

Extract

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When white colonial governance ended and ushered in a black political dispensation in April 1980, all legal and institutional constraints on movements to towns and cities no longer applied. Subsequently, the country experienced rapid urban migration and growth in the context of relative post-independence prosperity. Despite such developments, however, the Zimbabwe government and its urban municipalities continued to adhere to pre-independence housing policies. These made it both increasingly difficult and expensive for low-income urban residents to access and comply with legal housing requirements. The housing shortage and its twin seed, small-scale landlordism was thus planted.

The late-1990s began a disastrous economic decline that made house ownership ever more difficult. Potts (2006) explains that this was because of “the crippling economic hardships caused by the Economic Structural Adjustment (ESAP) adopted by the Zimbabwe government from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) that caused widespread unemployment and underemployment” (pp.526–551). When at the end of the last millennium, declining economic growth, restricted land supply and the country’s “land invasions” devastated the livelihoods of the country’s urban and rural population, this was exacerbated. Consequently, as Zimbabwe’s economic crisis worsened and poverty intensified into the early 2000s, the cost of housing equally became increasingly unaffordable for most urban poor. In response, many economically struggling low-income urban residents housed themselves in rented one rooms or illegal backyard shelters. Small-scale landlordism as a means of surviving the economic crisis manifested itself.