

Exploring perspectives that underpin decisions for southern African urban development

Insights from Harare, Zimbabwe

Chipo Plaxedes Mubaya, Rudo Mamombe and Mzime Regina
Ndebele-Murisa



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Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Introduction and background | 3 |
| Morton Jaffray expansion project in Harare..... | 4 |
| Crisis decision-making in the water sector | 4 |
| Political interference with the work of technocrats..... | 5 |
| Policy and legislation challenges..... | 6 |
| Lack of adequate financial resources..... | 6 |
| Conclusion | 7 |
| Bibliography | 7 |



Introduction and background

Our entry point into the discussion on exploring perspectives and underpinnings for decision-making in water related issues in the city of Harare is premised on the understanding that water is a central commodity, which is key for the development of all countries in both urban and rural setups. In fact, preliminary engagements with Harare city stakeholders reflected that water plays a pivotal role in the city's development. In 2015, leaders from 193 countries came up with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a way of facing the future and addressing challenges such as poverty. While SDG number six (6) focuses on clean water and sanitation, water seems to be central to a few other SDGs such as good health and well being; industry, innovation and infrastructure; life under water, sustainable cities and communities; climate action and peace, justice and strong institutions. We therefore support the current thinking that for countries to achieve these SDGs, special attention needs to be paid to decision-making processes with regards to water.

We, under the Future Resilience for African Cities and Lands (FRACTAL) programme, undertook a project with the aim to explore perspectives that underpin decisions for southern African urban development in the form of a “think tank” session. The think tank session was designed at engaging a small group of people (less than 10) who were involved in a certain decision through facilitated semi-structured discussions. In Harare, these discussions focused on stakeholders that were involved in the decision-making process to upgrade the Morton Jaffray (MJ) water works. The MJ water works, is the main water treatment plant where potable water for the city of Harare is processed (Dandadzi et al., 2018; Nhongo et al., 2018) and it is therefore important for water service delivery in the city.

In this thought piece, we outline issues that emerged during the think tank session held in Harare as well as pre-think tank discussions that we captured from city stakeholders. We submit that the city of Harare offers an important case study for tracing the challenges (and opportunities) faced in water delivery in Zimbabwe and southern Africa as a whole. We highlight five issues that need to be considered in this regard: crisis decision-making in the water sector; politics overriding efforts by technocrats; policy and legislation challenges; muddled decision-making processes; and lack of adequate financial resources.

Morton Jaffray expansion project in Harare

To ensure understanding of the context of our discussion, in this section we highlight the background to the rehabilitation of Morton Jaffrey Waterworks (MJ) in Harare. The water works have a design capacity of $614,000\text{m}^3 \text{ day}^{-1}$, initially built for a population of 350,000 people. However, this population figure has increased sixth-fold to date. Morton Jaffray water works were expanded in 1994 to accommodate 1.5 million people from the initial 350,000. Despite this effort, the population expansion in the city has not been met by complementary growth of water treatment and supply as some residential areas have continued to be setup before being serviced for piped water supply. A decade later and as the population continued to expand, another decision was made to refurbish the waterworks in 2013 when a loan of \$144 million was received towards the rehabilitation project (Manzungu et al., 2016).

Crisis decision-making in the water sector

We have gathered overwhelming evidence to the effect that the decision to refurbish MJ was made after the devastating cholera outbreak of 2008 in Harare. Although, refurbishment of MJ was already in the plans of the city as highlighted by the different phases in which it occurred, for the 2010 period, the refurbishment decision was mainly triggered by the cholera outbreak. This background buttresses our submission that decision-making processes for the water sector in Harare appear to be generally reactive rather than proactive. One statement from the stakeholders in the think tank session bears testimony to our submission; *'I hope we have more of these cholera outbreaks in future to trigger further meaningful action and implementation'*. In addition, a more recent cholera outbreak in September and October of 2018, which occurred after our think tank, reinforces the thinking that decision-making in the city tends to be made based on crises confronting city stakeholders, i.e. fire-fighting mode. In the latter context, the government of Zimbabwe issued one million dollars for the city to repair sewage and water infrastructure after the reported cases and deaths from cholera (The Herald, 2018). Therefore, the decision-making trajectory seems to indicate that the upgrading of the water and sanitation infrastructure in Harare becomes a priority in the face of life-threatening crises.

Considering this background, we suggest that having a plan on the books is not in itself adequate to deal with city woes in the water sector, rather, a clearly defined vision and strategy that drives development is key. For instance, we consider as positive and encouraging a vision in the 1920s by the Rhodesian government and as shared by one stakeholder in the think tank; *"... to have up to 1 million acres under irrigation producing \$300 million (£150 million) worth of*

agricultural produce every year (1970 prices)". For this vision to be realized, it was imperative for the government to develop and upgrade roads, water and electricity. Within this context, we suggest the need for the city to develop an ambitious vision and timely strategy that ensures general development and therefore proactive decision making to build resilience for the city. A similarly ambitious vision regarding the water infrastructure in Harare might have addressed the challenges relating to population expansion in the city. We further posit that there is a high chance that such a strategy will address sustainability issues within the context of population growth and climate change and provide a well-developed city where all residents have access to clean and safe water which is free from water borne diseases.

Political interference with the work of technocrats

We also take note of a second issue emerging from our engagement with stakeholders regarding politicians overriding the work of technocrats in Harare City Council (HCC). Engineers tend to have sound technical advice which politicians tend to ignore. We cite three emerging examples of such cases where politicians override technical decisions on development in the city. The first one is that of politicians sometimes allowing residents and business people to build on wetlands in order to gain popularity, yet it is no secret that wetlands play a key role in the purification of water. This is done at the expense of the environment, sometimes leading to HCC having to spend large sums of money on water treatment chemicals and sadly, some residents residing in these wetlands having to contend with frequent flooding episodes when heavy rains are received.

Our thinking in this context centres around the need for clearly defined roles in order to avoid a situation where politicians interfere in actual service delivery and control operations within HCC. This is critical given that where such interference exists, some decisions that are made for the local authority to implement are made without the local authority itself. In some cases, the decisions just come as a directive from superiors to the technocrats who are on the ground. We suggest that clearly defined roles come about when politicians restrict themselves to policy making and playing an oversight role while allowing technocrats, in collaboration with partners such as scientists and researchers to focus on issues of development and service delivery. In this process, we note that the citizen's voice must be heard in the decision-making process to ensure that the right evidence-based decisions are made for the citizens.

Policy and legislation challenges

We highlight in this case concern from stakeholders regarding the very limited mention of city decision-making on water in current legislation. Currently, the Urban Councils Act is the only Act (Section 5) which has mention of water and even then, it is a very thin section that states that 'Council may supply water within jurisdiction' without stipulating procedural paths to be followed for decision-making and practice for water service delivery. The implication herein is that the central government is more empowered, and HCC only has borrowing powers. We find this manifest in the issue regarding the loan for MJ refurbishment, which was allegedly only secured after an election period and new Councillors found that they had to sign with very little understanding of the loan circumstances.

Our second point in this context and as indeed confirmed by the engaged stakeholders, is that there appears to be lack of harmonisation and enforcement of relevant policies and laws. We again find this manifest in the destruction of wetlands, streambank cultivation and pollution of water bodies such as Lake Chivero despite the EMA Act which calls for the protection of environment. We note a concern in this regard that HCC will continue to spend large sums of money on water treatment chemicals, which could be prevented. We therefore suggest that going forward, there is a need to ensure that by-laws that protect the environment are implemented and enforced. Stakeholders highlight the need for robust campaigns and awareness on the importance of natural landscape, campaigns which can be initiated right from the elementary up to the elderly to help cultivate a culture of stewardship of the environment.

Lack of adequate financial resources

One key point that we emphasize as emanating from our engagement with stakeholders is that lack of adequate financial resources at a city level opens the city to all forms of abuse and manipulation from financiers. Financiers tend to dictate and have a final say on how loans are used and ultimately the route that development takes, in some cases at the expense of initially tabled plans. In this case, residents' associations were opposed to the refurbishing of the water treatment plant first without refurbishing the distribution channels, although this was never considered when the project was implemented. Tied to this issue is the fact that the current budgets in the HCC do not appear to prioritize the water sector, affecting water service delivery in the city.

We suggest that going forward, water must be made a priority in both the HCC budgets and at the national level budget, given that water plays an essential role in the lives and livelihoods of the citizens. We further support the suggestion by stakeholders that there be domestic resource mobilization strategies by both central and local government to limit overdependence on funders and ultimately skewed decision-making for the development of the city, which puts pressure on citizens as part of loan repayment schemes.

Conclusion

This think piece has highlighted some of the factors that underpin decision-making for the water sector in Harare. The factors highlighted above are not unique to Harare but are also comparable to other cities in southern Africa. An example of crisis decision-making is the city of Cape Town, where the local authorities put in place strict water demand management measures after the prolonged droughts of 2016-2017 season. This was critiqued by others as being a crisis decision as the city had been previously advised to put in place water storage infrastructure such as dams. Lessons drawn from Harare can therefore be applied in other southern African cities. Although the picture might seem gloomy for Harare, if major transformations urgently take place in the decision-making processes, the city might be able to develop sustainably. Decision-making processes in the water sector of Harare should hence be future oriented and ensure that there is accountability, transparency and collaboration among key stakeholders.

To this end, we echo the FRACTAL designed principles of collaboration, co-production and co-exploration in a platform where researchers and decision-makers work together to produce knowledge that is essential for decision-making in the city. Citizens should also be given an opportunity to self-mobilise to ensure that their voices are heard. Similarly, current thinking on development of cities is pushing for decision-making processes that ensure sustainable development and equity in access to resources and delivery in the water sector. Essentially, we envision an ideal situation where the city has standard, inclusive decision-making processes.

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