

## **Bargaining for a Better Town: A Tripartite Struggle in Ruwa Town (Zimbabwe), 1986 To 2015**

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### **Abstract**

*In the Zimbabwean urban set up, residents are represented by politicians in the form of ward councillors when negotiating with the local authorities (Town Councils) for improved services and living conditions in their residential areas. The hegemonic power of councils and councillors in post-colonial urban administration is presented in Zimbabwe historiography as unproblematic. However, although established by law (the Urban Councils Act, Chapter 29:15 of 1987) as custodians of people's interest in local authorities, the history of Ruwa Town reveals that the councillors' role in representing the people has been less significant compared to that of the residents' associations. This questions the relevance of politicians in urban councils. This article examines the major activities of different residents' associations in Ruwa as they bargained with the Ruwa Local Authorities for a 'better town' between 1986 and 2015. It demonstrates that councillors and party politics undermined town development rather than improving the local authority's town administration. This tripartite relationship created a base for urban protest reflected in the conflicts between residents' associations and councillors beginning in 1986 when Ruwa was established as a growth point before being upgraded to an urban area. The year 2015 was the climax of the struggle which involved residents, residents associations and town councillors. The overall conclusion of the paper is that councillors and party politics together with shrinking local representation fostered a permanent alliance between residents and residents' associations against Ruwa Local Authorities and emergent Private Land Developer Companies (PLDCs).*

**Keywords:** Residents' Association, Councillors, Local Authority, Private Land Developers

### **Introduction and Literature Review**

The history of urban administration and struggles has been covered by prominent scholars such as Auret (1995), Raftopoulos and Yoshikuni (1999), Toyin and Salm (2005), Locatelli and Nugent (2009), Ranger (2010) to mention a few. The question whether urban councils should be run by politicians or by the people is an intriguing one. Bases for urban protest in many cities are clear, but in the developing countries of Africa, these seem to find voice and are reflected through service-delivery concerns centred on shrinking or lack of local representation. Lack of democratic representation partly explains the emergence of incessant conflicts between the residents of Ruwa in Zimbabwe and elected councillors. This article is a case study of the social and political struggle between residents associations and elected town councillors in bargaining for a 'better town'<sup>1</sup> or improved urban space in Ruwa between 1986 and 2015. Ruwa Town, established in 1986 initially as a growth point, is located 23 km from Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. The 2012 national census shows that the town had a population of 50, 000, making it a major urban centre in Zimbabwe (Central Statistical Office, 2012). A town established in the post-colonial period, Ruwa is well known for involving Private Land Developer Companies (PLDCs) in its growth and expansion as these institutions were deemed not only to complement the residents' associations, but also to enhance residents' bargaining power in demanding improved urban services. It is administered by the Ruwa Town Council (RTC) which was established in 2008 after the area was ascribed town status by the Minister of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development (Ruwa Local Board, 2011: 6). Prior to being declared a town, Ruwa was administered by the Ruwa Local Board (RLB) which, just like the Town Council, was an urban authority, but of lower rank.

The RTC and other urban councils in Zimbabwe were guided by the *Urban Councils Act (UCA) Chapter 29:15* of 1987 which is the principal law governing urban councils in the country. The *UCA* provided for the election of councillors into the Town Council by the residents as a democratic process for representing the public at large. Although there were elected councillors in the RTC, residents organised themselves into associations in an endeavour to air service-delivery grievances against the Council and Private Land Developers (PLDs). Since residents were not getting enough representation from the lawful custodians of public interest in the council, this article examines the major activities of different residents' associations in the town as they bargained with the Ruwa Local Authorities. The associations did so in a way that intimately linked them or resonated with residents. Clearly, the operations of councillors in Ruwa incited the struggle with the

residents' associations whose bid for improved urban services and living conditions was not in doubt.

The article explores the conflicts between residents' associations and councillors beginning in 1986 because that is when Ruwa was established as an urban area and when the associations started to emerge. The year 2015 is appropriate as a cut off point for this paper because it marked the climax of the development of PLDCs as well as the peak of the urban crisis characterised by severe service-delivery challenges in the housing, water and infrastructure sectors which saw the escalation of the residents-versus-council struggle. The results of the struggle reflected the growing bargaining influence of Ruwa residents and their in-fragility in the face of a politically stronger RTC.

The associations confronted the Ruwa Local Authority over poor service-delivery in water, sewerage and refuse collection. They used demonstrations and petitions to air their grievances. These bargaining strategies forced the Ruwa Local Authority to make reforms in an endeavour to improve urban services in the area. Whenever the Council and PLDCs failed to deliver on their responsibilities, the associations raised funds to aid service-delivery in the town.

Our article is distinct from Yilmaz's (2008) approach to the study of urban service-delivery which emphasises decentralisation as a way of engaging citizens in local government. Yilmaz plausibly discredits partisan local government politics by noting its failure in Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Bolivia and Mexico. He compares partisan systems with non-partisan ones in local government service-delivery. Non-partisan systems proved to work well in Canada, Uganda and Ghana (ibid: 10). The advantages of such systems to international democracies like Canada were that political parties and political affiliation were seen as irrelevant to providing essential services, and that cooperation between elected officials belonging to different parties was encouraged. The disadvantages of partisan politics are discussed in this article but only as a way to justify the councillors' failure to represent the residents in Ruwa Town. Although Yilmaz observes that the councillor election system is ineffective, he, however, makes no reference to residents associations and how they are used as a social and political platform for residents' participation in urban councils.

Residents' associations emerged at the same time as the process of urbanisation in Zimbabwe. Urban struggles in colonial Zimbabwe have been discussed by Yoshikuni (2007). He accounts for African urban dwellers' experiences in the colonial era especially before 1925. According to him, the colonial government racially segregated Africans by relegating them to 'locations' created for them away from the city's central business district (CBD) (ibid: 38). Such segregationist

policies were resented by Africans, forcing them to create associations that represented them as they negotiated for improved services and living conditions. Yoshikuni's work helps to locate the site of urban struggles and establish the emergence of residents' associations and urban protest in Zimbabwe.

Since it was the *UCA* (1987) which established the councils' election system in Zimbabwe's local authorities,<sup>2</sup> Mutema (2015: 2084) discusses the implications of the Act on the practice of good corporate government in the country's urban councils. In doing so, he illustrates the tenets of the *UCA* that culminated in the establishment of councillors in urban areas (*ibid*). Mutema's work on the *Act* helps us to understand the emergence and reasons for the implementation of the councillor election system in local governments in Zimbabwe.

The study of residents' associations is not new and has been discussed in related scholarly works on local governance. Chikerema (2013) analyses the factors which promote citizen participation in local government. He links citizen participation to democracy by arguing that residents' associations, being instruments of citizen participation, played an important role in promoting democracy in local authorities (*ibid*: 87). Mapuwa (2011: 1) agrees by asserting that residents' associations enhanced accountability in local urban councils. Whilst Chikerema and Mapuwa's works demonstrate the importance of resident's associations, our article departs from a mere focus on their role to a comparison of their efforts and those of the councillors as the former negotiated for better services and living conditions in Ruwa Town.

## Methodology

In trying to understand the differential roles performed by residents' associations and elected councillors in Ruwa and identifying which of these institutions served ordinary citizens of the town better than the other, the article mainly uses primary and secondary sources to derive research data. Primary data from the Ruwa Town Repository (Archive) in the form of council minutes, correspondences among stakeholders and letters were an important source of data for the article. Council Repositories were relevant in tracing the differing roles of the councillors and residents' associations in the town. The council manuscripts used clearly documented the relationship between the residents and PLDCs. Interviews, based chiefly on purposive sampling, targeted Ruwa residents,<sup>3</sup> members and officials of residents' associations and town councillors. These revealed individual opinions about different issues related to the councillor election system, the functions of residents' associations and service provision in Ruwa Town. Data derived from questionnaires was vital in providing essential statistics used in the paper to analyse the role of both the councillors and residents' associations in the town. Secondary

sources (books, journal articles and newspapers) were useful in situating the Ruwa case in broader urban protest studies in Zimbabwe.

### **Outline**

The article illustrates how residents' associations represented ordinary citizens in Ruwa better than elected councillors. Using the case of Ruwa, it questions the relevance of councillors (politicians) as representatives of residents in local authorities. The councillor election system was intended to improve resident's participation in urban councils nationally but it failed to do so in Ruwa. Councillors and party politics undermined residents' participation in the town's service-delivery system, and this created a base for urban protest led by residents' associations. The article, therefore, demonstrates the bargaining methods used by residents and their associations for improved services, and how the two's efforts were counteracted by town councillors who were not as accountable as envisaged.

### **Councillors and their Work in Ruwa Town**

Urban councils were created as a result of the decentralisation/devolution process adopted by the Zimbabwean Government after 1980 to improve democracy and accountability in urban areas.<sup>4</sup> The decentralisation of urban governance was provided for and guided by the *UCA* which was used to accord Ruwa the status of a town. The town is administered by the Ruwa Town Council which is made up of elected councillors and professional administrators. Elected councillors were mandated to represent the residents in the Town Council.

The councillors' election system in Ruwa was meant to make the urban council administration democratic and transparent. Decentralisation scholars such as Beres et al (2008: 8) support this system as they believe that competitive and fair elections result in efficient town administration. Elections were envisaged to facilitate residents' participation by choosing office bearers in the town council. In Ruwa an elected member had the responsibility to put in place policies that represented the electorate. Chikerema (2013: 89) argues that elected councillors had to be responsive and accountable to residents' needs. They were expected to represent the residents and facilitate their access to resources like land in the town (ibid). Although councils were not homogeneous entities throughout Africa, the idea of elected councils and the benefits expected to accrue from them prompted the government of Zimbabwe to create urban councils with resident elected members. Ruwa Town was divided into nine political wards that were represented by different councillors. From 1991 when the Ruwa Local Board was created up to 2008, all the nine councillors came from the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party. After the 2008 local government elections,

ZANU-PF dominance was ended as all ZANU-PF councillors were replaced by Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) councillors. In that election, the parties failed to acquire the votes required to form a government and they went into a national political agreement which led to the formation of a coalition government, the Government of National Unity (GNU). Although there was a Unity Government, all of the RTC councillors belonged to one party, the MDC-T. Even after the 2013 general election when ZANU-PF won resoundingly and took back total control of the government, the RTC remained dominated by MDC-T. However, despite the changes in party-based councillors from 1991 to 2013, there was not much difference in how they operated in Ruwa.

The outcome of the councillors' election in the town reflected residents' affection for a political party rather than knowledge of the councillors they voted into office. Eighty percent of the respondents to our questionnaire proved the public's ignorance of the councillors they elected. This percentage of residents did not even know the names of the councillors they voted for; they only knew the councillors' political party. One of the councillors in Ruwa, in an interview on 31 January 2016, confessed that he did not campaign for the post during the 2013 council elections but he went and won the election because he belonged to MDC-T. Mutema (2015: 2086) argues that it is a trend in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities for the electorate to vote for a political party rather than people with ability, skills, experience and charisma to represent the local community in the council. This means the council election system in Ruwa did not reflect residents' participation for the development of the town as proposed by decentralisation scholars, but disgruntlement against one political party and affection for the other. The party-based councillor politics proved to hinder the Local Authority's service-delivery process in Ruwa Town. In party-based local politics there is always a risk of party polarisation that bedevils policy formulation (Zimbabwe Institute, 2005: 4). Since, politics in local government was partisan it became linked to the central government. Ruwa Town Council was not seen as an autonomous entity but an appendage of the central government. It followed that local politics in the RTC were also connected to the central government, which through the Ministry of Local Governance was the largest revenue provider for urban councils in Zimbabwe. In light of this, councillors in Ruwa alleged that urban councils received revenue from the Central Government based on party affiliation.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the councillors in Ruwa belonged to the opposition party leaving the town in a less favourable position for government funding. The councillors pointed out that the RTC and its MDC-T councillors were left with inadequate funding to execute their duties after being 'starved' of central government subsidisation because of their political affiliation. In the meanwhile, the Goromonzi Rural District Council, its ZANU-PF-oriented sister local authority, enjoyed government financial aid.<sup>6</sup> The MDC councillors argue that before 2000 the Ruwa Council was composed of

ZANU-PF officials and because of that the Council had good rapport with the Minister of Local Government, who promised to offer state land for Ruwa Town development. However, after the MDC councillors got into office, the Minister could not honour his promise.

In an endeavour to secure votes, councillors tended to implement populist decisions at the expense of sustainable development. Councillors in Ruwa forced the RTC to approve substandard infrastructure development in residential parks in order to entice votes from the residents.<sup>7</sup> Ordinarily, the *Regional Town and Country Planning Act (RTCPA)* chapter 29:12 of 1976 stipulates that the RTC should approve offsite infrastructure development only in newly-developed residential parks where residents were given title deeds by the Registrar of Deeds. In Damofalls and Barochit residential parks in Ruwa, the RTC approved substandard and incomplete offsite and onsite infrastructure after being influenced by the councillors who were merely seeking residents' votes. This demonstrates that the councillor election system in urban administration was manipulated. It ended up not serving its intended purposes but those of the elected council officials.

Corruption by councillors was a major challenge that bedevilled Ruwa since its inception. For Palmier (1985), corruption entailed using a public office for personal gain. Common acts of corruption by councillors in Zimbabwe included nepotism, receiving bribes, buying council assets at undervalued rates and mismanaging council funds and assets (Sithole, 2013: 27). In Ruwa, councillors were accused of being involved in corrupt residential stands-allocation. Councillors unlawfully allocated themselves multiple stands when other residents on the Ruwa Housing waiting list were deprived of the right to access these.<sup>8</sup> The council officials also allocated residential stands to their relatives at the expense of those on the waiting list (*The Sunday Mail*, 1994:1). Corruption and nepotism in residential stands-allocation was not peculiar to Ruwa only during this time. In Harare, the Executive Mayor of the City was on record for reserving more than 100 stands for favoured individuals (Sithole, 2010: 30). Such acts of nepotism disadvantaged the low income home-seekers who did not have political connections with the councillors. There were other cases of corruption apart from the unfair allocation of houses in Ruwa. The councillors unlawfully requested the Council to exempt them from paying rates, supplementary charges, water and sewerage tariffs and other levies in the town because of their political influence (*The Herald*, 2005: 3). On top of this, the councillors misused the Board sitting allowance. In 2004, the RLB was reprimanded by the Government for increasing the councillors' allowance from ZW\$4, 500 to ZW\$135, 000 per month (*The Herald*, 2004). The RLB went on to defy the warning and continued paying the councillors huge allowances (ibid). The councillors wanted to benefit from their public offices by looting from the Council because there was no guarantee that they would be re-elected after the

expiration of their terms of office (Sithole, 2013: 27). Most of the councillors were not employed anywhere. They only received council sitting allowances, leading them to take council politics as a form of employment. Of the nine councillors, only two were formally employed in some organisations on a fulltime basis and the rest depended on their councillorship for a living. The councillors' unemployment status catalysed corruption in the RTC.

Councillors also did little to promote democratisation through residents' participation in local authority delivery processes. Ideally, it was the mandate of elected council officials to create platforms for residents to participate in the Council's delivery system (CHRA, 2014).<sup>9</sup> Residents wanted to be involved in drafting the town budget and to influence policies which addressed community interests. However, councillors took advantage of the residents' ignorance of the concept of local government participation and sidelined them. Ward One Councillor, Masvingise, revealed that some council meetings were held outside Ruwa, in conference centres in Harare or as far as Victoria Falls, to prevent most residents from participating. Exorbitant travelling expenses eliminated residents from attending distant meetings. This became a common strategy by councillors to deliberately alienate residents from participating in local government systems. Although the councillor election system was the preferred way to administer urban councils in Zimbabwe, it did little to achieve its intended purpose of representing people at grass roots level. Rather, it brought national political patronage to the grass roots and in the process disturbing good government in urban councils. Those voted into power did not represent the electorate but abused their offices for personal gain. This emphasised the disadvantages of political partisanship avoided by some countries. After realising the pitfalls of partisan politics, Ghana, Uganda, and the Municipality of Toronto in Canada outlawed political parties from participating in local council elections (Yilmaz, 2008: 10). The residents' associations in Ruwa became very active in bargaining for a 'better town' because they were not getting enough or the desired representation from the councillors.

### **Ruwa Residents Associations: Bargaining for a Better Town**

Ruwa Town consisted of residents associations that were relatively young unlike the prominent associations in colonial-era established towns. Most of them just emerged and addressed particular challenges before disappearing into oblivion. Ruwa is made up of more than nine major suburbs and in each one of them residents collectively created associations or groups of people to represent or lead the charge when bargaining with the council for better living conditions. The UCA provides for residents and their associations to enter council meetings and access council minutes, financial statements and decisions (Mutema, 1996: 2086). It presents residents the opportunity to observe and monitor the RTC's



administration mechanisms. Although the Act improved transparency in the town, the residents were only observers in the process with little power to change the fate of the town. In an endeavour to challenge unpopular council decisions, the residents chose members from among themselves to represent them. The chosen individuals became part of the residents associations. A review of the Council primary documents suggests that charisma and merit was usually used when selecting members of residents' associations. Selection was not based on party politics. Different residents associations and committees in Ruwa agitated for improved conditions and service-delivery in the town at different levels by both the RTC and PLDCs.

The Ruwa Local Authorities faced chronic challenges in water and sewerage services as the population of the town grew from 1, 447 in 1992 to 50, 000 in 2012 and to more than 56,000 by 2015 (Central Statistical Office, 2012). Davison (2005) notes that there was a population boom in Ruwa, but the boom was not supported by water and sewerage infrastructure resulting in compromised service-delivery in the area. In an effort to fund this infrastructure, Ruwa Local Authorities charged high fees for water and sewage services. Residents felt short changed by high sewerage and water charges. In 1996, the Ruwa Residents Association (RRA) staged a demonstration over high water bills per household (*The Herald*, 1996: 6). The Association mobilised residents who converged at the Council's offices seeking justification for the huge water bills. Residents also raised concern over poor maintenance of the town sewerage system (*ibid*). The demonstrations over water charges did not end in 1996. Instead, they continued to rise sporadically throughout the history of the town. In 1999, for example, the Council increased water charges by 58 percent (*The Herald*, 1999). The RRA criticised the water charge hikes, arguing that they were unjustified. The residents expected the councillors to intervene on their behalf since it was their duty to consult the residents before the council increased water charges and other council rates (*ibid*). Increasing water charges without consulting the residents 'killed' residents' participation which is one of the tenets of decentralisation of government.

At the same time concerns over water bills were expressed, the RRA also lobbied for housing for low income-earners in the town. The UCA had made it mandatory for the Council and PLDCs to prioritise land allocation (for housing) for the local low-income earning community when allocating residential stands. It is, however, alleged by residents that the Council connived with the PLDCs to deviate from the norm and started allocating residential stands to high-income earners outside the town, 'who could afford to bribe the authorities' (*The Sunday Mail*, 1994: 1). In 1994, Ruwa residents were provoked by the irregularities in the allocation of residential stands and passed a vote of no confidence in the Council. The RRA organised 130 residents who signed a petition<sup>10</sup> to the Ministry of Local Government

accusing council members of allocating residential stands to themselves and their relatives (ibid). In February the following year, the Association staged a demonstration at the council offices demanding fairness in the allocation of stands in the low-income-earning housing schemes (*The Herald*, 1995: 5). Such demonstrations resulted in the restructuring of the Council which saw some members being dropped out of the Council on allegations of corruption (ibid). In 1998, seven members of the RLB were suspended for abusing power in the allocation of residential stands (*The Herald*, 1998). It was the role of councillors to make sure resources that included land benefited the locality, but in this case they were leading in alienating residents from accessing residential stands. Hence, residents had to stand for themselves.

The residents' associations did not fight against the council only but also the PLDCs as the RTC had partnered with the PLDCs in the provision of housing in the town. In most of the suburbs the private land developers provided land which they subdivided and developed. They also developed infrastructure which included sewerage and water reticulation systems, roads, public infrastructure as well as facilitated the electrification process before they sold the stands to individuals for profit, using parallel market rates. Beneficiaries of stands who paid for the service in advance, nevertheless, were often short changed by the PLDCs. Residential areas developed by PLDCs like Fairview, Zimbabwe Housing Company, Barochit and Tawona Gardens were characterised by slow and incomplete construction of offsite infrastructure. Different residents associations rose to protect their interests against unscrupulous and corrupt PLDCs.

The Crainbrook Park Residents Committee, for example, waged a legal challenge against the Zimbabwe Housing Company after the PLDC failed to deliver its obligation on infrastructural development. The PLDC sold un-serviced stands to home-seekers promising them that they would develop the residential stands within two years, but after five years there was no meaningful development on the stands.<sup>11</sup> The roads were not graded and there was no water and sewerage system for 'the residents to be allowed by the Council to occupy the residential stands'.<sup>12</sup> The installation of the sewerage and water system in residential areas was a prerequisite before residents were allowed to settle and the absence of these facilities meant that desperate stand owners had to occupy their 'homes' unlawfully. In 2006 the residents learned that the PLDCs had embezzled funds that should have been directed towards the construction of infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> After failing to get representation from the Council and ward councillors, the residents formed the Crainbrook Park Residents Committee to represent them against the developer. The Committee dragged the PLDC to the High Court until the Zimbabwe Housing Company was dissolved and placed under judicial management in order to pave way for the development of the residential suburb.<sup>14</sup> The court appointed

a new manager to finish the work in the suburb. Neither the Council nor the councillors represented the residents against the developer in this matter.

It was not only the Cranbrooke Residents Committee which clashed with land developers as it lobbied for improvement of residents' environment. The Barochit Park Residents Association was also involved in a struggle with their developer (Barochit) for a better residential area. The case of Barochit was similar to that of Cranbrooke where the developer failed to provide road, sewerage and water infrastructure which was necessary for residents to be lawfully allowed to occupy their residential stands. The Barochit Park Residents Association represented residents as they negotiated with the developer and the council for construction of offsite infrastructure in their area. Collectively, the residents created a resource centre which raised ZW\$10 million which was used to develop a water pumping station and to complement funding for the development of a sewerage system.<sup>15</sup> The Barochit Association's intervention in the crisis resulted in people being legally settled in the suburb.

Similarly, the Chipukutu Park Owners Association negotiated with the Council for better conditions in their suburb. Chipukutu Park is one of the low density suburbs in Ruwa among others which included ZIMRE and Windsor Park. The residents of Chipukutu felt that the Council was neglecting their area and was concentrating on improving other suburbs in Ruwa especially the high density residential areas.<sup>16</sup> In Chipukutu Park, roads were not being maintained leading to potholes.<sup>17</sup> The grass was left uncut while refuse collection was erratic.<sup>18</sup> The Chipukutu Park Owners' Association was agitated and demanded that their area should receive the same privileges as other suburbs in the high density areas. The reason for the neglect of the suburb had to do with the politics associated with the councillors' election system. A blind eye was given to Chipukutu because it was a low density area with a smaller electorate than its sister suburbs. Chipukutu Park had only 600 homesteads which were significantly less compared to high density suburbs which had more than 1,700 residential houses (*The Herald*, 2007). In order to seek more votes, the councillors concentrated on suburbs that had higher populations at the expense of those with less population. In 2009, the Chipukutu Park Owners' Association confronted the Council demanding that it should offer quality services.<sup>19</sup> The councillors, however, ignored the 'minority' in low density suburbs concentrating on high density suburbs with the majority of the electorate. The Chipukutu case, thus, illustrates the flaws of partisan politics in local governance and how corruption had come to be associated more with PLDCs than residents associations.

There were however, a few cases where residents associations and individuals who masqueraded as members of such associations committed fraudulent offences

in the Town. In 2013, members of the Damofalls Residents' Association embezzled money collected from the residents with the intention to rehabilitate a borehole.<sup>20</sup> The residents promptly replaced the offenders with new personnel whom they trusted. Unlike what happened in the Council, corrupt members in residents associations were easily removed without the same bureaucratic procedures followed when dismissing corrupt council officials. The other weaknesses of residents associations were disunity or lack of cooperation among themselves. All the associations except the RRA served their particular suburbs' interests only and most of them disbanded after realising their mission. However, despite a few fraudulent cases reported about residents associations and disunity amongst themselves, they were more influential than the town councillors in representing the residents of Ruwa.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The article has examined how councillors operated in Ruwa and the role played by different residents' associations in bargaining with the RTC and PLDCs for better living conditions and service-delivery. It has concluded that elected councillors inadequately represented the residents of Ruwa. This is because they took councillorship as a career and a form of livelihood for themselves at the expense of residents' concerns. The councillor election system brought partisan politics into local authorities which hindered residents' participation in the Council's service-delivery process. Councillors' political interests were put ahead of those of the public. Realising that the councillors were not representing them enough, the residents formed groups and associations in an endeavour to pursue their queries against the Council and PLDCs. The associations confronted the town council over poor service-delivery which included poor water and sewerage services, infrastructure rehabilitation and refuse collection services. They also waged a war against unscrupulous and unethical PLDCs which they accused of providing substandard services to residents. In summary, therefore, residents associations in Ruwa represented the residents in the Council better than what the elected councillors did.

In order to improve democracy and residents' participation in urban councils, the article proposes that local authorities should abolish partisan politics. Experiences in Ruwa offer insights on the urban governance flaws of the councillors' election system. Some lessons can be taken from countries like Ghana, Uganda, and Canada. They have outlawed political parties in local elections and have improved their urban councils' service-delivery systems. Merit-based representation through residents' associations proved more effective than party-based representation. Thus, the elevation of residents associations by urban councils as platforms for residents' participation in local urban struggle movements is recommended.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The term 'better town' is used to refer to an ideal town created out of features considered to be important in a modern urban area by residents of Ruwa through a questionnaire administered between March and August 2014. All residents who participated believed that a 'better town' should provide residents with basic service-delivery in water supply, refuse collection, electricity supply and provision of a sound sewerage system. They were of the opinion that an ideal town should have well developed public infrastructure for health, recreation, shopping, education and cultural amenities. Communication services which include telecommunication, road network and postal services were also some characteristics of an ideal town. The residents believed that a 'better town' should have a vibrant local economy and housing for low-income earners.

<sup>2</sup> The term local authority is used to refer to administrative authorities in urban areas and is sometimes used synonymously with Council, Ruwa Local Board (RLB) and Ruwa Town Council (RTC) throughout the paper.

<sup>3</sup> The consent of interviewees was obtained in order to cite their names in this article.

<sup>4</sup> Attempts at decentralisation in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the 1950s when the settler government of Southern Rhodesia made initial attempts to address the issue of spatial polarisation of economic development which was creating political pressures and unrest. The Decentralisation process in Zimbabwe's towns involved the decentralisation of administrative roles by the central government to urban councils. More detail on decentralisation can be gleaned from C. Brand. (1983) 'Will Decentralisation Enhance local participation?' In: A. H. J. Helmsing (ed) *Limits to Decentralisation in Zimbabwe: Essays on the Decentralization of Government and Planning in the 1990s*, London: The Hague: Institute of Social Studies; M. Nyandoro and L. Nyandoro. (2016) 'Colonial Agrarian History of Sanyati (Zimbabwe): Prelude, Debates and Innuendoes of TILCOR Decentralised Development, 1948-1979', *Zambezia*, Forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with S. Masvingise, Councillor Ward One, Mavambo Beer Hall, Ruwa, 31 January 2016; Interview with K. Katuka, Councillor Ward Six, Mavambo Beer Hall, Ruwa, 31 January 2016.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Interview with E. Chidhakwa, Ruwa Town Planner, Ruwa, 8 March 2015.

<sup>8</sup> The Ruwa Housing List is a document containing names of individuals who were vetted by council to be legible for low-income housing schemes in Ruwa. Residents of Ruwa in the low-income bracket apply to be on the list. Those on the housing list are given first preference for stand allocation whenever a low-income earner housing scheme has residential stands available for sale in the town.

<sup>9</sup> CHRA stands for the Combined Harare Residents Association.

<sup>10</sup> The petition was signed by 130 residents partly because most of the residents during this time were not familiar with the concept of participating in the council delivery system. According to the Central Statistical Office, the population of Ruwa in 1994 was just 1447 meaning that 130 was a sample representation of the population.

<sup>11</sup> RTC File C/17, (2006) Minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2006 at Cranbrook Park, 16 April.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> RTC, (2007) In the High Court of Zimbabwe held at Harare, Case No. HC 7438/00, 4 July.

<sup>15</sup> RTC File C/17, (2006) Information used at a meeting held between the Permanent Secretary for Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development, Ruwa Local Board and three developers namely: Taxwona Portion of Galway Estate, Lot 1 of Cranbrook, Sebassa and their respective beneficiaries' representatives, February, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> RTC, (2009) Letter from Chipukutu Park Owners Association to the Ruwa Local Board secretary, 23 December.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> RTC, (2009) Letter from Chipukutu Park Owners Association to the Ruwa Local Board secretary, 23 December.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Interview with J. Gutu, Resident of Damofallas Park, Ruwa, 12 June 2015.