



# Threats and Problems on Public Health: The Case of Zimbabwe's Harare CBD and the Inner-city

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## Abstract

Harare used to be known as the sunshine city considering its cleanliness and middle class competence but out of a blue, the city's busiest areas are now a big threat to the general public. This paper has been compiled to explore on the threats and problems on public health with focused lens on Harare's central business district (CBD) and the inner-city. Poor management of the city by the council has led to rampant vending at unclean places which affects the hygiene of the products consumed by the public. The shortage of public toilets to ensure a healthy environment is another story to tell. Harare's drainage systems within the CBD are failing to properly allow water drainage due to increased litter blocking the pipes increasing flash floods susceptibility. Consequently, the inner-city is filled with quite a lot of unhygienic food outlets which mostly capture the attention of low income earners such the comb venders and conductors. The influx of the so called traditional healers in the both the CBD and the inner-city has also become a threat to the public as most of them are not licensed by responsible authorities which may cause health problems as a result. The public is susceptible to a number of diseases and infections in other terms life threatening risks from the tainted environment. Proper measures have to be taken to ensure that the public's wellbeing health wise is free from environmental related threats and problems.

**Keywords:** Problems; Public health; CBD (Central Business District); Inner-city; Harare; Zimbabwe; Social work

## Introduction

The situation in Harare is flattering acute on a daily basis as evidenced by quite a number of health problems related to unclean environment. This paper is aimed at pointing out the veracity of what is going on in Harare's CBD and the inner-city concerning public health, the research problem. The research methodology to be used throughout this paper is based on the exploration of threats and problems of the issue understudy. The living conditions in Zimbabwe have led fairly a number of people abandon their rural homes to urban areas for economic maneuverings [1]. This has caused the escalation of overcrowding in the central business district as people try to make ends meet. The problems to be noted in this paper include the increase of diseases as a result of unclean environments for proper vending. The increase of deviant behaviors has led to problems of psychological squalid as health includes mental wellbeing [2]. This paper seeks to close the gap of reality through re-examining problems concerning public health in the areas understudy to have an understanding on how best they can be met.

Public health is really proving to be under a great threat especially on the issue of public toilets shortages instigating tainted environments as waste is being found everywhere. This is being usually done by street kids and commuter omnibus conductors as well as some short mannered people. As to be thoroughly pointed in this paper, most of these waste contaminated areas are close to food outlets and vending places thus a big problem to the public health [3]. Taking a foreseeing view over this paper, the author shall provide the background of the study concerning the environmental conditions and public health. On the above note, the author shall also provide a comparative view of how things are changing in Harare's CBD and the inner-city and how things used to be relating to the public health. There shall be the conceptualization of the Central Business District and the inner-city in Harare pointing to the situation going on in Zimbabwe. Subsequently, the paper shall provide an exploration on the threats and problems

which affects the health of the general public to effectively understand the hysterical or chaotic issue at hand. The above shall pave way for possible measures to safeguard public health as to be alluded.

## Background of the Study

The city's central business district is deteriorating in terms of the environmental conditions taking into account human activities increasing susceptibility of problems to the public. The environment has now been contaminated with uncollected garbage and waste which is proving to be a big threat when the city is hit by flash floods which habitually occur. Taking a look back in the 1990s, Harare CBD was known as the most hygienic area as the environment was frequently monitored for cleanliness as obliged by the international law which safeguards human health [4]. When the national economy started pointing down concurrently and drastically in the late 1990s, many people moved or migrated to urban areas with Harare being the major city in the country. The inflow of most rural dwellers into urban areas caused overcrowding in the city which is now ascertaining to be failing to accommodate the existing population. In other words, the carrying capacity of Harare has been exceeded thus causing a threat on public health recognizing the resources available. Back in the city's glory days, the authorities were able to successively monitor the city. This was done through the collection of garbage and picking up a few litter as the city was still equipped with bins as compared to the current make-up as it

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stands today. Public toilets were kept clean and were properly managed with required chemicals to safeguard people's health wellbeing.

Water supply by the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) was perfectly done or delivered to/in all areas of the city particularly in the CBD and transitional zone to ensure that people wash their fruits and hands whenever necessary. Treated water was provided by the water authority to safeguard the health of the general public, which is now a missed memory [5]. Sale of bottled water was largely done by licensed supermarkets such as OK and shops to guarantee and supervise proper/quality water consumption by the people. Harare CBD is currently jam-packed by people selling water from unknown/unapproved sources which are affecting people's health after drinking. Some of the water bottles are sealed in a fake way meaning the water is not from a recognized purifying company, yet, all these things are happening in the central business district and the transitional zone.

The city had order in terms of the designation of specific areas for a set of business as compared to the alarming issue in the present Harare. Vendors have always been there since the development of industrialization in France and other European countries [6,7]. Likewise, in Harare vendors were there even during the blooming days of cleanliness but they were given proper areas suitable for their activities for example Mbare Msika. This was aimed at reducing the number of vendors in the CBD and the inner city so as to circumvent dumping of waste and used materials at the heart of the city. The increase of vendors in the areas under study has raised the threats on public health as this has prompted the increase of vegetable litter. As water mix with decomposing litter it exacerbates great risks to public health.

The increase of food outlets in the transitional zone of Harare such as the avenues has also called for enlightenment pertaining consumer's health. The escalation of human population in the city has reduced the possibility of proper employment. Low income earners in the city usually go to the so called takeaways to buy food at affordable prices considering their economic status [3,5]. Propagated that the city council seems to be reluctant when it comes to this issue together with the health board as they are becoming rampant. Areas such as the RZende rank in the CBD where commuter omnibus drivers, hair dressers and other peoples are familiar with, many people are selling food to the general public, without the supervision and approval from the health dichotomy. When they finish eating there is guaranteed of a few public toilets as private bars or restaurants require a user fee. This perpetuates problems to people as some people are ending up leaving/dumping human waste everywhere thus contaminating the environment. It is the aim of this paper to spotlight and unravel health threats and problems which emanate from such an environment.

### Conceptualization of CBD and the Inner-City

The general thinking of people interprets the central business district differently and most perceive as the focal point of the city characterizing it with tall buildings. The reality is more than the general people's view of the central business considering a number of activities and infrastructural things that characterize the areas. It is important to understand the conceptualization of the areas under study in order to build an understanding and vivid creation of practicality. The delineation of areas in a city is usually done by town planners who ensure the proper erection of suitable services. Social scientists and Geologists have piled a lot of literature in trying to unearth relevant views concerning the CBD. The paper at this point is going to provide a link of the actual definitions and characteristics of the areas as well as

the inner-city.

The central business district (CBD) can be regarded as the centre for commercial activities such as banking and financing, it is comprised of core or major streets and public buildings [8]. In large cities as those of the developed countries it is referred to as the financial district meaning it is an area for proper commercial use which is highly managed for competent business functions. The area is characterized by high daytime activities considering the availability of commercial functions such as supermarkets and malls. Practically, the above concept on Harare concerning the central business district can be difficult to plot because of the existence of some external functions which can disqualify it as the CBD such as parkade along Jason Moyo Street opposite Food World Supermarket. The central business district in Harare can be delineated using four major streets that are Julius Nyerere on the west, Samora Macheal on the northern side, fourth street from the east and lastly Robert Mugabe street on the south. This delineation is based on the high commercial central activities that are carried out in this area. The study shall take data based on the area demarcated above in unravelling the nature of activities and current situation as well as how it is becoming an alarming threat to the public.

The inner-city which is usually called the zone of transition or rather the transitional zone by many writers is also an area of interest in this study. Waugh and Rowley noted that it is usually a zone or area between the factory zone and the central business district [9]. There has been a scarcity of literatures which have tried to delineate or demarcate the actual area which can be specifically be called the zone of transition when it comes to the city of Harare because of the mixture of services and functions of the area even in the CBD. The inner city has also been widely defined as an area which is comprehensively and universally found in old cities surrounding the central business district where several services or rather prevailing economic, social and environmental conditions pose severe problems [10]. Generally, the area is globally known as associated with poverty, dirt, overcrowding, unemployment, dilapidating housing and racial tension [11]. Linking the above with Harare's inner-city, it can be argued that the area is literary the same with the general view. The researcher used the area outside or extreme of Fourth Street, Robert Mugabe Street, Julius Nyerere and Samora Macheal as the inner-city considering the existence of functions such as wholesales for example Mohammad Musa.

The transitional zone or the inner-city extends to the Avenues where there are flats used as residential areas which is one of the fundamental maquillage of the area. The area is associated with high crime rates, dirty and some dilapidating buildings. Harare's downtown is also encompassed in this study as part of the inner-city. The researcher used the area within 3 km radius from the central business district of which the area is largely associated with high population and many food outlets which serve the interests of low income earners as well as those who stay in the avenues. Hence, the area to be used in this study as the inner-city shall be in line with conceptualization of the area as given above. The author shall be drawing example from the area for concrete data on problems and threats on public health as the two areas are highly associated with the large daytime concentration of the city's population.

### Threats and Problems on Public Health

The public which use the central business district (CBD) and the inner-city are faced by quite a number of problems which this part is going to explore on. The blockage of drainage systems in the city centre has brought about chaotic conditions of flash flooding. The area is well

known of receiving high rainfalls during the rainfall season which has been ascribed to its geographical location and fume contributions [12]. The blockage of the drainage pipes usually by plastic and vegetable litter has proved to be a problem minimizing the amount of water being drained. This causes flash floods which contaminates the water with waste hence a threat on public health. Improper protection of feet and legs can exacerbate micro infections which cause diseases such as cholera and diarrheal when the public makes contact with the contaminated flash floods which are emanating from poor drainage systems. The poor collection of waste by the council is increasing the threats of environmental related infections. Drainage pipes are evading their duties the reason being the lack of proper checks on the capability and strength assurance on the drainage's functionality. Hence, the situation in the central business district especially in Robert Mugabe Street concerning poor garbage collection and poor drainages has become a threat on public health thus a convincing reason for possible measures.

The increasing number of vendors in Harare CBD and the transitional zone provides limited confidence on a healthy environment. The inflow of many people from rural areas to urban areas has affected the living standards of the people as the economy is actually failing to sustain the population fairly [1]. The city's old systems of organization of proper sites for vending are exhibiting failure accounting rampant vending in the financial district and the transitional zone. Most of the vendors are involved in vegetable selling which involves tomatoes and fruits such as apples as well as mangoes. According to an observation made by the researcher, fruits are hardly covered for hygienic purposes which threaten the health of those who buy as flies taint them with micro bacteria's. The vending environment is not even conducive for public health as many do their business close to decomposing garbage for example in the transitional zone in Chinhoyi street at Copacabana where a lot of garbage and litter is found due to the area's popularity [13]. The products being sold by the vendors are open for controversy as many claim that they are subjected to improper farming procedures for money which may harm the consumers. The failure to remove vendors to designated areas and the collection of waste for health preserving cleanliness exacerbates the problems of dirty related illnesses to the general public.

Moreover, the shortage of public toilets in the city centre has become an alarming issue which subjects public health under threat. The debilitating public service in the areas understudy is contributing to towards the discoloration of the environment by human waste. Central business districts and transitional zones are primarily characterized by public services such as toilets to serve the interests of people who make contact with it [14]. The availability of public toilets in such areas is very essential in the preservation of human health and the environment. Harare central business district has a few toilets which are used by the public which are actually less than 5 in reality outfitting thousands of people. Most of the toilets in the CBD and the inner-city are owned by private bars and restaurants such as Chicken inn as well as Chicken slice of which a meal ticket is required for entry. This prompts many to erect human waste under some trees and closed areas as they have low admittance to toilets. The few public toilets are also poorly managed and maintained which increases an easy spread of diseases such cholera due to tainted environments. Vendors, commuter omnibus operators and street kids are mostly affected by the dearth of toilets accessibility in the central business district which makes the environment contaminated as a result. Unclean environments are a big threat to the public health which may cause problems such as diseases.

When talking of human existence and wellbeing, philosophers and scientists have at once reached a consensus that water is the essence of life [15]. The essentiality of water in Harare's central business district has become a service vacuum in terms of quality water supply. The core area of the city should have a preamble of ensuring that people are safe through the provision of water for cleanliness and hygiene [16,17]. The city council is improving to be incompetent when it comes the supplying of water particularly in the busiest areas of the city that are the CBD and the transitional zone which include the Avenues. People living in the flats within the transitional zone between Herbert Chitepo and Sam Mjoma street on the northern side of the city centre commonly branded as Avenues are facing water problems as they are receiving dirty and filthy water which is a threat which can cause water borne diseases such as typhoid and cholera. Subsequently, poor water supply in the CBD has resulted in many vendors selling bottled water to hydrate people. However, the water sources are not recognized or fully acknowledged for hygienic purposes as it is claimed that the water is collected from bursted city council pipes thus warmly comforting or convincing people to drink the dirty water in disguise when bottled [18]. The council's failure to provide clean, purified and treated water to the public because of corruption and misuse of funds has converted a threat to public health because most people are left with no option but to take the untreated water with many developing a sense of ignorance on the problems which come aftermath.

Consequently, the rampant of food outlets and butcheries in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare has also become a threat on public health considering health and hygienic incompetence. The central business district and the inner-city are filled with non-hygienic food outlets which are only aimed at gaining profit without the recognizance and prioritization of the effervescing human health [19]. There are many food outlets in the transitional zone around the CBD for example in the downtown when taking the Chitungwiza and Mbare routes which are relatively situated at areas close to uncollected waste where many flies are found [20]. The quality of these food outlets is rarely assessed by the council in conjunction with the public health board which brings a threat to the general consumers. Human Rights Watch propounded that the responsible boards have neglected the health protection of the general public through inconsistent license checks thus prompting the increase of unlicensed food outlets which may harm the public [21]. Butchery standards are deteriorating in the city centre as many are selling rotten meat. According to Holstein the Public Health Act of 1924 stipulates that health inspectors should consider it a norm of assessing quality supply of meat to the public [22]. However, the increase of butcheries allegedly owned by politicians who work towards protecting their integrity has constrained health inspectors to do their job at the expense of public health for profit has become a problem.

The influx of the so called traditional herbalists in the central business district and transitional zone street corners is an issue of concern. Living dynamics in today's Zimbabwe have been influenced by the indigenization program implemented by the Mugabe regime which gave power to the development of individual sustainability through possible ways to earn a living [23]. This has steered the increase of herbalists selling traditional medicine at the city's core area. Most of them are found at areas close to the Copacabana, Market Square and Fourth sites which attracts the city's majority because of commuter omnibus ranks at these places. They claim to sale medicine which cures illnesses like asthma, severe headaches, and stomach pains such as acid related, bleeding teeth gums and even sexually transmitted infections (STIs). A religious research by an anthropologist Mardontef in Zimbabwe point to the fact that many still subscribe to the African

Traditional Religion in one way or the other, which is a true reflection of what is happening in Harare because many are making use of the traditional medicine for wellbeing [24]. Some are actually claiming the ability to deal with cancer which is misleading the public from taking proper medical health assistance. A large constitution of these herbal practitioners is not registered under the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA) which is a national board which registers and licenses qualifying traditional practitioners [25]. This causes threats and problems on public health as herbalists are administering dangerous herbs and those with after effects.

Physical health is under threat in the central business district and the inner-city considering a reluctant norm which has developed within the council over road works and electrical engineering. The city centre has been pebbledash of quite a number of repair services over road works and water pipe renewals which are positive in nature but harmful when improperly articulated. When the department of public works is issued a mandate of doing a repair, usually it takes long for the process to finish of which the area of fault becomes a threat on public health especially when pits are dug. A lot of road works have caused injuries to people especially pedestrians as they hardly highlight the presence of a pit or open drainage which has been ascribed to recklessness and unavailability of caution tapes [26]. The council has neglected proper checks on the CBD's pavements of which some of the covers have been removed causing a hole which makes a threat on public health as there are high risks of people sustaining leg injuries. The transitional zone and the central business district are largely dissected by underground electrical supplies, the problem is that these tubed electrical cables are experiencing faults concurrently as a consequence the authorities usually dig for maintenance. According to Shamuvarira the Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC) usually prolong the process of fixing the cables and the worst part is that the cables are left unprotected or covered for the unconscious public and as a result some people have been subjected to electrical shock and many are still susceptible to this as it stands in Harare CBD and the inner-city [19].

Last but certainly not the least; it is of paramount importance to acknowledge the psychological aspect in order to effectively address human health. Rogers argues that mental health is affected by environmental circumstances because when the environment influences an individual badly one experiences psychological squalid [27]. This is proving to be an issue of concern considering the increase of crime and deviance rates in Harare's central business district of which the public is under a big threat. People's emotional handling capabilities are distinct on every person hence when one loses his or her money or material things to thieves chances of psychological disorders are very high [28,29]. Many have attempted to commit suicide after their huge amounts of money have been stolen because of emotional handling capability failure hence the increase of crime and deviance subjects the public mental health at stake. More so, the public is under threat from vendor-police and commuter omnibus-police sagas which habitually transpire in the central business district and the inner-city which assures psychological unrest accounting amygdala's hyper activeness thus causing neurological imbalances.

## Recommendations

Social work is aimed at ensuring human wellbeing through addressing social problems which affects human functioning [30]. The engagement of multi-sectoral professions can help in addressing the problems under study. Provided the information on how things

are going in Harare central business district and the inner-city, there is need to offer or propose a way forward on how best to deal with the situation to safeguard public health for human development. Drawing experience from the research observations and explorations, the author proposes the following recommendations:

- Build more public toilets which are properly managed.
- Consistent policies which orders litter and garbage collection in the city centre.
- Ensure quality water provision and stop disconnecting water for lack of payment.
- Public Health Act has to be revisited for upgraded applicability.
- The council has to locate vendors to designated vending sites for hygienic purposes.
- Upgrade the city's drainage system to circumvent the consequences of flash floods.
- Educational campaigns have to be carried out for public health awareness concerning the environments.
- Ban unlicensed food outlets to safeguard public health.

## Conclusion

The chaotic issue in Harare has prompted the author to provide a scrutinized exploration on the relationship between people and their environment. The paper had its precise orientation or focus on Harare's central business district and the inner-city. There was the provision of a background of the study which highlighted on a comparative view of the areas under study drawing some changes in urban population and how it has led to environmental problems such as increased litter. The change of routines by the city council concerning garbage or refuse collection has been noted as one of the factors giving threats to public health. The existing situation in Harare has been noted as a big threat on public health which calls proper intervention strategies in order to protect the general public.

The article also took into account a panoramic view or exploration on the threats and problems which are being encountered by people which may affect public health especially to those who make use of the central business district and the inner-city or transitional zone. Considering the increase of vendors and food outlets in the areas under study, public health is at stake as most of these activities are done at unhygienic sites and they are not even licensed by responsible authorities. Successively, the shortage of public toilets has been of interest as it prompts low hygienic ways of waste management as attested by human waste being found everywhere which leads to high spreads of diseases like cholera. The active existence of human waste tainted environments and the failure of drainage systems in the central business district have led to an easy spread of diseases as people make conduct with flash floods. More so, the paper also added on the contribution of herbalists on public health as most of them practice out of full legal or formal authority recognition. The situation in Harare is unbearable, a matter which urgently need responsible authorities to toil effectively for the betterment of the general public.

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