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RESEARCH REPORT

THE STRUGGLE FOR SHELTER IN AN URBANIZING WORLD*: A RHODESIAN EXAMPLE

DURING SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1976 a squatter settlement of some 2 600 families mushroomed on Derbyshire Estate, European land located 16 km from the centre of Salisbury. A combined exercise by the municipality and government during November relocated the majority of these people in a transitional urban settlement, where they were provided with basic services. This article attempts firstly to investigate who these people were, whence they came and why they were there, using material from a survey conducted by the Salisbury Municipality Department of Community Development,¹ and secondly briefly to review how the authorities handled the issue.

Squatters have been defined by Juppenlatz² as 'the illegal occupants of urban land whether government or private property'. Van Velsen³ points to the fact that in addition to being illegal occupants of land these people are also infringing a variety of building, planning and sanitation regulations. The majority of cities in the developing world are already under pressure from the squatter problem. Generally the manifestation of urban squatting becomes apparent when the rate of in-migration of families from the smaller towns or rural areas is greater than the rate at which the city can absorb or integrate the families into the existing social structure of urban society.

In Rhodesia the proportion of the indigenous population resident in the urban areas has shown little change over the past fifteen years,⁴ Rhodesia's urban centres are not being swamped by a wave of rural migrants and this is primarily the result of legislation⁵ which enables authorities to control the flow of work-seekers entering the towns. The African (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act of 1951 requires that all residents of African townships and domestic servants resident on employers' premises are registered with township authorities. Further this Act stipulates that for a married man to obtain housing his marriage must be registered by a District Commissioner.

* My title is taken from the sub-title of one of the pioneering works in the field of housing in developing countries, C. Abrams, *Housing in the Modern World* (London, Faber, 1966).

¹ I should like to thank Mr D. Passmore, Senior Community Service Officer, Salisbury Municipality Department of Community Development, for giving me access to data gathered during the survey.

² M. Juppenlatz, *Cities in Transformation: The Urban Squatter Problem of the Developing World* (St Lucia, Queensland, Univ. of Queensland Press, 1970), 12.

³ J. van Velsen, 'Urban squatters: "Problem or solution"', in D. Parkin (ed.), *Town and Country in Central and Eastern Africa* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), 297.

⁴ The percentage of the total African population resident in the main urban areas has not changed appreciably between 1962 and 1975: 14.4 in 1962 and 13.6 in 1969, Rhodesia, *Census of Population, 1969*, 7; and 16.5 in 1975, Rhodesia, *Supplement to the Monthly Digest of Statistics, October 1976*, 2.

⁵ The Africans (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act [Chapter 242]; The Vagrancy Act [Chapter 92]; The Land Tenure Act [Chapter 148].

The Vagrancy Act empowers civil authorities to send back to tribal areas those Africans who cannot prove they are gainfully employed or formally registered urban residents. The Land Tenure Act specifies those areas in which persons of each race may reside, and also enables authorities to sweep aside any embryonic squatter settlements. Thus Rhodesian towns have managed to avoid the growth of large 'shanty towns' or 'informal housing sectors' which are frequently characteristic of cities in the developing world. The policy in most centres is to regulate the flow of male migrants according to the availability of employment and prevent the accumulation of a large body of unemployed, the latter being seen as a threat to civil peace in urban areas. 'Single' male workers are normally able to obtain accommodation on employer's premises, in barrack-like quarters in the African townships, or as lodgers. The size of the overall urban population (including dependents) is thus very much a function of housing provision and availability of employment.

While the legislation described above has prevented a large influx of rural migrants, numerous unemployed persons do live in the urban areas, especially the larger ones. The true figure for the population of the various townships may be as much as double the official figure. Furthermore, although there is no great influx of people into the cities, the urban population is growing rapidly with the growth of second generation city-dwellers; Stopforth⁶ estimates that 14.7 per cent of the adult population of Highfield was born in the town. The African population of Salisbury according to the 1969 census was 280 000 while the estimate at 31 December 1975⁷ was 430 000. Housing provision over the last ten years has been at the rate of approximately 5 000 units per annum; and this has not and cannot in any way keep pace with the demand. The waiting-list for housing in the Salisbury Municipality comprises some 14 000 heads of households, a figure which gives some indication of the backlog. This housing shortage, combined with strict regulations on qualification for housing, forces a large number of people to seek alternative dwelling arrangements.

Alternative dwelling takes the form of legal, or, more frequently, illegal lodging; lodgers generally pay exorbitant rents, such as Rh\$8-10 a month for one room. Otherwise these people may use their own initiative and ingenuity to construct temporary shelters using whatever materials available, such as plastic sheeting, metal sheets, poles and grass. Squatter settlements have existed in various areas of Salisbury since the birth of the city, but nothing has matched the scale of the Derbyshire Settlement. In the early 1960s a squatter establishment of approximately 2 500 people was formed on the banks of the Hunyani river. The government feared pollution of the river and Salisbury's water supply, and over a period of two years it moved these people from this area to plots which were individually served with running water and latrines on which the people built their own houses. Other squatter settlements have merely been 'flushed out' by the municipal authorities with no alternative arrangements provided for the people.

THE DERBYSHIRE SETTLEMENT

The core of the Derbyshire settlement, a group of about 200 people, had existed since 1958; these people were living illegally on European-owned land that was not being farmed but on part of which a granite quarry is operating.

⁶ P. Stopforth, *Survey of Highfield African Township* (Salisbury, University of Rhodesia, Department of Sociology, Occasional Paper No. 6, 1971), 18.

⁷ Rhodesia, *Supplement to the Monthly Digest of Statistics*, October 1976, 2.

Over the years no attempt was made by the authorities to establish whether or not these people were employed by the quarry.

Between August and October 1976 this small settlement grew dramatically into a population of some 12 000. The suddenness of the growth in population appears to have been due to the fact that political considerations suddenly impinged upon the underlying social and economic facts. Social aspects are laid down in the legislation previously mentioned: the need for a registered marriage. Many marriages remain unregistered because the fathers-in-law will not give due recognition to a marriage until the *lobola* payment has been completed. They consider that because of the influence of urbanization sons-in-law will fail to honour their payment obligations; this is different from traditional marriage which is recognized after the first instalment of *lobola* has been paid. Economic factors, in addition to the increasing unemployment brought about by the state of the Rhodesian economy, included the raising of rents by Salisbury Municipality in August 1976; lodgers were frequently prevailed upon to pay the greater portion of this rise. Political events that suddenly supervened were the Prime Minister's statement to the nation on 24 September declaring majority rule within two years, and a statement to the press by Joshua Nkomo on 17 October in which he raised the people's expectations when he outlined his ten-point plan for Zimbabwe by stating that, 'the land belonged to the people and would be used for their benefit. If a person used the land for the people's good, no one would take his farm. Absentee landowners would not be allowed nor would land speculation'. In addition to this, guerilla warfare in the rural areas resulted in men, hitherto 'single', bringing their families into the urban areas for safety. These factors combined with the housing shortage, appear to have been the main motivating forces behind the massive move to Derbyshire.

People moved to Derbyshire in their thousands. A committee was set up among the long standing residents under the leadership of a Mr Chimusoro, who had been in the area since 1958. This residents committee was responsible for assisting and advising in the pegging out of plots of land on which people erected shelters using whatever material was available. A rocky outcrop was used as a communal latrine and water for drinking was available from wells in the area. Traders vended fruit and vegetables, and builders and tailors conducted their trade. The community had its own football and netball teams and playing fields were set aside in the centre of the settlement.

THE SURVEY

A survey of the people of Derbyshire was conducted at the beginning of October by the Department of Community Development of Salisbury Municipality. The purpose of its survey was to discover who these people were, their reasons for being in Derbyshire and their previous residence. Two hundred and sixty heads of households were interviewed, constituting at that stage a sample survey of approximately five per cent of the population.

The survey (see Tables I-III) showed that, of these 260 heads of households, 212 were men and 48 were women. Self-employed and employed males constituted 81 per cent of male heads of households. However, in terms of the legislation only 25 per cent (53) were single or had a registered marriage and were thus eligible for municipal accommodation. This figure may be reduced further when one considers the requirements of the present development schemes. A monthly income of Rh\$50 is taken as an index in the

Tables because it is the cut-off wage figure used in assessing the suitability of applicants for housing at Zengeza, the area where new African townships are being developed. The survey showed that when considering the size of income only 11 per cent (25) would be able to take advantage of presently available housing. Those disqualified because of unregistered marriages, but otherwise earning a minimum of \$50 were 20 per cent (43) of male heads of households.

Women heads of households constituted 18 per cent of the sample. The majority of those women were divorced or widowed, generally earning less than their male counterparts; 79 per cent (38) of the women earned some form of income, but only 12 per cent (6) of them earned more than \$50 a month. Besides low incomes women have further problems in obtaining housing. When a couple who are tenants of the municipality are divorced or separated they must forfeit the house. The man may find 'single' accommodation, but for a divorced woman with children finding accommodation is extremely difficult. At the discretion of the township superintendent, depending on the demand for housing in the area, widowed women may maintain the house providing they can meet the rent; otherwise they have to find themselves alternative accommodation.

The survey showed clearly that the majority of heads of households were urban dwellers of long standing: 59 per cent (154) of the total had been living in Salisbury for eleven years or more and 21 per cent (57) had been living in Salisbury for between six to ten years.

TABLE I

NUMBERS OF RHODESIAN MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME IN DERBYSHIRE

Marital Status	Length of Stay in Urban Area						Total N
	0-5 Years		6-10 Years		11+ Years		
	-Rh\$50 N	Rh\$50+ N	-Rh\$50 N	Rh\$50+ N	-Rh\$50 N	Rh\$50+ N	
A: EMPLOYED							
Marriage Registered	—	3	2	2	5	6	18
Marriage Unregistered	8	2	6	10	27	18	71
Single	2	1	—	—	1	2	6
TOTAL	16		20		59		95
B: SELF-EMPLOYED							
Marriage Registered	1	1	—	1	2	2	7
Marriage Unregistered	1	1	3	3	3	1	12
Single	1	1	—	—	1	—	3
TOTAL	6		7		9		22
C: UNEMPLOYED; NO INCOME							
Marriage Registered	1		3		4		8
Marriage Unregistered	2		3		10		15
Single	—		1		1		2
TOTAL	3		7		15		25

SOURCE: An unpublished report by D. Passmore, Senior Community Service Officer, Salisbury Municipality Department of Community Development.

TABLE II

NUMBER OF ALIEN MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME
IN DERBYSHIRE

Marital Status	Length of Stay in Urban Area						Total N
	0-5 Years		6-10 Years		11+ Years		
	-Rh\$50 N	Rh\$50+ N	-Rh\$50 N	Rh\$50+ N	-Rh\$50 N	Rh\$50+ N	
A: EMPLOYED							
Marriage Registered	—	—	—	—	14	2	16
Marriage Unregistered	3	—	—	2	17	6	28
Single	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	3		2		39		44
B: SELF-EMPLOYED							
Marriage Registered	1	—	—	—	—	3	3
Marriage Unregistered	1	—	1	2	2	3	9
Single	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	1		3		8		12
C: UNEMPLOYED: NO INCOME							
Marriage Registered	1	—	1	—	4	—	6
Marriage Unregistered	1	—	2	—	3	—	6
Single	—	—	1	—	1	—	2
TOTAL	2		4		8		14

TABLE III

NUMBER OF FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME
IN DERBYSHIRE

Family Size	Length of Stay in Urban Area						Total
	0-5 Years		6-10 Years		11+ Years		
	-Rh\$50	Rh\$50+	-Rh\$50	Rh\$50+	-Rh\$50	Rh\$50+	
A: EMPLOYED							
1	5	—	4	—	1	1	11
2	3	—	3	—	—	—	6
3	—	—	3	1	—	—	4
4	1	—	1	—	—	—	2
5	1	—	1	—	1	—	3
6	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
7+	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
TOTAL	11		13		5		29
B: SELF-EMPLOYED							
1	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
2	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
3	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
4	—	—	—	—	1	1	2
5	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
6	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
7+	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	1		—		8		9
C: UNEMPLOYED: NO INCOME							
	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11+ Years	Not Stated			
1	2	—	1	—	—	3	
2	1	—	1	1	—	3	
3	—	—	1	—	—	1	
4	—	—	—	—	—	—	
5	—	1	—	—	—	1	
6	—	—	—	1	—	1	
7+	—	—	—	1	—	1	
TOTAL	3	1	3	3	—	10	

GOVERNMENT AND MUNICIPAL ACTION

On 4 October the Mayor of Salisbury and the Minister of Local Government and Housing met to decide on a policy of action for the growing squatter community on Derbyshire. At this stage the population numbered nearly 2 000, but with publicity from the mass-media this figure was to grow to 12 000 by the end of October. As the squatter community is a few kilometres outside the city boundary, the municipality did not consider it to be its problem, but the government was reluctant to assume responsibility for the settlement. The Minister of Local Government and Housing referring to the large number of low-cost houses to be built at Seki to accommodate some of the squatters made the following statement to the press on 12 October 1976:

The Government is not normally involved with providing African housing, which is largely the responsibility of the municipal authorities. We have launched this crash programme to help them out due to the size and urgency of the problem.⁹

It was decided at the meeting on 4 October that the squatters should be moved some 20 km by road to land at Zengeza. This land, located approximately 22 km from the centre of Salisbury, was previously excised from Seki Tribal Trust Land and was scheduled for development in 1978. The area at Zengeza is being considered as a 'transitional settlement'. Here provision was made for 2 600 plots of 9.5 x 10 m onto which the people, with the assistance of municipal transport, moved their belongings and building materials and constructed their own dwellings similar to those in which they had lived at Derbyshire. Communal taps, latrines and a refuse collection service were provided; plans allowed for one tap per six families (i.e. approximately 30 people), and one latrine per four families. Rent for each plot, to cover services and wages for extra staff employed by the Zengeza Township, is R\$2.50 a month. The Salisbury City Council agreed to move people to Zengeza if they could prove that they were employed; and a select number of self-employed members of the informal sector¹⁰ of the economy were also included.

In the nine days during the joint operation by the Government and Salisbury City Council 1 909 families (approximately 9 000 people) were screened and moved. This selection process left an estimated 700 families (approximately 3 000 people); these were families of aliens or unemployed for whom the Department of Social Welfare and Internal Affairs were considered responsible. The government departments appeared unwilling to accept this responsibility and asked the Council to reconsider its decision not to accept aliens and unemployed. At a council meeting on 18 November Councillor Jock Alves introduced an urgent resolution which was adopted by the council meeting to the effect that:

1. Council views with the gravest concern the information received from the Secretary for Lands and Natural Resources, to the effect that the Ministry of Internal Affairs is unable to discharge the function undertaken by it in preparation of conjoint plans for the sympathetic and expeditious removal and re-settlement of the squatters in the Derbyshire area.

⁹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 12 October 1976.

¹⁰ R. J. Davies, 'The informal sector in Rhodesia; How important?', *The Rhodesia Science News* (1974), 8, 216-20, gives examples of the type of work engaged in by these people: pirate-taxi operators, shebeen queens, cowdung sellers, fruit and vegetable hawkers, second-hand clothing traders, bicycle repairers, and basket makers.

2. Council considers that it is now being called upon to discharge functions that do not fall within the sphere of its responsibilities and to do so at the unavoidable expense of the limited resources available to Council which are heavily committed to the discharge of Council's onerous housing responsibilities.
3. Council is, furthermore, most concerned that the inadequacy of the appreciation of the situation made by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the inadequacy of the arrangements made by that Ministry could affect adversely the success that has attended Council's efforts thus far.
4. In the light of the above the City Council cannot agree to making itself responsible for the housing at Zengeza, of those squatters who are not employed in the City of Salisbury.¹¹

The Government was reported to have noted the Council's response to its request and 'its implications were being studied at high level'.¹²

For those people already at Zengeza the Government policy envisaged relocation of the majority on a Rh\$1 million government housing scheme at Seki which provided for 1 500 fully serviced two-roomed houses at a rent of Rh\$9.50 a month. These units are specifically designed for workers earning less than Rh\$55 a month. The first 40 homes were completed by the end of November 1976 and the remainder made available at the rate of 50 per week. Those people already on the municipal housing list were given priority in the move; legislation concerning the need for a registered marriage was waived. A Government Notice on 21 January 1977¹³ noted the revocation of the appointment of District Commissioners and Assistant District Commissioners as competent authorities for the purpose of assessing African women as approved wives in terms of the Africans (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act and listed the appointment of various competent authorities with the power to recognize women as approved wives. In Salisbury this power was granted to the Directors and Assistant Directors of African Administration of Salisbury Municipality.

CONCLUSION

Popular misconceptions portray squatters as poor peasants new to towns and the money economy. The survey clearly shows that the people of Derbyshire were urban dwellers; 80 per cent of the sample had been living in Salisbury for six years or more. Furthermore, although in the majority of cases the wages earned by these people could be considered to be low, only 18 per cent of the total sample were found to be unemployed. Van Velsen's¹⁴ study of 'unauthorized settlements' in Zambia also found that there was no evidence that squatter areas were largely occupied by rural migrants who continued to flock to town irrespective of the availability of employment.

The Derbyshire squatter settlement was an attempt by the people to meet their needs for shelter in the urban environment. The shortage of housing, in particular low-cost housing, together with legislation disqualifying them from

¹¹ Salisbury City Council, 'Minutes of the 1488th Ordinary Meeting of the Council Held . . . on Thursday, 18 November 1976 . . . '.

¹² *The Rhodesia Herald*, 20 November 1976.

¹³ Rhodesia, *Government Gazette*, 21 Jan. 1977, Rhodesia Notice No. 66 of 1977.

¹⁴ Van Velsen, 'Urban squatters: Problem or solution', in D. Parkin (ed.) *Town and Country in Central and Eastern Africa* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), 294-307.

taking advantage of available accommodation left these people homeless; 25 percent of male heads of households were eligible for housing but due to the backlog of housing or cost of available housing were obliged to find alternative accommodation, and the unregistered marriages of 57 per cent of males disqualified them from obtaining housing. In terms of life style and social networks, it appears that no real distinction can be made between Derbyshire people and the township dwellers; rather differences appear to be in marital status and size of income (factors that have driven many from the townships). The Rhodesian Government's relaxation of housing regulations by waiving the requirements that marriage be registered has made a considerable number of families eligible for housing.

Urban housing for the low income population in Salisbury has generally taken the form of subsidized mass public housing programmes, the rationale being that public sector management and control of this section of the urban housing supply would ensure adequate housing standards and facilitate orderly urban development. However, despite legislation controlling the flow of population into the urban areas and specifying qualifications for housing, the provision of housing through these schemes has not kept pace with demand. In many other developing countries a smaller and smaller proportion of the population has benefited directly from the performance of urban housing authorities and the formal housing market generally; while a greater proportion of these cities' households have found or invented settlement and housing solutions outside the urban laws and institutions that supposedly govern their action and meet their needs. An example is the city of Lusaka whose squatter and slum population increased from 27 per cent of the city's total population in 1967 to 48 per cent in 1970.

Rethinking on housing policy in many developing countries has led to the realization that a very substantial part of the low-income population can and do house themselves without direct control or direct housing assistance. Furthermore, there was the realization that these popular actions are likely to happen relatively speedily and satisfactorily in a secure urban setting where families have at least the prospect of long term legal tenure of their land and the use of urban facilities and services; hence the introduction of 'site and service' schemes. Many variations of the 'site and service' scheme have been tried out in various developing countries. Zambia provides an interesting case of evolution in public housing policy towards self-help 'site and service' schemes.¹⁵ These schemes were initially introduced in the mid-1960s as a means of resettling squatters. The government accepted the fact that available resources were grossly inadequate to provide conventional contractor-built houses for every urban family.

The Rhodesian Zengeza 'site and service' scheme was not in terms of Government policy to be considered a permanent 'transit camp' for those unable to find accommodation in the townships; rather the municipality was anxious to house those people as soon as possible in government and municipal housing schemes. However, the squatter problem is going to arise from time to time until the urban areas are able to provide adequate accommodation at rents that are within the reach of the low income groups. Site and service schemes may well prove a satisfactory way of meeting these peoples' needs for shelter.

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DIANA SEAGER

¹⁵ C. E. Madavo, 'Zambia: Squatters' Self-help', *South African Outlook* (June 1976), 90-1.