



## **The Poverty Reduction Forum Trust's Statement on Housing demolitions in Harare**

### **Background**

The City of Harare has embarked on demolition of alleged illegal housing settlements in Arlington area which is in proximity to Harare International Airport and has threatened to embark on more demolitions in Mt. Pleasant Heights, Pomona, Belvedere West, Prospect/Mainway and South of Ashdown Park along Harare Drive. Questions arise pertaining to laws governing housing development in as far as stand allocation is concerned. The Regional Town and Country Planning Act (RTCPA) Chapter 29:12 subsection 10, paragraph 1a entitles local authorities as planning authorities to develop and administer master and local plans which categorically divides the land into urban land use zones such as residential, historical, industrial and commercial zone. Section 24 of the same Act; prohibits any development work unless subject to a development order sanctioned in terms of the RTCP Act. The law further allows that the planning authority under section 35(1ai) may remove, demolish or alter any buildings which constitute existing development or (1aii) by order, require the discontinuance of any use or operations, if [35(3a)] the action is necessary to make the land or buildings concerned conform to an operative master plan or local plan or an approved scheme or (b) if it appears to that authority expedient in the interests of the proper planning of the area, having regard to any master plan, local plan or scheme. Section 287 of the Urban Councils Act Chapter 29:15 sanctions urban councils to make by-laws in matters relating to alteration and demolition of buildings which are constructed in contravening of plans, specifications and structural calculations and removal of unauthorized buildings on land under the control of council. The Harare City Council has used this law to initiate the demolitions of property worthy over a million US dollars without an operative relocation strategy and appropriate compensation in place. This move has significantly increased the social and economic challenges of the households who were left homeless and stranded.

Following the Arlington housing case, the Government resolved to ban the allocation of state land to housing co-operatives in order to sanitize the housing sector that has been rocked by land barons and illegal housing schemes. As a way forward, the government has tasked the Urban Development Corporation to develop and service all state land reserved for housing in a bid to reduce corruption. It is not evident at the moment that the Urban Development Corporation has the capacity both financial and human to execute this mandate. This development is therefore likely to slow down the allocation of residential stands putting pressure on the existing housing units. The associated consequence is the growth in shanty settlements and increased occupancy levels of up to more than 5 people per room which is regarded by the UN Urban Indicators Guidelines to be overcrowding.

### **Housing challenges in Zimbabwe**

Housing challenges have been on an increase in urban areas in Zimbabwe. Access to low cost housing land has been a major obstacle to adequate provision of affordable housing in the face of growing demand for home ownership. Of great importance to note, the government has not been able to provide financial assistance which is required in the sector to reduce costs of accessing land especially by low income earners. On the demand side, the continued economic collapse and increase in poverty levels make it difficult for ordinary households to own their houses through the private housing schemes which are expensive and beyond the reach of many people. The ZimStat census report for Harare in 2012 indicated that Harare Municipal area has a population of 1.5 million people, 48% being lodgers. The substantial need for housing has not been adequately addressed by the responsible authorities considering the 1.1% annual intercensal population growth rate noted by ZimStat in 2012 census. There is a critical shortage of housing and the backlog continues to increase with the most affected being the low income earners. This has put pressure on the housing sector resulting in the eruption of corrupt housing schemes which have robbed urban households' hard earned money.

The UN Agenda 21 recommended member countries to ensure in their housing programmes that they provide shelter to homeless poor through (1) protecting populations by law against unfair eviction from their homes or land (2) upgrading informal settlements and urban slums as an expedient measure and pragmatic solution to the shelter deficit; (3) developing and implementing resettlement programmes of the displaced populations in their respective countries. While Zimbabwe has a plan to address housing challenges through the Ministry of Local Government and National Housing urban housing policy, the critical issues are around areas of transparency in following the proper housing allocation procedures. Through the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset) under the Social Service and Poverty Eradication cluster, government committed to improve the standard of living by constructing 125 000 housing units. There has been a surge in the number of housing cooperatives because the

government through its current housing policies identifies Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) as one of the key strategies to solve housing problems. However, PRFT notes that illegal housing cooperatives and settlements have erupted as a result of the failure by government or the local authority to manage the developments of residential areas

It has become apparent that the housing delivery system in place has a lot of loop holes which require urgent plugging. It is shocking to discover that a residential area can be build over years in sight of the City planners only to be deemed illegal and unrecognized. While Nyikavanhu Housing Cooperative's claim on legal rights to Arlington Land may not be authentic as already been established, it was the local authority's responsibility to nip the development in the bud instead of waiting until people had invested their hard-earned money into putting up structures only for the local authority to demolish.

### **Poverty Implications of Housing demolitions**

The UN Habitat Agenda II paragraph 75-79 stresses out that access to land and security of tenure are prerequisites of adequate shelter for all and provide the opportunity for people to break away from poverty. A deprivation of shelter by any means violates this right and escalates poverty. The UN Multidimensional Poverty Index considers people deprived of housing to be poor and having poor quality of life and standard of living. The demolitions of houses valued between 30 and 50 thousand US dollars (The Herald of 26 January 2016) in Arlington have increased poverty incidences as the displaced residents have most likely depleted their financial resources and yet are now deprived of shelter and this exposes them to health hazards such as cold and rain. It has increased the households' burden as they are now faced with the hard option to pay for unaffordable accommodation, which is a complete reversal of gains in the living standards which they attained through owning houses. The loss in property and the money used building housing have far reaching effects on the displaced households' social and economic standing. The PRFT's Basic Needs Basket Harare sentinel surveys for the month of January established that rentals per room in Harare are ranging from \$50 to \$80 in high density suburbs such as Warren Park, Dzivarasekwa and Mufakose, with low to medium density suburbs such as Mt Pleasant, Hillside and Avondale ranging from \$100 to \$150 per month. These rentals are unaffordable for many households as most of the bread-winners are now unemployed after losing their jobs due to the excessive company closures.

### **Recommendations**

- PRFT calls for a relocation strategy to be put in place prior to any demolitions. The government has to come up with a detailed report which forms the basis of any demolition and this has to be done in a transparency manner with the active involvement of all stakeholders. Housing Policies and Legislation should be pro-poor and the Government should make it a major responsibility to defend the vulnerable low income earners in cases which involve property losses.

- There is need for a strengthened collaboration in the issuance and allocation of residential stands at central and local government level and central government should retain the oversight role and effectively monitor the planning function of local authorities. PRFT also advocates for the effective coordination of residential stands allocation strategy between central and local government to bring transparency and harmony into the system.
- PRFT recommends that residents should be educated about the housing policy in place and be advised accordingly by the local authorities. The housing laws and policy should be made available to the ordinary citizenry and interpreted for easy comprehension. To achieve this, PRFT insists on massive and widespread dialogues with the communities creating awareness on the various policies and laws pertaining to housing.
- The housing policy as a tool for development should provide affordable housing and the local authorities should ensure the clearance of housing lists to avert opportunistic land barons from deceiving unsuspecting low income earners who are desperate for housing. PRFT advocates that the right to adequate housing should be taken as a national priority as access to housing is chief to the attainment of other fundamental human rights that are necessary for human development.

*For more information about Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT) and the BNB initiative please contact us on Number 59, Mendel Road , Avondale, Harare; Tel: +263 4 307472; Email: [info@prftzim.org](mailto:info@prftzim.org); Website: [www.prftzim.org](http://www.prftzim.org)*