative, to implement the requirements of the Convention in accordance with the Environmental Management Act (EMA). This is something that should be taken into consideration (*Government of Zimbabwe, 2003*). Zimbabwe has renewed its commitment to the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources by becoming a signatory to the convention. Every year in February, the nation observes and commemorates World Wetlands Day in accordance with the principles underlying the legislation of the international community. Some of Zimbabwe's seven wetland regions have been categorized as part of the country's international treaty commitments as part of the Ramsar Convention. Some of these wetland sites are located in Harare, a city that has experienced an unprecedented loss of wetlands. It is important to note that Zimbabwe has ratified a number of international legal agree-

ments, including the Paris Agreement, which was ratified on August 7, 2017, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was ratified on November 3, 1992. It is also important to note that Zimbabwe has ratified the African Union Treaty on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In order to curb the effects of climate change, the nation states that are party to the Paris Agreement are obligated to develop Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in the form of Nature-based Solutions (NbS), which may include the management and preservation of wetlands. It is imperative that this point be driven home: ratifying treaties, in this case environmental accords, is one thing; putting the provisions of such treaties into practice at the level of local government, on the other hand, is an entirely different ballgame. This claim is confirmed by the wetlands situation in Harare.

Even though they are not directly mentioned, wetlands are covered by the legislative provisions that are found in the Zimbabwean constitution that govern the governance and management of the environment (Matamanda et al., 2018: p. 5). Nevertheless, the Constitution ensures that legal action can be taken to protect environmental rights (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). In recent years, Harare's wetland areas have become a target, despite the fact that the constitution places prohibitions on people and other parties that forbid them from damaging the environment. Despite the fact that Zimbabwe has a plethora of by-laws and statutory instruments that govern the usage, conservation, and management of wetlands, this is still the case. Among these are the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27), the Regional Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 20:27), the Statutory Instrument 7 of 2007 for Environmental Management (EIA and Ecosystems Protection Regulations), and the Water Act of 2002. The protection of wetland areas has not advanced despite the fact that there is legislation regarding the management of wetlands. This legislation outlines the requirements that must be met by (duty bearers), as well as how and in what manner the state, through local government, can effectively manage wetland areas. In point of fact, there is a substantial amount of proof that the local authority, namely in Harare City, intentionally disobeys rules regarding wetlands. As a direct consequence of this, public interest groups have taken the federal government, municipal governments, and private land developers to court. Greendale Residents and Ratepayers Association argued, with the assistance of one public interest group, that CoH had proceeded to continue with housing developments on the Latimer/Greengroove Wetland Area and the Nature Reserve and Open and Passive space also known as Stand 298 Athlone Township in the Mukuvisi Catchment Area in Greendale suburb in flagrant defiance of the law. These areas are located within the Mukuvisi Catchment Area (Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, 2019).

4. Recommendations

It is crucial that the Ministry of Environment and Tourism immediately ceases

approving developments on wetlands, including those at places like Monavale Vlei that are protected by international treaties, as well as large-scale developments that are causing the wetlands in the city to continue to deteriorate. The excessive discretion and power used by a few numbers of people, as well as the lack of openness in the process of awarding development permits and environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) certificates for development on wetlands, are cause for worry. It appears that decision-makers have prioritized short-term gains from improvements, such as revenue from taxes and rates, without properly taking into account their long-term effects on the environment.

The creation of an environmental tribunal with the authority to impose sanctions for infractions on environmental legislation, as well as an independent environmental commission to report on environmental issues. Additionally, the National Environmental Council was created to serve as the Minister's expert advisory council. A specialist environmental police squad that is knowledgeable about environmental issues needs to be developed.

Eliminating inter party contestations is key to saving Harare's vanishing wetlands. Internal party conflict is what drives the City of Harare routine daily operations. The environment has suffered greatly as a result of an awkward union between MDC council members and the ZANU-PF central administration. Why is the Harare wetland catastrophe not being addressed with adequate political will? Three of them are tenable explanations. First, politicians in Harare who promote "illegal" planning and housing operations are part of a vast network of patron-client relationships, relationships that anchor people in a clear framework of reciprocal obligations in which land and money are traded for political support. The network includes senior politicians as well as local government and authority figures, and everyone benefits from the chaos in the area. Second, Zanu-PF is attempting to portray municipal failure in Harare as a result of the MDC's control of the municipality in terms of urban control politics. Such a political context means that central government does not always have an incentive to help the municipality improve its performance. Third, in order to tackle the planning and housing issues, the Harare Municipality must make steps to improve its capacity, particularly its corporate governance processes (which have severely impacted the environment). Both the federal government and the municipality seem reluctant to engage in this capacity-building process, which calls for large investments in human capital and municipal systems. As officers from government agencies have shown, political meddling has resulted in the denigration of wetland management and conservation. To gain the hearts and minds of the voters, political leaders have promoted populist measures, allowing for the illicit exploitation of the resource. Politicians have taken advantage of the impoverished circumstances by allocating land strategically to the welfare vote. Substantial portions of this land are naturally wet. Hundreds of informal communities have grown in the city as a result of ZANU-PF dangling land as a carrot to win urban voters, with many of them placed on wetlands.

There is a need for the mapping of Harare wetlands. Accurate classification is an important tool for understanding wetland function and monitoring wetland response to natural and anthropogenic functions. Wetlands mapping shows current ongoing developments on wetlands as well as wetland characteristics and data on their biological and physical status. Wetland mapping gives decision-makers in Harare Urban the tools they need to manage wetlands sustainably. Wetland classification system based on environmental protection and sustainable development principles while adapting to local conditions should be developed so as to have a clear criterion for wetland use and protection. A database of all the wetlands in Harare Urban needs to be created in order to require scientific decision-making on how wetlands should be managed. The Environmental Management is now using the 2012 Wetlands Map, which makes it difficult to come up with management strategies for wetlands in Harare Urban because certain wetlands have been drained. In order to maintain wetlands ecosystems, EMA must produce a current map of wetlands in Harare Urban.

Since environmental impact assessment (EIA) reports are created by consultants who hold Environmental Management Authority licenses, it is necessary to remove conflicts of interest before issuing EIA reports to developers (EMA). Because the project developer is paying their fee, there is a conflict of interest for the consultants. Developers are hesitant to hire consultants again if they build a reputation for producing bad reports. It is important that this important role is ring-fenced to minimize any attempts at corrupt activities with regards to the issuance of EIAs.

5. Conclusion

The research showed that protecting and managing urban wetlands is still difficult, particularly in rapidly urbanizing places like Harare, which is dealing with a growing housing sector, increased urban agricultural operations, and rising industrial growth. The study also revealed how and in what ways protecting and managing urban wetlands remains a challenge. It was argued that this trend is continuing because of acts of action and omission by a complicit local administration that merely gives lip service to the idea of protecting wetlands. The discussion found that despite having local government norms and ordinances, they have been ineffective or insufficient in halting the loss of wetlands in Harare City. This appears to be the norm in African towns that are suffering from irregular settlement patterns. This is in part due to the way in which politicians and city officials undermine effective local governance. This is evidenced by the fact that economic interests are prioritized over efficient town and city planning that prioritizes the conservation of wetlands. This is one of the reasons why this is the case.

In a city plagued by deep-seated corruption, which manifests itself in land exploitation and mismanagement at the local government level, the study uncovered the limitations of relying on the law (legal remedies) to spearhead wet-

lands protection. This is perhaps the most important finding of the study. According to this theory, the regulation does not provide enough of a deterrent to discourage people from destroying urban wetlands, which would be necessary. This is especially true in cases in which local and central government authorities are engaged in illegal land-use practices, such as settling populations and giving industrial and commercial locations in wetland regions. Examples of these types of practices include: The research also found evidence that wetlands laws and regulations will not do much to stem the flood of wetlands grabs and destruction in Harare if there is no political commitment, concurrent and robust policy actions to combat land corruption. These findings were found in the report. The report places an emphasis on the significance of a reformist strategy, which includes the strengthening of existing bylaws, efficient law enforcement, the implementation of wetland regulations, and a commitment and willingness to combat land transaction-based corruption in urban areas at the level of the local government. It is necessary to conduct additional research in order to determine the best way for various stakeholders, including individuals, CSOs, and NGOs, to collaborate in order to persuade or pressure local governments in African cities to adhere to wetlands legislation, observe municipal by-laws, and implement wetlands policies. The goal of these advocacy and educational campaigns is to increase awareness of the need to strengthen institutional frameworks, regulatory policies, and laws in order to achieve sustainable wetlands management. This will pave the way for more resilient, sustainable, and environmentally conscious cities, which is in line with the Urban Sustainability Framework.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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