

# Urbanizing Rural Zimbabwe: Growth Points 37 Years on, Opportunities and Challenges Case of Zhombe in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** The designation of growth points created a ray of hope and promise for development of the hinterland. With government promising to invest in infrastructure there was a lot of hope that growth points would be the epi-center of activities in rural Zimbabwe. Attraction of both public and private investment was envisaged, but that was not to be. In Zhombe the little that government put up like the grain marketing board and the cotton company depots are the only visible developments since independence apart from the small scale welding and carpentry shops. Thirty seven(37) years after designation Zhombe growth point is actually showing signs of decline rather than development. The gold deposits around Kwekwe district that are being exploited by small scale gold panners have not been able to help develop Zhombe. To invite investment to growth points like Zhombe, Zimbabwe needs to involve the grassroots in planning as well as assist gold panners and gold buyers become serious business people in areas they are operating.

**Keywords:** *Growth Points, Urbanization, Infrastructure, Opportunities, Challenges,*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is an inevitable phenomenon, which brings with it both positive and negative effects to humanity. This paper unravels the opportunities and threats to the urbanization process in Zimbabwe rural areas by considering what is taking place at Zhombe growth point of Kwekwe district.

Handling urbanization has not proved to be an easy affair for the local authorities in Zimbabwe because of issues like restricted land for development, insufficient water supplies, erratic power supplies, uninterested investors. Urbanization has proved to be a mammoth task that requires multi sectorial approach. The number of players who must make an input is large and varied. If development of the small urban centers is ignored people will continue to move into existing cities and towns in seek of socio-economic opportunities thereby creating congestion in the cities leaving the hinterland to continue on the decline. In order to unravel the requests of urbanization of the previously rural hinder land it is necessary to carry out research activities.

This paper will present the situation in Kwekwe District in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe by considering Zhombe growth point's status 37 years after it was designated as a growth point. Kwekwe District is viewed as having the potential to positively adapt urbanization because it is centrally located in Zimbabwe. As well as the fact that Kwekwe used to be the heavy industrial hub of Zimbabwe. The many artisans and engineers who left the heavy industries can assist in the development of the hinterland. Kwekwe also has a large population (100000 going by 2002 census) the majority of whom are unemployed. The large deposits of gold around Kwekwe District do not only give a distinct development

advantage but also set the stage for growth and development of the local areas.

Cohen (2004), Chimura (2003), Chaeruka and Munzwa (2009) concur that there is no universal definition of an urban area as these differ from one country to another. In Zimbabwe the size of a settlement is determined by its population and industrial base. These two have been used to classify settlements. Starting with a Village, Business center, rural service center, and District service center, Town, Municipalities and Cities. Urban settlements start at the rural service center (Chaeruka and Munzwa 2009). In Kwekwe district we find Zhombe District Service centre (a designated growth point). Zhombe growth point will be the focus of this paper which seeks to analyze the challenges and prospects of growth or lack of it that has been observed in growth points 37 years after designation.

## II. GOVERNMENT POLICIES

After the attainment of independence government put in place policies to foster development as well as to try and spread the development throughout Zimbabwe. The policies that government set for Zimbabwe were engulfed in the global policy of "Growth with equity" A policy that set to see development being spread throughout the whole country including the formally deprived areas. To give impetus to the growth with equity government put in place the growth center policy as well as the decentralization policy. Decentralization has been defined by Conyers (2000) as the transfer of power, resources, and responsibility from central government to sub national governments. Decentralization was on the Zimbabwe Governments agenda since 1980. Decentralization was envisaged as a way of transferring development functions to rural local authorities. Colonialism had left a legacy of multiple and generally centralized power centers, rigid laws and procedures as well as bureaucratic institutions (Chaeruka and Munzwa 2009) As a result little effective power has been decentralized up to today. According to the Rural District Councils Act 1996 29:13 partnerships, borrowing powers and budgets require Ministerial approval. Meaning that power and authority is still vested at the apex and no activity can be undertaken without central government's consent.

## III. GROWTH POINTS

The growth center policy saw the designation of 55 district service centers into growth points. One growth point was designated in every district in the country. The focus was to develop those centers into economic hubs in the rural areas to benefit the economically marginalized rural people. The growth points were meant to become towns within 10-15 years. By the growth point strategy government committed itself to the development of rural and district centers. Manyahire e...tal (2009) defines growth point as centers of economic activity which are created in disadvantaged regions, for them

to eventually become natural centers of economic growth.

Hwekwete (1988) agrees with Manyanhire when he states that "the term growth point in Zimbabwe denotes settlements that are earmarked or designated for economic and physical development." They are places that should have potential for development especially under support from central government. The idea was that government would support the development with infrastructure (water, sewage reticulation, electricity, new market stands, public toilets and bus terminus) Government would provide the infrastructure under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). Zhombe is a designated growth point. Designation of growth points was done in a bid to attract private and public capital to these areas. In addition to being gazetted Zhombe also had its physical layout plans prepared with the aim of being in control of the anticipated development. With clear land uses that are well-coordinated on paper. Those companies that expressed willingness to invest at growth points were exempted from various taxes as stated in statutory Instruments 57 and 58 of 1987.

In 1983 government formed the Small Enterprise Development Corporation (SEDCO). The key objective of SEDCO was to encourage the establishment of cooperatives and small commercial and industrial enterprises by providing the requisite funding. The small commercial and industrial enterprises, it was hoped would operate from the designated growth points which had infrastructure put in place by government through the PSIP programme focusing on physical developments.

**RURAL ELECTRIFICATION PROGRAMME:** In 1983 the rural electrification programme was initiated. The Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) earmarked an initial 48 growth points for electrification. The 48 included Zhombe. As a result Zhombe got power supplies. There was great hope that the power supplies would boost the initiation of development.

#### IV. KEY FACTORS FOR DEVELOPMENT

In order for development to take place there are conditions that must prevail. According to Manyanhire et al (2009) the key factors for development include the existence of proven economic base supported by the exploitation of local natural resources. The natural resources will be used as raw materials to trigger chain reaction in the form of industrial activities hence employment creation and the creation of forward and backward linkages within the hinterland. The next key factor is availability of adequate physical and human resources to sustain and facilitate industrial development. The third key factor is assured government support to stimulate and support the potential until the economic growth is sustainable.

#### V. METHODOLOGY

This study took a case study approach. In a bid to come up with a comprehensive description and explanation of the challenges and prospects of urbanization in Zhombe The various elements of urbanization in kwekwe district were examined by targeting the planning authority which is the Zimbabwe Rural district Council and the residents of Zhombe district service center including those in the nearby villages. The Ministry of local government Rural and urban Planning was used as a key informant in the research.

A sample was drawn from council management. Three (3) members out of 8 were interviewed. Representing 38% coverage of the population in that strata. Fifty residents of Zhombe out of the 496 were given questionnaires representing 10 % coverage. At the same time 10 villagers out of 80 were

interviewed.

A convenience sampling approach was used; the researcher visited Zhombe growth point early in the morning and gave questionnaires to the first householder who was found in their place of residents including the villagers. Physical developments were observed by the researcher on the days of the visit to the growth point

#### VI. ZHOMBE 37 YEARS LATER

Zhombe district service center is still small in terms of both physical structures and population. Leading to the conclusion that 37years after being designated as a growth point Zhombe is still underdeveloped and stagnant. The population remains small and below 1500, little physical development have taken place. The question is why has Zhombe remained small in spite of the designation and all the physical and financial support from central government over the years? Why has the anticipation of developing an economic hub not been met? Why have investors not take advantage of the tax concession to move into Zhombe? Why did the retrenched artisans from the kwekwe heavy industries not move into Zhombe?

There are 1565 serviced stands at Zhombe of these 1226 are housing stands and 399 are business stands. Of the 1226 housing stands, 730 are not yet developed leaving only 496 as developed stands 37years on.

What is visible at Zhombe growth point is the government hospital, the government high and primary schools, the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) and the Cotton Company (COTTCO) depots. There are also a number of groceries shops, butcheries. At Zhombe no outer buildings were observed in the residential areas since development is progressing as per plans pointing at the absence of pressure on accommodation in the areas. However a number of outer buildings were observed on the business stands meaning that a number of people reside on the business stands. They have on site accommodation to provide security as well as provided earnings for the business owner. Availability of accommodation is an advantage for Zhombe. However it also symbolizes lack of attractiveness of the growth point. All residents (100%) sighted low rentals as a major advantage for staying in Zhombe but the low rentals have not been able to attract investment.

All respondents (100%) indicated that there are fewer employment opportunities in Zhombe growth point. There are no major industries what is visible is the informal sector activities being carried out by vendors and flea-market stand holders. Grain Marketing Board (GMB) and Cotton company (COTTCO) depots were seen as potential employment avenues but with a very low up take of employees. On the other hand the informal trading activities involving vendors and flea-market stands stood out clearly in the district service center as the major employment activity. Council management indicated that Zhombe has approved layout plans. In terms of the Regional Town and Country ACT 1996 individuals with substantial developments on their pieces stands can apply for title deeds to secure their investments. It was hoped that such a move can attract investment towards the District service centers but today 37 years after designation no reasonable investment has been attracted to Zhombe.

All respondents cited agriculture is the predominant land use surrounding Zhombe. Maize and cotton are the major crops grown. Cattle rearing are also quite notable in the areas. The center can therefore develop agro-industries, abattoirs, milling centers ginneries, and oil-pressing industries are potential business ventures in Kwekwe District. The next activity cited in

the area was gold panning. All respondents stated that gold panners and gold buyers are nomadic. The move into area were deposits are discovered and proceed out when need be. Council management indicated that Zhombe growth point is supposed to be a source of revenue for Zibagwe Rural District Council by now. The traditional cash cows for the Local authority the commercial farms no longer exist it is necessary for the local authority to harness the centers residents as a source of revenue. However the centre remains small and no sustainable revenue can be generated from there.

The flea-markets have created employment in Zhombe. Even some former retail shops have converted into flea –markets as the flea market business seems to be doing better than the retail outlets at the moment. Council management indicated that they are collecting some revenue from the flea-market owners

## VII. CHALLENGES

**WATER:** Zhombe district service center has water reticulation systems managed by the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA). Zhombe also has a borehole and several protected wells as sources of domestic water. According to council management and the residents Zhombe dam has become an unreliable source of water for domestic and industrial use due to siltation, leading to the drilling of a borehole and deep wells in the district service center. The new residential properties are the ones without water at Zhombe. One of theoretical considerations for human settlement is availability of a reliable source of water. For a growth point which expects to attract both people and investment in order to grow into a town, water must be available without interruptions otherwise it will be a health time bomb. As a result of the water shortage the urbanization of Zhombe will not be possible unless a new source of water supply is identified.

Ninety per cent of the Residents expressed the view that service delivery is poor. They indicated that interruptions to water and power supplies are common and refuse removal is non-existent. Piles of uncollected rubbish could be seen at every convenient point. Leading to the conclusion that no system of refuse removal exists at Zhombe growth point.

**LAND FOR FUTURE EXPANSION:** Zhombe growth point is surrounded by villages to the east to the west south and north are villages the furthest of with are only two kilometers from the growth point the majority are nearer in fact they are now like part of the growth point. It therefore means that the land around them is all settled. The local authority was of the assumption that the villagers would readily surrender their land to the local authority for expansion of the growth point. Unfortunately that is not the case as only 26 out of 80 households were willing to be resettled elsewhere. OF the remaining villagers 100% are demanding monetary compensation for their land and improvements plus an inconvenience allowance before they are relocated to another place. The local authority management indicated that the local authority does not have cash on hand. Management cited projects that have been appearing on Zibagwe Rural District Council budget since 2005 that have still not been implemented due to budgetary constraints. One can therefore identify financial constraints as hindering urbanization. The unavailability of land is and money are serious constraints to the development of Zhombe growth point. Thirty seven (37) years after designation Zhombe growth point is still without land for expansion.

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** The poor state of the roads does not need an introduction in Zhombe. Due to the poor state of the

access roads buses and other public transport operators are not using designated bus termini. Access roads at Zhombe are poor dry weather roads. They need to be up graded. Zhombe growth point is serviced by both land and mobile phone services. Communication is good in Kwekwe District. Information and money can be exchanged quickly in the district. However that has not proved to be enough to attract meaningful investment.

Management agreed that the bus termini are a potential source of revenue for the local authority hence the need to put them and access roads in shape. Infrastructure in place cannot support large population as well as diversity of industries.

**LIMITED RESOURCE BASE:** Resource based theorists argue that the trigger for economic growth lies in the presence of exploitable natural resources. (Manyanhire e...tal 2009). Zhombe is situated in an area with known gold deposits. The gold deposits are being exploited by gold panners. When the panners have made money they proceed to the nearest urban center to enjoy their earnings leaving Zhombe growth point behind them with its poverty. The residents agreed that Zhombe faces stiff competition from established urban centers such as Kwekwe 55 kilometres away, 150 kilometres to the east Kadoma and Gokwe 100 kilometres to the south east. The local authority management was agreeable that the agricultural activities such as maize production, cotton production and cattle rearing are at such a small scale. They cannot make an impact on the growth point, contributing to the absence of investors 37 years after designation.

**LACK OF PARTICIPATION:** The growth point strategy was borrowed from other countries. The local authority management and villagers were in agreement that no local involvement was done at any point in the identification, execution and even evaluation of the growth point project.

**UNATTRACTIVENESS OF ZHOMBE GROWTH POINT:** There was a general agreement among the respondents that the unattractiveness of Zhombe growth point lies in its size. Any business supplying goods and services requires a certain number of customers in order to generate sufficient revenue to survive in business. Businesses operating in Zhombe will not be able to make economies of scale with a population of around 1500. Economies of scale can only be achieved when the population in an area is large and diverse.

**INCREASED COMPETITION:** The local authority management was clear that the conditions prevailing at Zhombe have failed to be competitive enough to attract investors, especially those already established in existing towns. To the investors Gweru, Kwekwe, Kadoma, and Harare are better places to operate from. Zhombe has nothing to offer even the tax incentives offered under statutory instruments 57 and 58 are not enough to attract investors to the growth point.

**RURAL URBAN MIGRATION:** The movement of people away from the growth points to towns resulted in a market shrink for the existing businesses at Zhombe. The existing business had to downscale and even close.

### *Recommendations*

**INCREASING AGGRARIAN PRODUCTIVITY:** Land needs to be reorganized, in order to increase agrarian productivity. The increased productivity will transform growth points into marketing and production outlets. The transformation will make development in Zhombe area sustainable. As long as agrarian production remains low the growth points will remain

without business.

**RE-ORGANIZE GOLD PANNING:** Gold panning needs to be made a business. Those involved in panning must be the prospective investors in the areas they are exploiting. Rather than have panners who disappear as soon as they have made money. Panners need to transform their activities into proper business operations. Gold buyers also need to be made resident, in order for them to invest in Zhombe. Rather than continue to see 'bonnet' gold buyers, offices for that purpose must be made mandatory in Zhombe.

**REFUSE REMOVAL:** Contracts for refuse removal must be given to locals who can start as cart and donkey refuse collectors and they develop from there. The approach to development that develops locals is a route to sustainable development in growth points

**PARTICIPATION:** The planning authority (Zibagwe Rural District Council) must involve the villagers, stand owners, local and business people in the planning and development process so that the projects planned are sustainable.

**ROADS:** Roads leading to Zhombe from all directions need to be improved. The service roads at the growth point need resurfacing and the bus terminus must be renovated and used.

### CONCLUSION

Development remains very low in Zhombe. There are no wholesalers no breweries, no abattoirs, industrial sites are mostly car repairing and welding. Grinding mills are the dominant service industrial activity at Zhombe, followed by welding, carpentry, tailoring and radio repairs. No hotels, lodges sports bars, commercial banks and departmental stores operate in Zhombe growth point. Only retail outlets, butcheries, hardware shops, bottle stores and general dealers are available. Some of the facilities are operating besides flea-market activities. One can safely conclude that there is evidence of a growing informal sector in Zhombe growth point. There is poor diversity of industrial and commercial activity.

Poor solid waste management poses a threat to the public health as poor management of refuse may cause the spread of such diseases like cholera and malaria. Ichimara (2003) wrote that poor solid waste management may result in the contamination of ground water. Refuse collection is needed urgently. Overall there is no meaningful development towards the formation of an urban settlement in Zhombe 37 years after designation.

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