

Dzivarasekwa Slum Upgrading Project, Zimbabwe

Organisation implementing the project

[Dialogue on Shelter for the Homeless in Zimbabwe Trust](#) acts as the technical partner in an alliance with the [Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation](#). This Federation is a community-based organisation made up of a network of savings schemes in low-income communities, who collectively save for housing and other essential needs.

Dialogue on Shelter provides capacity-building, training and facilitation between communities and government, the private sector and academic institutions. It supports low-income urban communities to access resources; plan and implement their own solutions to the challenges of inadequate land, housing and infrastructure provision; and advocates for changes in policy and practice through their engagement with local and national government.

Since 2010, Dialogue on Shelter has implemented the Dzivarasekwa Extension Slum Upgrading Project in partnership with Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation and the City of Harare.

Dialogue on Shelter Trust has eight full-time and one part-time member of staff, supported by three student interns.

Project Description

The Dzivarasekwa Extension Slum Upgrading Project works to improve the living conditions of residents of Dzivarasekwa Extension and promotes practices and processes that encourage the inclusion of the urban poor.

It is part of the wider Harare Slum Upgrading Project (HSUP), which started as a five-year pilot project to upgrade informal settlements, initially by mapping and profiling slums in and around Harare in 2012. During this first phase, they mapped 32 slums. The second phase - in 2014 - brought the total to 63 slums, which included 37,936 households with an estimated total population of 215,109. By 2018, they had mapped a total of 71 slums.

Dzivarasekwa Extension was chosen as the first site to work on, from where lessons would be transferred elsewhere. Construction began in 2011 and has now happened in other settlements in Harare, including Mabvuku-Tafara, Stoneridge, Hatcliffe, Mbare, Hopley, Crowborough, Msasa, Jumbo and Glaudina. Currently, in Mabvuku-Tafara settlement, a project involving 240 households is taking place, involving relocation from an informal settlement that could not be upgraded.

In Dzivarasekwa Extension 408 families (around 2,050 residents) now have secure land tenure, adequate water and sanitation facilities, and improved roads, among other services. In addition to this, 336 homes have been built and 1,344 people have been housed. They have also achieved the installation of 29 eco-san toilets (replacing pit latrines), a solar-powered water system, an early childhood development centre, boreholes with solar lighting for safety during evenings, a community resource centre and tarred roads.

Aims and Objectives

The project was initiated as a sustainable model for upgrading slums through in-situ provision of improved services, rather than relocations or evictions. It is now a 'showcase' of the potential for when local authorities partner with communities to improve conditions in slums: clearly demonstrating how cities can promote inclusion through slum upgrading.

The members of the savings groups select the housing beneficiaries as they are familiar with the individual socio-economic circumstances of every member. The criteria considered is based on household employment status and income. Typically, those prioritised are child-led, elderly-led or women-led households.

The pilot interventions have been implemented in only a few slum settlements. It is, therefore, the goal of the alliance that the remaining slums are reached with a range of slum upgrading programmes championed by different stakeholders, especially with the city taking the lead role.

Context

After independence in 1980, there was massive rural to urban migration and little to no adequate housing development in urban Zimbabwe. This resulted in slums growing across major urban centres. In 2005, there were country-wide government-backed evictions and demolitions of slums in Zimbabwe. People then moved into holding camps, and Dzivarasekwa was one of them.

Afterwards, in 2007 an agreement - signed with the central government - said that the settlement would be upgraded in-situ where people had been living, and land was allocated. Dzivarasekwa Extension slum dwellers had gone through a series of government-led evictions and waited for years for basic services. The slum upgrading initiative provided a perfect opportunity to demonstrate a more inclusive way of tackling issues in urban informal settlements.

Key Features

In 2010, a memorandum of understanding signed between Dialogue on Shelter, Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation and the City of Harare focused on promoting city-wide slum upgrading. This provided the framework for collaboration with the city authorities. Initially, the idea was to upgrade Dzivarasekwa and then assist other slums using that experience.

Dzivarasekwa Extension was selected first, due to the land having already been allocated to the Federation a few years prior to the project. At that time there were around 180 households already settled there (informally) that were included in the upgrading programme. The Federation-linked savings groups ensured that there were grassroots structures to organise and mobilise for the project.

Community members were involved in data collection, carrying out mapping and inventories, planning and building of houses, and upgrading services, to ensure they reflected the community's priorities. This also helped to link the data with the City's cadastral (land boundaries) maps and development plans.

Dzivarasekwa Extension families were involved in developing three architectural designs through community consultations and exchange visits to areas where housing units have been constructed using a similar densification concept. Different design options were produced, and these were debated during community meetings until the members agreed on prototype house plans. Community members were also involved in the trenching and laying of water and sewer pipes. Training for artisans under the project produced teams of plumbers and bricklayers who are now leading the construction of the houses.

The roles of the three parties involved in the project are divided as follows:

- **City of Harare:** infrastructure installations, including roads, water and sewer systems; provision of technical expertise and supervision.
- **Alliance (Dialogue on Shelter + Federation):** house construction; provision of labour; community mobilisation; inventories and documentation. Local community members directly implement the upgrading works.

A project management committee - which includes representatives from the community, the alliance and the City of Harare - oversees the project.

Besides actual housing provision, the project also undertook a process of identifying and documenting current challenges relating to housing delivery faced by low-income people. This has helped partners and other stakeholders to reflect and revisit the systems, practices and regulations that hinder the delivery of low-income housing at a scale that is needed. Consequently, a report on the review of housing regulations was compiled and adopted by Harare Council to form a basis for mainstreaming the recommendations.

The project has been classified as an 'upgrading laboratory', establishing a learning platform with five other local authorities: Bulawayo, Masvingo, Kadoma, Kariba and Epworth. A series of exchanges centred around the project have been used to highlight lessons that can potentially inform practice and policy in other councils.

The University of Zimbabwe's Rural and Urban Planning Department is also linked to the project, creating research opportunities as well as enabling students to experience first-hand the issues of urban informal settlements.

Funding

The wider HSUP has raised \$5 million USD for slum upgrading interventions.

- A significant part of the funds was mobilised from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (\$3.8 million USD).
- Community members contributed through community-based savings which were used to demonstrate members' commitment to the project. Housing beneficiaries were required to have saved part of the loan amount in order to access loan support. Some also contributed through assembling materials for house construction. Total contributions from the community - which includes loans/payments for houses and money from savings groups - are around \$600,000 USD.
- The City of Harare contributed waivers (exemption of approval fees to allow building to take place), equipment (excavators and tippers) and technical supervision.
- Additional funding was received from partners that include Selavip Foundation, SDI and DFID.

Around 25% of the project budget was spent on technical assistance.

The cost per housing unit averages \$2,400 USD for a 24 square metre house, which is paid for by the resident with a loan from the savings group.

\$3.8m USD of the total \$5 million was allocated to the Dzivarasekwa Extension project which funded housing, infrastructure and technical support costs.

Innovation

The Dzivarasekwa Slum Upgrading Project is the first in Zimbabwe to take a people-led approach. It is also the first in Zimbabwe where city authorities and slum communities have worked together on a slum upgrading initiative. City authorities have traditionally taken an approach based on evictions, yet this project has led to the authorities' attitudes and mindsets about the urban poor in slums being transformed.

The project has tested alternative urban services - such as the eco-san toilets - creating scope for reflecting on infrastructure policies and standards. It represents a comprehensive model to slum upgrading which integrates housing, infrastructure, green energy solutions, environmental management (through waste management intervention) and community development (through the construction of a building that serves as a community centre, early development centre and ICT hub).

In contrast to traditional top-down interventions in the country, the savings groups identified the households to benefit from housing construction, based on how they adhered to the Federation's rules of savings and participation, and prioritising of the most vulnerable households.

Environmental Impact

The introduction of eco-san toilets mitigates pollution of the underground water sources through pit latrines, which were the dominant form of sanitation in the settlement.

It has introduced environmentally-friendly energy solutions, such as the installation of a solar-powered borehole, public solar lighting and solar lights for households.

Thirty women were trained in solid waste management, with some now working in recycling businesses. In addition to creating jobs, this also helps to manage public health issues and protect the environment.

Financial Sustainability

The transferability of this project is based on its affordability due to community members doing much of the work with minimal supervision from council and NGO technical staff. The adoption of semi-detached housing designs meant construction costs per household were reduced (shared walls). The densification approach meant a reduction in the cost of services per household. The participatory model meant that instead of using some of the funds for outsourcing labour, the savings were directed towards reaching more people and extending the impact of the available funds.

The project started by gradually and incrementally improving services for communal use, such as toilets, boreholes and wooden houses to replace plastic shacks. This strategy helped to ensure affordability through cost-sharing arrangements.

The Harare Slum Upgrading Finance Facility (HSUFF) is a mechanism developed as part of the project to provide financial sustainability and extend the initiative to other settlements. HSUFF is a joint-city fund for slum upgrading programmes, also supported by a partnership between the City of Harare, Dialogue on Shelter, and the Federation.

HSUFF started in 2014 with an initial fund of \$200,000 USD - the City of Harare gave \$120,000 USD from the City Treasury; Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation gave \$30,000 USD; and Dialogue on Shelter/SDI \$50,000. In total, 355 loans have been given to 110 groups for 550 households - for income generation projects, water and sanitation, housing, and land acquisition.

House construction costs are met by household savings and loans from HSUFF and Gungano Urban Poor Fund. However, the economy is in decline and the viability of loans is a challenge. Consequently in 2019, issuing loans has temporarily halted due to currency challenges in Zimbabwe.

Social Impact

The project has provided secure land tenure and improved urban services for low-income people. The community centre has provided a space for community meetings, an early development centre for children, and for young people to learn about ICT-based documentation of slum upgrading initiatives.

The first year of the project focused on building the capacity of partners to implement planned activities, including peer exchanges to similar initiatives - one of them to the city of Windhoek, Namibia, which has a reputable pro-poor city development and upgrading strategy. Because residents have worked on improvements from repairing boreholes to construction, they now have skills in solar training, plumbing and bricklaying. This means they haven't had to pay for this to be done and have a potential future income.

The improved slums are now recognised as part of the city, and, therefore, its development agenda. This helps integrate slum dwellers with the wider community and helps secure their right to housing and access to services. The project was also instrumental in the creation of the Harare Slum Upgrading Strategy in 2012 which was based on the experiences of Dzivarasekwa. Because of this, residents now know more about city processes, including their rights and obligations as city dwellers. This relationship realignment between the urban-poor and authorities has increased engagement and concrete action after decades of animosity.

Barriers

- The first challenge was to get the local authorities to recognise that there are problems: people living without water, sanitation, security. Through profiling and inventories the partners on the ground helped authorities understand the challenges.
 - Another difficulty was to encourage partners to work together, discuss their contributions and partner in fundraising. There was mistrust between communities and the local authority. The evolution of dialogue with the city was facilitated through a range of strategies such as exchanges, a joint project management committee and meetings. This culminated in the Memorandum of Understanding, which provided the framework for collaboration on this particular project.
 - There was a lack of acceptance of a densification strategy, so the community were involved in the design of architectural densification plans.
 - The cash crisis in Zimbabwe had an impact on the HSUFF, especially the repayment of loans. Since the end of 2015, they were cautious about paying loans and made changes to the process. Loans were not paid via banks (difficulty receiving the money and high bank charges) but paid in cash. Businesses were affected by lack of availability of cash, and this in turn affected repayments. However, the Fund is still operating (temporarily suspended in 2019) with a capital of around \$200,000 USD, which continues to grow.
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Lessons learned

- Through working with slum dwellers in Dzivarasekwa Extension, the project has set a precedent for positive engagement between the local authorities and slum dwellers in other parts of the city. The project highlights the importance of genuine partnerships between low-income communities and city governments. These partnerships become platforms through which pro-poor settlement responses (like slum upgrading) can be initiated and collectively implemented.
- The central role played by communities helped them to understand how the city works, and their responsibilities in terms of maintaining infrastructure, paying city rates, etc.
- Organised slum communities can be serious partners when city authorities commit to engage them differently around progressive and inclusive solutions to the challenge of slums.
- Alternative off-grid urban services have the potential to make incremental slum upgrading a reality.

Evaluation

Evaluations have focused on:

- quantitative indicators - number of houses constructed, number of improved toilets built, numbers of improved water points installed; and
- qualitative indicators - improved relations/partnerships and recognition of pro-poor models.

This has been carried out internally by the Dialogue on Shelter and Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation, and externally by the Development Government Institute. The evaluation concluded that the project has resulted in the formulation of a Harare Slum Upgrading Strategy, and the interventions in Dzivarasekwa Extension have resulted in land tenure which achieves the objective of preventing evictions.

Recognition

The project was a winner of the Community Led Habitat Awards (2019), a competition co-ordinated by CoHabitat Network. As a result, there has been a number of mentions in international publications, including an online article for [urbanet](#).

In 2012, former Harare Mayor Muchadeyi Masunda, whose council spearheaded the Dzivarasekwa Extension project, was awarded the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour at the Sixth World Urban Forum for his commitment and involvement in urban governance and upgrading of the living conditions of marginalised communities.

The publication [COMMUNITY DENSIFICATION PROJECT - 01 HARARE, Zimbabwe](#) (by the World Economic Forum and MIT) features the key aspects of the Dzivarasekwa Extension project. The document [Densification of Dzivarasekwa Extension](#) (a publication by SDI and Dialogue on Shelter) was developed to document the project and the associated processes, focusing on the housing provision and design.

The wider Harare Slum Upgrading Project has been discussed in some academic papers:

- [Brick by brick - Transforming relations between local government and the urban poor in Zimbabwe](#)

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- [What are the institutional implications of co-production as a strategy for development? \(PhD Thesis\)](#)
 - [Slum upgrading and inclusive municipal governance in Harare, Zimbabwe: New perspectives for the urban poor](#)
 - [Developing an informal settlement upgrading protocol in Zimbabwe - the Epworth story](#)

The project also had some coverage in [local media](#), and two videos available [here](#) (on the wider HSUP) and [here](#) (specific for Dzivarasekwa Extension project).

Transfer

The Dzivarasekwa Extension project was planned as a first intervention, to be later replicated across the city and make this initiative a city-wide upgrading project – thus the initial step was to carry out mapping and inventories of all informal settlements in Harare.

The financial mechanism development for the project (HSUFF) was also planned as a tool beyond Dzivarasekwa. The significance of the finance facility is that the project now has a city-wide impact, reaching out to the other slums profiled in Harare in 2014.

Some of the ideas are being tested elsewhere in Harare and other local authorities. The Harare Slum Upgrading Unit was set up to design and implement settlement upgrading plans, which are currently being carried out in three locations (Mabvuku-Tafara, Harare; Iminyela-Mabutweni, Bulawayo; and Epworth Ward Seven, Epworth).

The establishment of a project learning platform increases the potential for replication. Future plans are for those councils that were part of the learning platform to implement similar slum upgrading programmes, and for this to lead to progressive slum upgrading policies and frameworks both at central and local government levels. The model has already spread to other cities in Zimbabwe: Bulawayo, Masvingo, and Kadoma, through exchanges between local authorities. The first two already initiated similar slum upgrading work and are working to set up a finance facility similar to HSUFF.

There is need and scope for raising more resources to upscale current investments, given the innovative nature of the partnership and the financial mechanism (HSUFF) piloted by the project.

The project has seen replication of piloted models such as the eco-san toilets - in Masvingo over 1,000 units have been built in the local authority, championed by Masvingo City Council. Adjacent housing groups in Dzivarasekwa Extension have also started building these.

The main barrier to transfer is policy inconsistency within the city of Harare as a result of a lack of political will to follow through and implement the principles underlying the slum upgrading strategy. Frequent staff turnover has also resulted in the loss of institutional memory as champions of slum upgrading have either been made redundant or resigned.
