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and Nyasha Ndemo-Masimbarasi

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# About the Journal

## JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation Review and Advancement*, is to provide a forum for community engagement and outreach.

## CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Sociologists, demographers, psychologists, development experts, planners, social workers, social engineers and economists, among others whose focus is on community development.

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## SCOPE AND FOCUS

The journal is a forum for the discussion of ideas, scholarly opinions and case studies of community outreach and engagement. Communities are both defined in terms of people found in a given locale and defined cohorts, like the children, the youth, the elderly and those living with a disability. The strongest view is that getting to know each community or sub-community is a function of their deliberate participation in matters affecting them by the community itself. The journal is produced bi-annually.

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Articles must be original contributions, not previously published and should not be under consideration for publishing elsewhere.

**Manuscript Submission:** Articles submitted to the *Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation* are reviewed using the double-blind peer review system. The author's name(s) must not be included in the main text or running heads and footers.

**A total number of words:** 5000-7000 words and set in 12-point font size width with 1.5 line spacing.

**Language:** British/UK English

**Title:** must capture the gist and scope of the article

**Names of scholars:** beginning with the first name and ending with the surname

**Affiliation of scholars:** must be footnoted, showing the department and institution or organisation.

**Abstract:** must be 200 words

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Italicise *et al.*, *ibid.*, words that are not English, not names of people or organisations, etc. When you use several scholars confirming the same point, state the point and bracket them in one bracket and ascending order of dates and alphabetically separated by semi-colon e.g. (Falkenmark, 1989, 1990; Reddy, 2002; Dagdeviren and Robertson, 2011; Jacobsen *et al.*, 2012).

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# MANAGING THE 'SNATCH AND GRAB' AND OTHER CRIMES IN HARARE GARDENS: THE HARARE GARDENS CRIME ELIMINATION MODEL FOUNDED

LORETTA NYAKABWI<sup>1</sup>, ARNOLD KAMANGA<sup>2</sup>, TANATSWA MHLANGA<sup>3</sup>, SHANON KAPINGAUTOWA<sup>4</sup> AND ENEST TAKURA<sup>5</sup>

## Abstract

*Urban recreational spaces, such as the Harare Gardens in Harare, Zimbabwe, were initially conceived as secure environments intended for leisure, relaxation and public enjoyment. However, in recent years, these spaces have become increasingly characterised by heightened levels of criminal activity, particularly opportunistic offences such as "snatch and grab" thefts, attributable to their proximity to high-risk urban zones and the absence of robust security infrastructure. The deterioration of safety within such environments undermines their intended function and presents a pressing challenge for urban governance and planning. While previous research has broadly examined urban crime, there remains a significant gap in scholarly attention to crime dynamics within recreational spaces, especially in the context of sub-Saharan African cities. Moreover, few studies offer context-specific crime prevention frameworks responsive to the unique socio-spatial challenges of these sites. This qualitative study addresses this lacuna by investigating the prevalence, underlying*

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*causes and socio-economic impacts of crime in the Harare Gardens and by proposing the Harare Gardens Crime Elimination Model as a tailored intervention. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including visitors, vendors and street children, as well as participant observation within the Gardens. A qualitative desk review further supplemented the primary data. Textual analysis was employed to interpret the data, revealing three critical insights. Firstly, street children occupy a dual role as both perpetrators and victims of criminal activities within the Gardens. Secondly, the inadequacy of security infrastructure significantly facilitates the occurrence of crime. Thirdly, broader socio-economic vulnerabilities, such as poverty and marginalisation, serve as persistent drivers of criminal behaviour in the space. The study concludes that effectively addressing crime in the Harare Gardens necessitates a comprehensive and integrated approach, encompassing community participation, enhanced surveillance measures (e.g., CCTV systems) and targeted socio-economic interventions for at-risk groups. The proposed Harare Gardens Crime Elimination Model offers a contextually grounded framework aimed at restoring public trust, enhancing community resilience and re-establishing the Gardens as a safe and inclusive urban recreational space.*

**Keywords:** *urban crime, recreational spaces, street children, community engagement*

## INTRODUCTION

The City of Harare is home to several public recreational spaces, including the Harare Gardens, Unity Square and Greenwood Park. These facilities were originally established as centres of leisure and social interaction, attracting a diverse cross-section of the urban population. Renowned for their convivial atmosphere, these spaces have long served as oases of joy, tranquillity and relaxation amidst the bustle of city life. Over the years, they have also fostered informal economic activity, with vendors, hawkers and photographers

establishing livelihoods by catering to the needs of visitors through the sale of foodstuffs, fruit and photographic services. The Harare Gardens, in particular, have historically served as a cherished communal space intended to promote social well-being. However, despite its intended purpose, the gardens have increasingly become sites of public concern rather than public pleasure. Located to the north of Harare's Central Business District (CBD), the gardens are somewhat removed from key security infrastructure and personnel. Although a police base exists within the facility, it is frequently unmanned, creating a security vacuum that has inadvertently encouraged the proliferation of criminal activity. This absence of consistent oversight has allowed for the emergence of a range of illicit behaviours, including theft, gambling, robbery and the encampment of street children. As a consequence, the Harare Gardens have been transformed into a hotspot for crime, undermining their primary function as safe spaces for recreation. This article explores the nature and extent of criminal activity within the Harare Gardens and proposes a targeted intervention, the *Harare Gardens Crime Elimination Model*, as a context-specific framework aimed at restoring the facility's original purpose and ensuring the safety and well-being of all who use it.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by two complementary criminological theories: the Social Disorganisation Theory and the Routine Activity Theory. These theoretical lenses provide critical insight into the socio-structural and situational dynamics that underpin criminal activity within urban recreational spaces such as the Harare Gardens. The Social Disorganisation Theory, originally developed by Shaw and McKay (1942), posits that crime is more likely to flourish in communities marked by weak social cohesion, limited collective efficacy and pervasive social disorder. According to this framework, structural factors such as poverty, residential instability and ethnic



heterogeneity, undermine a community's capacity to maintain informal social control, thereby increasing the likelihood of criminal behaviour (Sampson and Groves, 1989). Bursik and Grasmick (1993) further emphasise the importance of informal mechanisms, such as community engagement and mutual surveillance, in maintaining order and reducing crime. When social bonds are fragile and residents are disinclined to intervene in problematic situations, opportunities for crime are likely to proliferate. Applied to the context of the Harare Gardens, this theory suggests that the convergence of diverse social groups, street children, vendors and transient visitors, combined with economic hardships and ineffective security structures, produces a socially disorganised environment. In such a setting, social ties are weak, collective action is minimal and informal social controls are virtually absent. This creates fertile ground for opportunistic crimes such as “snatch and grab” thefts and other illicit behaviours to take root (Warner and Rountree, 1997).

The Routine Activity Theory, formulated by Cohen and Felson (1979), complements this perspective by focusing on the situational conditions that facilitate crime. It contends that criminal acts are likely to occur when three elements converge in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of capable guardianship. Rather than focusing on the motivations of the offender, the theory highlights how everyday routines and environmental conditions generate opportunities for crime. Felson (1994) underscores how routine daily activities shape the spatial and temporal dynamics of criminal opportunities, while Clarke (1997) applies the theory to crime prevention, advocating for strategies that reduce situational vulnerabilities and enhance protective measures. In the Harare Gardens context, the theory elucidates how daily movements and interactions of vendors, visitors and street children contribute to crime risk. The presence of unguarded valuables (suitable targets), combined with economically driven offenders (e.g., street children) and a lack of

visible or effective security (capable guardianship), significantly increases the likelihood of criminal incidents. The proposed *Harare Gardens Crime Elimination Model* draws upon this theory by proposing practical interventions that aim to reduce opportunities for crime. These include increasing guardianship through improved surveillance and policing, promoting public awareness to reduce target suitability and disrupting the routine activities that facilitate criminal behaviour. Together, the Social Disorganisation Theory and the Routine Activity Theory offer a robust conceptual foundation for analysing crime within the Harare Gardens and for informing the design of contextually appropriate crime prevention strategies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Renowned sociologist Durkheim (2016) made significant advances in the study of crime and deviance, particularly by focusing on the essential role that crime plays in society. His fundamental thesis posits that crime serves vital social functions, supporting social cohesiveness and order. Durkheim argues that crime is an inevitable and necessary element in any society, suggesting that it is not merely an aberration, but a social phenomenon that reflects challenges faced by communities, such as unemployment and the mismanagement of resources. Furthermore, he introduced the concept of 'social facts', rules, conventions and institutions that exist beyond individual consciousness but which profoundly influence behaviour. Durkheim considers crime to be one such social fact, pervasive in all societies regardless of the specific norms or laws governing them. Despite the commonly negative perception of crime, Durkheim maintains that it plays a crucial role in upholding society's moral boundaries. Deviant behaviour, including illegal acts, helps define what conduct is deemed acceptable or unacceptable. In this sense, crime acts as a mechanism of social control. Typically, crime elicits a collective response, such as public outrage or punishment, which reinforces society's accepted standards and values. Social order is subsequently restored and the

collective conscience, a set of shared beliefs and values, is strengthened (Bowden, 2017). This process ultimately helps in reinforcing acceptable behaviour. Durkheim's conceptualisation of crime as a tool through which institutions can respond to societal challenges continues to be instrumental in developing strategies and solutions to the issue of crime in areas such as the Harare Gardens.

Despite decades of research and policy changes, crime continues to exert a profound negative social, economic and emotional impact on individuals, communities and society as a whole. To formulate effective solutions and promote safer, more resilient societies, it is imperative to understand the origins, consequences and preventive measures associated with crime. The foundational research of Robert Park, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (Park, 1915) laid the groundwork for understanding the link between urban ecology and crime. The significance of urban planning in crime reduction is further highlighted by Oscar Newman's (1972) concept of defensible space. According to the Broken Windows Theory proposed by Wilson and Kelling (1982), disorganisation and neglect can contribute to an increase in crime rates. Anderson's (1990) ethnographic studies illuminate the complex and interconnected issues of urban poverty and violence, highlighting how these challenges manifest and affect communities within urban environments. Building on these foundational insights, scholars such as Braithwaite (1989) have investigated community-based crime prevention strategies and restorative justice. These seminal studies underscore the complexity of urban crime, which is shaped by an interplay of social, economic and environmental factors.

Recent research has expanded upon these foundational ideas, with more recent studies examining crime trends and the relationship between economic conditions and crime rates. Levitt's (2004) analysis of the 1990s crime decline emphasises the importance of economic

factors and the role of policing tactics in shaping crime patterns. Similarly, Rosenfeld (2018) explores the relationship between crime rates and economic conditions, suggesting that shifts in economic circumstances can have a profound impact on crime trends. The importance of problem-oriented policing and community-led initiatives is highlighted in Sherman's (1995) work on policy innovation, which advocates for tailored, evidence-based approaches to crime prevention. Furthermore, Petersilia's (2003) research on evidence-based practices for reducing recidivism, underscores the necessity of data-driven approaches in the development of effective crime prevention strategies. Collectively, these studies illustrate the importance of the integrating theory, research and practice when addressing urban crime. This integrated approach offers valuable guidance for developing long-term solutions that can improve public safety and promote well-being in urban areas.

Matthews and Pitts (2001) have significantly advanced the study of crime and its impact on communities. They argue that crime is not merely a consequence of poverty and economic deprivation, but is also deeply rooted in social structures and political contexts. Their work suggests that crime persists partly due to policies that fail to adequately address the core issues facing communities. Furthermore, they assert that economic inequalities are intrinsically linked to broader injustices experienced by ordinary people, leaving them with few options but to turn to crime as a means of survival. In their view, crime cannot be eradicated through harsh penalties or heightened security measures alone. Instead, crime prevention requires a focus on community engagement and the implementation of policies that aim to uplift individuals from the conditions of poverty (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993). In the context of recreational areas, crime has become a significant concern due to a lack of security measures, exacerbated by tourism officials' failure to adequately protect visitors. Jones *et al.* (2012) support this observation, noting that tourism authorities have

not done enough to safeguard clients from potential criminal activity. To address this issue, they advocate for the implementation of security measures, such as surveillance systems, to prevent attacks on tourists and ensure that perpetrators are swiftly apprehended. This suggests a proactive approach to crime prevention, particularly in leisure and tourism spaces, where security must be prioritised to protect both visitors and the broader community.

## **STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation to explore the experiences of individuals visiting the Harare Gardens. As a primary recreational space, the gardens serve as a focal point for relaxation, making them an ideal setting for this research. The main objective of the study is to capture the experiences and perspectives of various visitors, as well as those who reside in the area, such as street children, who are integral to understanding the dynamics within the gardens.

A random sampling method was employed to select participants for the interviews. Random sampling was chosen due to its cost-effectiveness and simplicity, as it obviates the need for elaborate sampling frames or extensive recruitment processes (Levy and Lemeshow, 2013). This method is particularly well-suited to environments like the Harare Gardens, which attract a large, diverse crowd, making it easier to select participants without bias (Henry, 2017). Through random sampling, a broad range of individuals, including both visitors and street children who frequent the gardens, were chosen to participate in the study. Interestingly, it was discovered that many street children consider the gardens their home, making them valuable participants. These individuals, who witness the daily activities and social interactions within the space, provided rich insights into the patterns of criminal activity observed in the gardens. As regular observers of the comings and goings in the area, they serve as primary sources of information, offering crucial perspectives on the

trends and occurrences of crime. Engaging with these participants allowed the research to move beyond assumptions and develop a more nuanced understanding of the realities of crime in this public space.

The study also incorporated interviews with both victims and perpetrators of crime, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the different sides of criminal activities in the Harare Gardens. Victims were identified based on their direct experiences with criminal acts, while perpetrators were selected based on their involvement in street-level criminal behaviour. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure a representative mix of individuals, capturing a broad spectrum of viewpoints. This intentional selection process ensured that the study accounted for the lived experiences of those who have suffered from crime, as well as those who engage in it. By interviewing a diverse range of participants, the research was able to uncover the emotional and psychological impacts of crime on individuals, particularly the victims who have been affected by these incidents within the gardens.

In sum, the methodology adopted for this study, spanning in-depth interviews, participant observation and purposive sampling, facilitates an in-depth understanding of the social dynamics at play in the Harare Gardens. The combination of insights from both victims and perpetrators offers a unique opportunity to explore the complexities of urban crime and its impact on the community in this public space. This approach enables the research to gather detailed, qualitative data that enriches the overall understanding of the patterns and experiences of crime within the gardens.

## **FINDINGS**

The Harare Gardens, once a vibrant nucleus of social interaction and relaxation in the heart of Zimbabwe's capital has, in recent years, become emblematic of the broader challenges facing urban public spaces. Once characterised by the cheerful murmur of families, couples

and artistes, the Gardens now echoes with concern and caution as rising crime steadily erodes its former charm. The park, which for decades served as a cherished recreational facility, is increasingly plagued by a surge in criminal activity, including *kubvutirwa* (snatch-and-grab thefts), petty and grand larceny, illegal gambling (*feja-feja*), drug abuse and, more gravely, violent crimes including assault and murder. Much of this unlawful behaviour is attributed to disenfranchised street children, often victims of economic hardship and the breakdown of familial and social structures, who, driven by desperation, resort to opportunistic and sometimes violent acts. The ramifications of these developments extend well beyond immediate safety concerns. They threaten the social cohesion that once defined the gardens, discourage foot traffic essential to nearby small businesses and contribute to a broader erosion of public trust in shared urban spaces. Where once the Harare Gardens symbolised unity, leisure and civic pride, it now risks becoming a cautionary tale of neglect and societal disrepair. Harare itself, a metropolis with a diverse population and a rich cultural legacy, mirrors the contradictions of many post-colonial urban centres thriving with potential, yet grappling with the persistent scars of inequality, unemployment and systemic inefficiencies. Among its many challenges, the deterioration of open areas such as the Harare Gardens stands out as particularly urgent. The persistence of *kubvutirwa* and other forms of urban crime underscores the need for comprehensive interventions that address not only law enforcement, but also the socio-economic roots of this decline. Without concerted effort, what was once a sanctuary in the city, risks fading into a memory, a casualty of urban decay and the failure to safeguard common civic heritage.

In this context, *kubvutirwa* refers to a swift and opportunistic form of theft wherein individuals, often operating in crowded urban spaces, snatch personal belongings from unsuspecting victims. Within the environs of the Harare Gardens, such acts are frequently perpetrated

by street children, who tend to target those appearing distracted, such as individuals absorbed in their mobile devices or carrying visible valuables. The opportunistic character of this crime renders it particularly insidious, for the element of surprise often leaves the victim feeling violated and deeply unsettled. Though there are elements akin to a surprise attack, the term *kubvutirwa* also connotes the forcible and self-serving seizure of personal property. It is commonly associated with street youths and other petty criminals who prey upon unwary bystanders, especially in locations such as the Harare Gardens. The term encapsulates a broader culture of theft and desperation that has emerged in urban centres plagued by social unrest and economic adversity. Tsvangirai (2020) argues that Zimbabwe's socioeconomic instability is intrinsically linked to the rise in petty crimes such as *kubvutirwa*. With unemployment rates soaring, particularly among the youth, many find themselves driven to engage in small-scale criminality as a means of subsistence (*ibid.*). Chikanda (2018) similarly observes that, while the expansion of the informal economy may present certain opportunities, it often fails to accommodate the needs of a burgeoning urban population, thereby contributing to the prevalence of public crime. Understanding the cultural interpretations of crime is essential to grasp the phenomenon of *kubvutirwa*. Munemo (2021) notes that in contexts marked by economic hardship, social norms and community attitudes may serve to normalise certain forms of criminal behaviour. In this light, snatching may be interpreted not merely as theft, but as a response to structural inequities and a broader sense of societal discontent.

Narratives from vendors in the Harare Gardens reveal that the economic hardships confronting urban dwellers have significantly contributed to the alarming rise in criminal activity within the gardens. In an interview with Clara, a vendor operating in the Harare Gardens, explained that numerous individuals, including street children and the unemployed, found themselves in precarious financial circumstances,



compelling them to engage in crimes such as snatching and grabbing (Interview with Clara, Harare Gardens, 15 September 2024). She further elaborated on how these individuals often organised themselves into gangs that systematically targeted visitors to the gardens. According to Clara,

‘Individuals come together to establish gangs with well-organised structures that carry out planned thefts. The gangs target crowded public areas where they rob people of their belongings’ (*ibid.*).

Similarly, Tafara, a photographer based in the Harare Gardens, stated in an interview that,

‘New members are recruited, trained and deployed to steal from either visitors or those passing through the Harare Gardens’ (Interview with Tafara, Harare Gardens, 22 September 2024).

Within this context, the economic difficulties confronting Harare’s urban population have driven many unemployed youths to align themselves with criminal gangs operating within the gardens. Regrettably, visitors, drawn to what was once regarded as a convivial and leisurely space, often fall victim to these organised perpetrators of crime.

Given that the Harare Gardens serves as a recreational facility, unsuspecting and relaxed visitors are often taken unaware by attacks perpetrated by well-organised gangs. These criminal groups deliberately targeted individuals who appear distracted or at ease, such as those walking alone, carrying shopping bags, or engrossed in their mobile phones. In addition to targeting such passers-by, certain members of these gangs are strategically stationed in more secluded areas of the gardens: dimly lit pathways, tranquil alleys and unattended stalls. Within these obscured spaces, potential victims, typically relaxed visitors, are observed by criminals who subsequently launch attacks, either as coordinated groups or a lone perpetrator. In an interview conducted with Clara, the vendor, remarked,

'Individuals seated in secluded spaces are the main targets. After being spotted, the criminals share signals, usually in the form of whistles or hand signs. These signals are given by the senior members of the gangs to indicate whether to proceed with the attack or not' (Interview with Clara, Harare Gardens, 15 September 2024).

Items such as mobile phones, foodstuffs, handbags and wallets are commonly snatched from victims in these isolated areas of the gardens (*ibid*). Upon seizing the goods, the culprits typically flee the scene with haste. These surprise attacks reveal two critical issues afflicting the Harare Gardens. First, the conspicuous absence of security personnel within the premises. Second, the mismanagement of the facility fosters an environment in which criminal activity can flourish unchecked. Consequently, the Harare Gardens, once envisioned as a space for leisure and relaxation, has come to be regarded as a hotspot of criminality, a hazardous place for those in search of recreation.

Furthermore, criminals who snatch goods from visitors typically flee the gardens and vanish into the surrounding streets of the city. Many escape into the thickets within the gardens, later exiting through particular weak points in the perimeter. These vulnerable areas are often the result of deliberate vandalism, as criminals damaged sections of the fencing to create covert escape routes. In an interview, Chioniso an ice cream hawker operating within the Harare Gardens, lamented the deteriorating state of the park. She stated,

'The garden is no longer safe. Some trees must be cut down, as they provide hiding places for thieves. The fence was destroyed by the thieves so that they could escape after stealing from the visitors' (Interview with Chioniso, Harare Gardens, 17 September 2024).

The physical condition of the gardens thus facilitates the perpetration of crime. Chioniso further recounted how visitors who attempt to pursue the culprits were often met with violence. She explained,

'Once the thieves steal from you, they first run into the thicket; any visitor who follows them is beaten by the gangs before they flee the Garden.

Unfortunately, the police base is not manned and one must go to First Street to report a case' (*ibid*).

Criminals operating within the Harare Gardens, therefore, enjoy considerable advantage owing to the ineffective security infrastructure. The presence of an unmanned police base meant that these individuals can commit crimes without fear of apprehension. Moreover, the overgrown thickets and the broken fencing system provides convenient escape routes, further emboldening the perpetrators. As a result, the Harare Gardens, once a space intended for leisure and public enjoyment, lacks adequate security measures, rendering its visitors increasingly vulnerable to attacks by criminals.

In addition to snatching, *feja-feja* is another prevalent crime in the Harare Gardens. This game, which deceives unsuspecting visitors, involves criminals dressed in suits who gather and roll bottle caps or tumbler, under which an object is concealed. The criminals lure individuals to bet money on guessing under which cap or tumbler the object is hidden. Visitors who agree to participate are typically allowed to win the first game, which serves to entice them into continuing to play. However, as the game progresses, the visitors inevitably lose all subsequent rounds, resulting in them losing all their money to the criminals. In an interview with Chinoto, a street father in the Harare Gardens, he reflected on *feja-feja* as yet another criminal activity in which visitors are lured into playing a rigged game, ultimately losing their money to the perpetrators. Chinoto explained,

'When a visitor agrees to participate in the game, we make sure they win the first round. After winning, we reward them with money and encourage them to play again. We ensure they bet more money in the following rounds. Once they exhaust their funds, we disperse' (Interview with Chinoto, Harare Gardens, 18 September 2024).

Unlike snatching and grabbing, *feja-feja* involves a more complex system wherein visitors are willingly drawn into the game. However,

the visitors have little control over the outcome and are often at the mercy of the criminals. Clara, the, further narrated that,

‘Since the criminals coerce the visitors into continuing to play the game, they typically lose their personal belongings, such as wallets, belts, bags, mobile phones and foodstuffs’ (Interview with Clara, Harare Gardens, 15 September 2024).

Thus, the Harare Gardens became a notorious hotspot for crime. Visitors, seeking a space for leisure and recreation, often find themselves bereft of both their cash and personal possessions at the hands of criminal gangs.

The prevalence of snatch-and-grab incidents and *feja-feja* scams in the Harare Gardens foster a pervasive atmosphere of fear among visitors. Concerns about personal safety prompt many individuals to avoid the gardens, leading to a decline in foot traffic and diminishing community engagement. This shift discourages potential visitors and stifles the social interactions that are essential for nurturing a sense of community. In the 1990s, the Harare Gardens had been a vibrant recreational facility, accommodating a variety of activities (Interview with Norman, Harare City Council Officer, Council House, 12 September 2024). It was a hub for significant gatherings, such as weddings, conferences and even church crusades (Interview with Clara, the vendor, Harare Gardens, 15 September 2024). However, the once convivial and bustling environment gradually gave way to a more hostile atmosphere, where visits became rare. Over time, some street children and street fathers established their ‘homes’ within the Harare Gardens. These individuals, driven by desperation, resorted to stealing items such as food, clothing, wigs and electronic gadgets, including mobile phones, from visitors. Consequently, the gardens have become a locus of insecurity, as most visitors fell prey to thieves and street dwellers. In light of the escalating criminal activity, many people opted for other recreational facilities, such as the Unity Square

Garden, which offers a sense of security that has long been absent from the Harare Gardens.

Moreover, the crimes have severe financial repercussions for local businesses which have hitherto relied upon the foot traffic generated within the Harare Gardens. Vendors and small-scale enterprises operating in the vicinity, sustained considerable losses owing to persistent theft, which, in turn, eroded public confidence. As business proprietors grapple with declining sales, many find it increasingly difficult to sustain their operations, thereby contributing to a broader downturn in the local economy. These continued declines in revenue entrench a vicious cycle of poverty and criminality. Vendors within the Harare Gardens lament that the rising incidence of crime has significantly curtailed the flow of visitors to the area. Clara, the long-standing vendor, remarked,

‘Nowadays, only a few people visit the gardens. No one is purchasing our products. People now fear the street children and thieves who are all over the gardens. We are now working for losses’

Clara’s account highlights two salient concerns. Firstly, the escalation in crime instills a pervasive sense of fear, thereby deterring the general public from frequenting the Harare Gardens. Secondly, this resultant decline in footfall severely impairs the functioning of small businesses operating within the gardens. In a separate interview, Chioniso, the ice cream hawker, observed,

‘Visitors no longer trust us. They are suspicious of everyone. They rarely purchase our products because they suspect that we may also be involved in the crimes’ (Interview with Chioniso, Harare Gardens, September 2024).

The prevalence of criminal activity in the Harare Gardens, therefore, not only discourages patronage, but also undermines the credibility of small-scale vendors, thereby paralysing their operations. Visitors, no longer at ease, become increasingly reluctant to engage with these

business operators, exacerbating the economic hardships faced by the community.

This research came up with a model to eliminate crime in the Harare Gardens. The model seeks to improve the welfare of the visitors. The application of the model eliminates crimes and returns a convivial environment, which promotes community engagement and the joyous nature of the gardens. The model also promotes the flourishing of the local small-scale businesses in and around the Harare Gardens.

### **MORPHING THE SOLUTION: THE HARARE GARDENS CRIME ELIMINATION MODEL**

The *Harare Gardens Crime Elimination Model* is a highly secure digital system designed to regulate and monitor the entry and exit of individuals within the Harare Gardens. The model employs modern technological devices such as digital cameras, sirens, digital tokens, electrified fences and Closed-Circuit Televisions (CCTVs). It is aimed at the total eradication of crime within the Harare Gardens. The model is founded upon five principal objectives. The first is to create a convivial environment for visitors within the Harare Gardens; the second, to prevent the entry of crime perpetrators; the third, to remove street children from the gardens; the fourth, to establish a safe environment for visitors; and the fifth, to monitor the movement of people within the gardens.

The model entails the establishment of two digital gates, one for entry and the other for exit, within the Harare Gardens. The implementation of these gates is intended to facilitate the monitoring of ingress and egress. The use of multiple entry points is eliminated to ensure more effective regulation through a singular, controlled access point. Visitors are issued digital tokens at the control room adjacent to the entry gate. Each token is registered in the name of the visitor to whom it is issued. To gain entry, the visitor inserts the token into the digital

gate, which then grants access. Upon entry, the visitor retrieves the token, which must be used again when departing. At the point of exit, the token is 'swallowed' by the gate, which then opens to permit the visitor's departure. Tokens thus collected shall be returned by the gate manager to the entry point, allowing for redistribution to other incoming visitors.

As all tokens are registered under visitors' names, the entry gate records the identity of each individual entering the gardens. Similarly, the exit gate records the departure of each visitor. This mechanism allows for a reliable log of both entry and exit. At six o'clock each evening, the entry gate automatically closes and generates a printout of the day's entries, which is submitted to the council office for safekeeping. The exit gate likewise produces a printout, indicating the precise time at which each visitor exited the gardens. In the event of a criminal incident, these printouts will serve as essential tools for police investigations.

CCTVs are installed in proximity to the digital gates and continuously record footage of individuals entering and exiting the gardens. These video recordings are of critical importance in the identification and tracking of crime suspects. In addition, digital cameras automatically capture photographs of both incoming and outgoing visitors. These images are stored for 24 hours, after which they are automatically deleted. In the event of criminal activity, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) may employ the photographic evidence from the digital cameras, video footage from the CCTVs and printed entry/exit logs to identify and apprehend perpetrators. This integrated approach is expected to significantly facilitate the work of law enforcement within the gardens.

Physical emergency buttons shall be installed at strategically selected locations throughout the Harare Gardens. These include high-traffic

areas, benches, entrances, restrooms and secluded spots. A centralised security system will be implemented, enabling personnel to receive and respond to alerts from these emergency beacons at any time. Real-time notifications will appear on a central dashboard, displaying information such as the location, time and nature of the emergency. The system permits direct communication between the responding personnel and the individual who activated the beacon, thereby allowing for clarification and appropriate response. Integration with existing law enforcement systems, such as those of the ZRP, will ensure full compatibility. As part of the standard protocol, security personnel will verify each alert's nature, dispatch specialised teams for rapid intervention and utilise necessary tools and communication devices. Regular drills and training exercises will be conducted to prepare personnel for various emergency scenarios. Additionally, all incidents reported through the system will be documented for analysis and the development of future prevention strategies. A feedback mechanism will also be introduced, enabling visitors to comment on the efficiency of emergency responses and thereby contribute to the system's continual improvement.

The fishpond and water pool within the Harare Gardens require restoration and revitalisation to eliminate them as potential hideouts for street children. Existing infrastructure, including performance stages and cabins, also necessitates renovation and the implementation of surveillance measures to mitigate the formation of criminal havens and eliminate security blind spots. Furthermore, the installation of enhanced street lighting, commencing each evening, will improve visibility and safety during night time hours.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explores the prevalence and drivers of snatch and grab crimes and other illicit activities in the Harare Gardens, revealing critical insights into the interplay of social, economic and



environmental factors that contribute to this issue. The findings underscore the vulnerability of the Harare Gardens due to its location, inadequate security and the presence of marginalised groups, particularly street children. The study also highlights the limitations of current crime prevention strategies and the urgent need for a more holistic and community-based approach. This research ultimately underscores the importance of addressing crime, not merely as a law enforcement issue, but as a complex social problem requiring integrated solutions that promote social inclusion, enhance security and revitalise the Harare Gardens as a safe and enjoyable public space. The Harare Gardens Crime Elimination Model, founded on these findings, presents a framework for sustainable crime reduction and community empowerment within the gardens.

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