

Resource Allocation Decisions and Urban Sustainability: A Focus on Rural Local Authorities in the Harare Metropole

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Abstract

Urban sustainability in African metropolitan regions is critically shaped by how scarce public resources are allocated across essential services and infrastructure. This study investigates the effect of resource allocation decisions on urban sustainability outcomes in Harare Metropolitan and surrounding rural district councils, examining both the distributive patterns of municipal spending and the lived experiences of residents and service providers. In Harare Metropolitan there has been wide literature with lots of reports about recurrent fiscal constraints, infrastructural backlogs and rapid urbanisation intensify the trade-offs municipal authorities face when prioritising water, sanitation, waste management, transport, housing and environmental services. The Neo-liberalism theory underpinned this study complimented by the Resource Mobilisation Theory of Local Governance and Public Choice Theory (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962). The study adopted a mixed methods paradigm and sequential explanatory design. On the quantitative strand, secondary administrative data were compiled from municipal budgets, audited financial statements, departmental expenditure reports and service performance dashboards for Harare Metropolitan jurisdictions. For the quantitative aspects, largely descriptive statistics were used and data collected through a structured questionnaire. On the qualitative strand, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with municipal officials, councillors, service delivery units, civil society actors and residents from high-, medium- and low-income neighbourhoods. Purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used to ensure

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representation across sectors and settlement types (formal and informal). Major findings were that, there were challenges regarding governance issues, institutional capacity, political interference, aging networks and infrastructure and maintenance problems. Major recommendations are that there should be higher and more stable allocations to preventive maintenance and network rehabilitation in water and waste to correlate with improved service reliability and environmental hygiene; coordinated road and drainage investments reducing flood risk and solid waste externalities. By combining rigorous budget-outcome analysis with rich institutional and community perspectives, the study contributes an evidence-based framework for allocation-for-impact in Harare Metropolitan and surrounding district authorities to inform practical recommendations on budget prioritisation, execution discipline, maintenance planning and accountability mechanisms to enhance equitable, resilient and sustainable urban service delivery.

Keywords: service delivery, Harare Metropolitan, rural district council, policy, regulations, survivalism

INTRODUCTION

Urban sustainability has risen to the forefront of global development discourse as cities grapple with rapid population growth, climate change and increasing service delivery demands. The United Nations (UN-Habitat, 2023) estimates that by 2050, approximately 68% of the global population will reside in urban areas, intensifying resource pressures, particularly in developing regions. African cities, including those in Zimbabwe, face unique challenges linked to governance incapacity, historical inequalities, economic instability and institutional fragmentation (Turok, 2021). The Harare Metropolitan Province, in this context comprising Harare, Chitungwiza, Epworth and Ruwa Local boards and surrounding rural district councils like Manyame, Goromonzi and Zvimba, reflects these multifaceted pressures as it struggles to balance resource constraints with the growing need for sustainable urban development. Since the early 1990s, Harare has experienced unprecedented urban expansion driven by rural-to-urban migration, demographic pressures, informal sector proliferation and economic decline (Chirisa, 2019). This expansion has strained the city's infrastructure, leading to deteriorating service delivery outcomes. Zimbabwe's

prolonged economic instability, marked by hyperinflation, currency volatility and reduced municipal revenue streams, has complicated the ability of local authorities to effectively allocate resources (Mugari and Fombad, 2021). The result is a widening gap between service demand and available municipal capacity.

One of the core determinants of urban sustainability is the manner in which public institutions allocate financial, human and material resources. Resource allocation decisions influence the quality of water provision, waste management, transport systems, housing, environmental conservation and local economic development. These resources, however, remain severely constrained in Harare owing to reduced fiscal transfers from central government, limited own-revenue generation and politicisation of budgetary processes (Makoni and Chatiza, 2020). For instance, the decline of traditional revenue streams such as rates, service charges and property taxes—largely due to economic decline and rising poverty—has weakened the financial independence of councils.

Environmental sustainability in Harare is compromised by uncollected waste, pollution of water bodies such as Lake Chivero, wetland encroachment and poor land-use planning. Solid waste management systems are overburdened, resulting in illegal dumpsites across suburbs including Mbare, Glen View and Epworth (Government of Zimbabwe, 2022). These challenges are aggravated by insufficient investment in waste collection vehicles, recycling infrastructure and landfill management. The inadequate allocation of resources to the Environmental Management Unit within Harare City Council shows how financial decisions directly shape environmental outcomes.

Water supply has been a critical problem for Harare Metropolitan for over two decades. Water treatment plants such as Morton Jaffray operate below capacity due to aging equipment, chemical shortages and limited capital expenditure. Poor allocation to water infrastructure rehabilitation leads to frequent water shortages, compelling households to rely on unsafe boreholes and contaminated wells. This exposes communities to health risks such as cholera and typhoid, documented during outbreaks in 2008 and 2018 (Chirisa, 2019). These problems highlight systemic weaknesses in prioritising long-term, sustainability-oriented water investments. Social sustainability is equally affected by resource allocation decisions. Social equity, housing quality, public

health, safety and accessibility of services are shaped by municipal investment decisions. Most low-income communities in Harare, particularly informal settlements, receive disproportionately lower service provision due to limited resource allocation and inadequate planning. Epworth, for instance, has historically been underfunded due to its quasi-legal administrative status, resulting in infrastructure backlogs and poor living conditions (Makoni and Chatiza, 2020). This raises concerns about spatial justice and inclusive urban governance.

Economic sustainability in Harare Metropolitan is hindered by deteriorating infrastructure, informalisation and weakening local economic development policies. Streets and road networks have deteriorated due to insufficient maintenance funds and weak corporate governance within road authorities. Power shortages, unreliable water supply and poor transport infrastructure elevate business costs and discourage investment. These economic risks illustrate how inadequate resource allocation undermines Harare's urban competitiveness. A major structural challenge involves institutional fragmentation. Entities such as Harare City Council, Chitungwiza Municipality, Ruwa Local Board, Epworth Local Board and parastatals like the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), share overlapping jurisdictional mandates. This creates conflicts in revenue collection, service delivery responsibility and infrastructure management (Moyo, 2020). Fragmented governance complicates coherent budgeting and creates redundancies in resource allocation.

The Public Administration Theory suggests that budgetary processes should be strategic, participatory, transparent and guided by evidence-based priorities. However, in Zimbabwe, allocation decisions are often influenced by political interference, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies and inadequate public participation (Hope, 2020). Reports from the Auditor General between 2015 and 2023 highlight recurrent irregularities, including misallocation of funds, unsupported expenditures, weak internal controls and lack of adherence to procurement regulations. These issues directly undermine sustainability efforts. Given these complexities, understanding how resource allocation affects urban sustainability is vital for developing more resilient and inclusive cities. Mixed methods research is appropriate because it provides a comprehensive analysis: quantitative data reveal trends in budgets and service outcomes, while

qualitative insights uncover institutional dynamics and stakeholder perspectives. This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which resource allocation decisions shape environmental, social and economic sustainability within Harare Metropolitan.

STUDY THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This section presents the key theories anchoring this study. Three theories, the Theory of Neo-liberalism, the Resource Mobilisation Theory and the Public Choice Theory are presented. The section concludes with a synthesis of these theories.

THEORY OF NEO-LIBERALISM

Neo-liberalism is a theoretical approach that can help us understand the decision-making processes associated with resource allocation in relation to urban sustainability in Harare Metropolitan and other rural districts in Zimbabwe. The theoretical approach was developed in the latter half of the 20th Century to counter the Keynesian model of welfare state, which advocated increased state involvement in delivering public goods (Lee, 2007). Major characteristics include market liberalisation, privatisation of state assets, deregulation, fiscal austerity, cost-recovery techniques and decentralisation of governance functions (*ibid.*; McCarthy, 2007). With respect to the management of municipal budgets and infrastructures financing, the theory stresses the principles of financial and operational efficiency in achieving effective provision of urban services in collaboration with the private sector and prioritising those that could be paid for by residents based on demand (Cheyne, 2015). This theoretical perspective has been adopted in Zimbabwe through fiscal austerity practices that limit the financial resources available to city councils forcing them to adopt user payments in their operations (Manyena, 2006). Though intended to promote efficient use of resources, neo-liberalism reforms are also criticised for marginalising poor people in cities (McCarthy, 2007; Slocum, 2016). Moreover, research from a global and African perspective suggests that some of the limitations associated with neo-liberalism include partial decentralisation, government interference and fragmented governance processes, all of which hinder its efficiency towards sustainable urban development (Manyena, 2006; Lee, 2007). Therefore, the use of neo-liberalism is characterised by an orientation towards market rationality, but this is usually

achieved through the exclusion of social inclusivity and sustainability considerations in urban and peri-urban areas of Zimbabwe.

RESOURCE MOBILISATION THEORY

On the other hand, the Resource Mobilisation Theory of local governance explores how variations in resources available determine how they can be efficiently mobilised for effective use in pursuit of urban sustainability strategies. This theory highlights several key variables like the range of financial, human, institutional and information resources, and the ability of local governments to mobilise both internal and external resources (Cheyne, 2015; Slocum, 2016). Additionally, it recognises the importance of network governance where local governments establish relationships within various sectors like the public and private sectors to increase their ability to mobilise resources (Manyena, 2006; Cheyne, 2015). Considering the Harare Metropolitan and rural district councils, differences in resource endowment and institutional capabilities result in differences in the prioritising of budget allocations, the maintaining of infrastructures and investments in strategic areas that impact the sustainability results (Manyena, 2006). According to the theory, effective mobilisation of resources is not just about financial resources, but, rather, involves reforms and capacity-building issues that are very important considering the governance issues and fiscal limitations of Zimbabwe (Manyena, 2006; Spiegel, 2015). At the same time, one should note that criticism of the theory includes the lack of consideration of power imbalance and politics behind the distribution and prioritisation of resources (Lee, 2007). In spite of this limitation, resource mobilisation is an important tool that helps analyse the ways that municipalities use to manage their constraints and networks. Overall, the neo-liberal and resource mobilisation theories provide important insights into the relationship between the market-based reforms and local capabilities that have an impact on the process of resource allocation that greatly influences the results of sustainability in Harare and its rural districts.

PUBLIC CHOICE THEORY

The application of the Public Choice Theory is instrumental in providing an analysis of factors that influence resource allocation leading to specific urban sustainability outcomes in Harare Metropolitan and its adjacent rural district councils. The theory is grounded in methodological individualism and rational

choice. According to the theory, people, especially politicians and public officials, pursue self-interest, thus seeking to gain maximum benefits from actions or decisions made. It means that self-serving actions and behaviours become important elements within the decision-making process. Consequently, the interests of political actors may take the priority in influencing resource distribution. In light of empirical evidence from Zimbabwe, it becomes clear how political factors, including patronage practices and elite domination of key resources such as land and housing, impact urban sustainability processes in the country, whether in urban or peri-urban settings. Indeed, one of the examples of political manipulation of resources is seen in the case of Fast-Track Land Reform Programme, which led to distortions in land markets and subsequent unplanned urban expansion in Harare. Such cases illustrate the importance of using Public Choice Theory in analysing the role of political motives in allocating resources influencing urban sustainability outcomes. Rapidly growing cities in Zimbabwe provide such examples due to their highly politicised nature (Hammond and Knott, 1999; Brown, 2001; Muchadenyika, 2015; Bhanye *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, critics of Public Choice Theory point at its overemphasis on self-interest and the need to pay attention to collective action and normative questions. Thus, Public Choice Theory requires complementation with other theories (Macdonald, 2003; Oppenheimer, 2012).

THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS

A theoretical synthesis of Public Choice, Neo-liberalism and Resource Mobilisation Theories would provide an ideal theoretical framework to discuss issues of resource allocation processes and consequences thereof towards urban sustainability in Harare and rural councils around it. Neo-liberalism provides important information concerning market-based allocations, stressing such aspects as de-regulation and privatisation in allocating resources, often neglecting the aspect of social equity and environmental sustainability for the sake of economic development. As such, this theory would be useful in explaining the tendencies that exist in urban management practices in Zimbabwe, where the allocation process of infrastructure, housing and services in urban areas might be influenced by market logics and, hence, might be directed at the detriment of poorer residents of urban areas and peri-urban rural population (Brown, 2001; Magidi, 2021). Simultaneously, the Resource Mobilisation Theory stresses the process through which the allocation of

resources is controlled politically and organisationally, showing how the elite in Zimbabwe use their political influence over land and urban spaces to gain certain benefits in terms of resource allocation. The Resource Mobilisation Theory would complement the Public Choice Theory by considering issues of collective politics and mobilisations' abilities to affect allocation decisions (Jenkins, 1983; Klandermans, 1984). All in all, from these three theories, one can see that the process of resource allocation within Harare and its vicinities is political and characterised by the logics of the markets, struggles for power and organisational mobilisation. The multi-theoretical approach enables one to lay down an effective foundation for understanding urban sustainability issues based on political economic processes, such as the impacts of resource allocation on infrastructure, services, housing and the environment (Brown, 2001; Thondhlana *et al.*, 2021; Mukomberanwa *et al.*, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents literature in existing studies. The key themes presented in this section include resource allocation decisions in sustainability-related sectors, the effects of resource allocation on urban sustainability and challenges influencing resource allocation for urban sustainability.

The issue of resource allocation by local authorities influences significantly urban sustainability results, especially in the case of rapidly urbanised cities like Harare Metropolitan and rural district councils around it. Empirical evidence indicates that municipal budgeting processes often reveal pronounced disparities in sectoral prioritisation, with resources being unevenly distributed across competing demands (Fenuku, 2024; Pratiwi *et al.*, 2024). The important point is the tendency of water and energy sectors to be preferred choices when it comes to financing because of their critical importance in service delivery and their political prominence as spotlight jobs (Arshad *et al.*, 2021; Ahmad and Muslim, 2024). Environmental management sectors, which include green space and solid waste sectors, are likely to lack enough financial inputs even though their importance in urban sustainability cannot be overlooked (Juarez-Quispe *et al.*, 2025). The described situation is indicative of the general trend of resource allocation by local governments focused on more immediate benefits rather than urban sustainability (Fenuku, 2024). Deterioration of urban environmental quality and undermining of social well-being are among the effects of such

allocation strategies, thus necessitating integrated fiscal policies to manage sustainability.

The patterns of expenditure in municipalities provide important information about adequacy of resource allocation and impacts on sustainability expenditures. Literature indicates that many municipalities suffer from limited fiscal envelopes that constrain them from allocating adequate resources to various sectors (Ahmad and Muslim, 2024; Pratiwi *et al.*, 2024). Specifically, services involving water are usually budget heavy, as a result of which there is no room in the municipal budget for other aspects of sustainability such as waste and transport services which ensure ecological sustainability and resilience (Arshad *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, there is an urgent need for participative approaches towards budget planning as otherwise the prioritisation might be inefficient in addressing the problem of resource allocation in line with the sustainability objectives (Fenuku, 2024). The presented issues highlight the significance of increasing resources for sustainable development purposes.

The problem of resource allocation to energy and environmental sustainability is not easily addressed. Empirical studies show that the reason for this is the fact that the systems providing energy resources tend to be heavily invested, as they play a pivotal role in sustaining economic operations and provision of services to the citizens (Arshad *et al.*, 2021; Ahmad and Muslim, 2024). The sector of environmental sustainability such as green spaces and the control of pollution, however, continues to be one of the least prioritised even though the evidence of their relevance in their ability to reduce urban heat, improve biodiversity and offer a better quality of life for citizens is growing (Juarez-Quispe *et al.*, 2025). In addition, the aforementioned trend hinders the provision of important ecosystem services and limits the adaptive capacity of the urban environment to environmental changes (Fenuku, 2024). Finally, insufficient resource allocation negatively impacts innovations and the adoption of environmentally-friendly technologies essential for moving to carbon-neutral cities (Pratiwi *et al.*, 2024). The resolution of these imbalances calls for the dedication of municipal leadership towards re-aligning their budgets by incorporating sustainability principles that help in balancing their investments across sectors.

Budget adequacy remains a core constraint limiting the realisation of sustainable urban infrastructure and services, with recurrent fiscal shortages impeding long-term sustainability investments. Several scholarly findings show the problem with insufficient mobilisation of resources in the case of rural district councils around Harare, thus resulting in a backlog of infrastructure in transport, waste management and environmental services (Fenuku, 2024; Juarez-Quispe *et al.*, 2025). Inadequate funding also fuels reliance on short-term fixes rather than sustainable, lifecycle-based infrastructure planning, causing premature asset depreciation and escalating future costs (Arshad *et al.*, 2021). Political interests, along with poor governance, contribute to making resource allocations difficult with a higher tendency to allocate money to politically relevant projects compared to sustainability projects (Ahmad and Muslim, 2024). In such conditions, citizen participation for urban sustainability becomes challenging (Pratiwi *et al.*, 2024). Thus, it is necessary to adopt an integrated approach towards budget transparency and accountability along with the use of innovative financing techniques that can improve municipal fiscal capability to support sustainable urban development.

Resource allocation proves to be essential in achieving sustainability goals in terms of environmental protection due to its impact on the quality of water, waste management, pollution and green spaces. Empirical evidence reveals a direct link between sufficient and strategic investments in water infrastructure, water quality and availability, which are key to good health and ecological balance. However, research also points out certain limitations when it comes to achieving desired results through resource allocation owing to institutional weakness and implementation problems (Arshad *et al.*, 2021; Juarez-Quispe *et al.*, 2025). For example, allocation of resources to waste reduction programmes and pollution prevention mechanisms encounters difficulties with enforcement and implementation of technologies needed to achieve the required results. Besides, in most cases there is lack of sufficient allocation of resources to urban green areas and environmental protection (Ahmad and Muslim, 2024). This shows that although allocating resources is significant, its effectiveness depends largely on institutional strength and efficient implementation.

Social sustainability is impacted significantly by resource allocation because it helps in improving the provision of public services and enhancing health and

well-being of communities. Researches have shown that specific investment in health care and basic social services improves health indicators and addresses socio-economic inequalities via improvements in the quality of care provided and its accessibility (Mogahed and Mansouri, 2025). Combining resource allocation with participatory governance systems will promote social equity since needs of marginalised communities will be taken into account during the process of urban development planning, thus making it more inclusive (Pratiwi *et al.*, 2024). However, there is a wide variation in the ability of local administrations to allocate resources effectively due to the influence of institutional inefficiencies and political dynamics (Fenuku, 2024). Besides, there may be a considerable time lag between allocation of resources and achievement of social benefits, requiring constant monitoring of the process. The above evidence shows that resource allocation is closely associated with the effectiveness of governance practices in creating social sustainability outcomes.

In relation to economic sustainability outcomes, the process of achieving them through proper resource allocation will have some peculiarities in terms of timing and scope. Existing literature emphasises the need for investing funds in local economic development, business resilience and job creation programmes (Juarez-Quispe *et al.*, 2025). In particular, it is possible to mention that resource allocations related to the green jobs sector, along with the development of more affordable and clean technology, are likely to promote economic resilience and at the same time serve the environment goals (Arshad *et al.*, 2021). Still, positive economic aspects of such actions like job creation and improvement of services' affordability will be realised within an extended period of time and thus may cause certain difficulties for local government officials who are under constant pressure to produce some economic results right away (Ahmad and Muslim, 2024). In addition, resource allocations have to be supported by effective institutions and markets that would foster innovations and entrepreneurship. This way, sustainable development cannot be achieved without appropriate resources and proper strategies.

Based on the information provided above, one can state that successful sustainable development is highly dependent on the adequacy and efficiency of resource allocations. In fact, regardless of how much money is spent on some projects, if there is no proper leadership, transparency, participation of

stakeholders, the results will not be achieved (Fenuku, 2024; Pratiwi *et al.*, 2024). Failure to implement environmental measures and monitor these actions properly, and the inability of economies to reap economic benefits faster, is caused by the existence of ineffective mechanisms in place in most regions (Juarez-Quispe *et al.*, 2025). To bridge these gaps, an integrated approach to resource allocation policies that would be flexible, fair and consistent with the key principles of urban sustainability, should be considered. Through the development of institutions and adoption of holistic models of governance, city administrations could utilise resources more effectively to ensure greater resilience, inclusiveness and economic development of rapidly growing metropolitan and rural communities.

Allocations of funds related to urban sustainability within the framework of Harare Metropolitan and rural district councils in the vicinity pose some of the key difficulties associated with a financially unstable environment that limits the possibility of proper services provision and development of relevant infrastructures. Limited finances are a major obstacle for cities to meet the increasing demands posed by urbanisation and lead to greater dependence on unreliable sources of funding from donors, making such an approach financially unsustainable due to the lack of alignment with urban sustainability plans (Haou *et al.*, 2025; Reynilda and Renal, 2025). Research findings indicate that fiscal instability makes it harder to allocate sufficient amounts of budget revenues to vital areas like provision of clean water and proper management of waste, making communities vulnerable to further environmental damage and failure to provide proper services (Spoann *et al.*, 2018; Song *et al.*, 2025). In turn, such financial constraints usually force local governments to adopt a reactive rather than proactive stance towards their finances, leading to insufficient investments in sustainable city-building. The academic research indicates that the way to overcome the issue of financial restrictions is to diversify local sources of income and improve their capacity of proper financial management to create shock-absorbing mechanisms for urban infrastructure in rapidly growing cities.

Governance-related issues considerably affect the efficiency of resource allocation decisions, where the impact of corruption, poor fiscal management and low-level accountability practices reduces the capacity of government agencies to allocate resources properly. According to research carried out in

Africa, there is evidence that corrupt practices cost many countries much-needed funds for sustainability, leaving their infrastructure poorly maintained and unsustainable (Fenuku, 2024; Pratiwi *et al.*, 2024). In addition, the absence of transparency and accountability during budgetary procedures further exacerbates the situation, depriving the general public of chances to exercise control over the actions of the government (Ahmad and Muslim, 2024). Moreover, the interference of politicians in the process of resource allocation also distorts the priorities of the government in favour of its own agenda (Okolie and Egbon, 2025). Such factors degrade the quality of urban governance and erode trust, which is a key element needed for proper coordination and urban development. It has been highlighted in the literature that improving the quality of urban governance through implementing accountability mechanisms, transparency and participatory budgeting processes, is a requirement for ensuring an alignment of resource allocation with sustainability goals.

Political considerations tend to interfere in the process of resource allocation and lead to distortions and misallocation of resources in favour of political considerations, which hinders urban sustainability (Song *et al.*, 2025; Haou *et al.*, 2025). This politicisation results in under-investment or misallocation of resources into less synthesised but nonetheless critical services, like waste management and environmental protection and in reducing the capacity of cities to be resilient. For instance, such important sectors as waste management and environmental protection are neglected due to political manipulation. Influence of the urban elite in urban governance only reinforces inequality and contributes to the allocation of insufficient resources to under-served areas. Empirical findings from sub-Saharan Africa emphasise that depoliticising budgetary systems and institutionalising evidence-based planning are essential to curtailing politicised discretion and promoting just, efficient resource distribution (Hossain *et al.*, 2024; Haou *et al.*, 2025). Commitment to good governance and citizen participation can help reconfigure the political economy of resource allocation to support sustainable urban development.

Insufficient institutional capacities constitute one of the key challenges to planning and resource allocation. Information on budgeting is not effectively used because of skills shortages, limited technical expertise and the lack of

organisational capacity (Uduokhai *et al.*, 2023; Haou *et al.*, 2025). Due to the absence of relevant databases and proper systems of monitoring, decisions regarding resource allocation may be far from reality. Furthermore, fragmentation of institutional settings and operations leads to duplicated work and effects (Spoann *et al.*, 2018; Haou *et al.*, 2025). In such a case, academics stress the necessity to implement capacity-building programmes involving collaboration within institutions, advanced analysis techniques and integrated governance approaches. Institutions with adequate knowledge and coordination capacity can allocate resources more efficiently in pursuit of sustainable initiatives.

The coordination of activities among organisations presents another major issue hampering the effectiveness and sustainability of resource allocation. Because of institutional networks and inter-agency fragmentation, there is poor information sharing, competing mandates and uncoordinated programming that reduces financial and operational efficiencies (Haou *et al.*, 2025; Song *et al.*, 2025). Weak stakeholder collaboration limits synergies that are critical for multisectoral sustainability efforts such as integrated water management, waste reduction strategies and urban greening initiatives. Participatory governance models, enabling inclusive decision-making and joint accountability, are identified as mechanisms to bridge institutional divides and align resource allocation with comprehensive urban sustainability priorities (Maphosa and Moyo, 2024; Haou *et al.*, 2025). Enhancing coordination through institutional reforms, digital platforms for data-sharing and capacity-building programmes foster more coherent planning and execution processes. These efforts are inclusive of resources and enhance their efficiency in use, prevent duplication of efforts and enhance urban shock resiliency, ultimately in accordance with equitable urban development trajectories.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed methods paradigm (Creswell and Clark, 2011). The rationale is that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches allows for a broader and deeper understanding of how existing laws used by local authorities impact on urban sustainable development. The design was explanatory sequential, which denotes that, first, quantitative data are collected and analysed, followed by qualitative exploration to explain or elaborate on the

quantitative results. The population comprised local authorities officials like those in housing and planning departments, mayors, town clerks, administrators, human resource directors/officers, construction and maintenance departments, including rate-payers, informal traders, illegal settlers, formal traders, land housing developers, chiefs or village headmen, among others. The target population size was about 620. Stratified sampling and purposive sampling were used. For the size, the Krejer and Morgan formulae and data saturation were used. For the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire (Maxwell *et al.*, 2023) was used to capture data on financing models used, the extent of innovative financing adoption and the perceived link with institutional sustainability. For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with institutional leaders, revenue unit heads and external stakeholders. For quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics (means, frequencies) were used to profile adoption of financing models; inferential statistics (e.g., multiple regression) were used to test the relationship between innovative financing adoption and institutional sustainability (*ibid.*). For qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis was used by using interview transcripts, coding for themes such as drivers, obstacles, institutional culture, stakeholder engagement and sustainability outcomes. The integration of results was such that the qualitative findings were used to explain and contextualise the quantitative results, offering a richer understanding of “how” and “why” the relationships exist. Ethical considerations were taken into account and that involved institutional ethical clearance that was sought; participation was voluntary, with informed consent; confidentiality and anonymity were observed.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Quantitative Findings

Scale: 1-5 Likert (1 = Very low/Strongly disagree; 5 = Very high/Strongly agree).

Interpretation bands:

1.00-2.49: Low

2.50-3.49: Moderate

3.50-5.00: High

OBJECTIVE 1: ADEQUACY OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION IN SUSTAINABILITY-RELATED SECTORS

Table 1: Adequacy by Sector

Sector	Mean	SD
Water	3.0	0.95
Solid Waste Management	2.7	0.98
Energy	3.1	0.92
Transport	2.8	0.96
Green/Public Spaces	2.9	0.90
Composite Adequacy Index	2.9	0.70

INTERPRETATION

Adequacy is moderate overall (Index M = 2.9). Energy (M = 3.1) and Water (M = 3.0) score comparatively higher within a moderate range, while Solid Waste (M = 2.7) and Transport (M = 2.8) lag. This suggests uneven allocation, with waste and transport as priority areas for improvement.

OBJECTIVE 2: IMPACT OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Table 2: Environmental Outcomes

Environmental Outcome	Mean	SD
Air quality has improved	2.8	0.93
Water quality has improved	2.9	0.91
Waste reduction is effective	3.0	0.94
Urban green cover has increased	2.6	0.90
Pollution control is adequate	2.7	0.96
Environmental Impact Index	2.8	0.72

INTERPRETATION

Perceived environmental impact is modest (Index M = 2.8). Waste reduction performs best (M = 3.0, still moderate). Green cover (M = 2.6) and pollution control (M = 2.7) are weaker, indicating that current allocations are not yet translating into strong, visible environmental gains.

OBJECTIVE 3: EFFECTS ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Table 3: *Social and Economic Outcomes*

Social	Access to essential services	3.4	0.85
	Community well-being	3.3	0.86
	Public health outcomes	3.2	0.88
	Social Sustainability Index ³	3.3	0.68
Economic	Affordability of services	3.0	0.89
	Business resilience	3.1	0.87
	Green jobs/employment	2.9	0.92
	Economic Sustainability Index ⁴	3.0	0.66

INTERPRETATION

Social outcomes are moderate (Index M = 3.3), with relatively better service access. Economic outcomes are also moderate (Index M = 3.0), with green employment lagging (M = 2.9). This suggests that resource allocation is helping social conditions somewhat, while economic dividends, especially jobs, are less evident.

OBJECTIVE 4: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON CHALLENGES AFFECTING ALLOCATION

Table 4: *Perceived Challenges (N = 460; 1-5 scale; higher = bigger challenge)*

Challenge Area	Mean	SD	
Budget constraints	4.2	0.80	
Political interference	4.0	0.85	
Skills/technical capacity	3.8	0.88	
Data availability/quality	3.7	0.90	
Inter-agency coordination	3.9	0.86	
Integrity/corruption risks	4.1	0.84	
Donor dependence	3.6	0.91	
Composite Challenge Index ⁵	3.9	0.69	

INTERPRETATION

Stakeholders identify budget constraints ($M = 4.2$) and integrity/corruption risks ($M = 4.1$) as the most severe barriers, followed by political interference and coordination gaps ($M \approx 3.9-4.0$). This pattern points to systemic and governance-related hurdles as primary constraints on effective allocation.

Major takeaways:

- ☐ Allocation adequacy is moderate and uneven, with solid waste and transport trailing.
- ☐ Environmental gains are modest, especially on green cover and pollution control.
- ☐ Social outcomes are moderate; economic outcomes are moderate but weaker on green jobs.
- ☐ Budget, integrity and political factors emerge as top challenges to better allocation and outcomes.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A six-stage thematic analysis framework was applied (familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, definition and reporting). Respondents included key informants from government departments, local authorities, environmental agencies, civil society and community-level actors.

OBJECTIVE 1: TO ASSESS THE ADEQUACY OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION IN SUSTAINABILITY-RELATED SECTORS

Table 5: *Themes and Sub-themes - Adequacy of Resource Allocation*

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
1. Uneven Allocation Across Sectors	Water and Energy receive prioritisation	Funding and equipment favour certain sectors.
	Solid Waste and Transport underfunded	Chronic shortages of vehicles, bins, collection equipment.
2. Inadequate Budgeting and Planning	Delayed disbursements	Funds released late or inconsistently.
	Short-term budgeting	No long-term sustainability planning.
Limited Human and Technical Capacity	Skills gaps	Shortage of engineers, planners, technicians.
	Outdated equipment	Tools and machinery depreciated beyond usability

Participants commented as follows

Key informant 16 said,

“Water and energy get the lion’s share, but waste management is always left behind. We simply don’t have the trucks or bins to meet demand.”

Key informant 7 said,

“Allocations look good on paper, but the disbursements come late, so projects are delayed or abandoned.”

Key informant 25 said,

“We lack technical staff to implement sustainability projects—capacity is a real bottleneck.”

Stakeholders consistently perceived resource allocations as uneven and insufficient, especially in solid waste management and transport. Although water and energy sectors were seen as relatively well-funded, participants emphasised budget delays, short-term planning and severe technical capacity deficits, limiting effective implementation of sustainability initiatives.

OBJECTIVE 2: TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Table 6: Themes and Sub-themes - Environmental Impact

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
1. Limited Visible Environmental Improvements	Slow progress on pollution control	Air and water pollution remain problematic.
	Green cover declining	Urban expansion reducing vegetation.
2. Waste Management Inefficiencies	Irregular collection	Uncollected waste contributes to pollution.
	Illegal dumping	Caused by poor service reliability.
3. Fragmented Environmental Interventions	Overlapping mandates	Conflicts between agencies.
	Weak monitoring systems	No consistent follow-up on interventions

Participants commented as follows

Key informant 11 said,

“We see minimal change in pollution levels; the current allocations are too small to make a real environmental impact.”

Key informant 4 said,

“Green spaces are shrinking because there’s no dedicated funding for urban reforestation.”

Key informant 13 said,

“Waste collection is irregular. People end up dumping in open spaces.”

Respondents highlighted that resource allocation has not produced strong environmental gains. Pollution control efforts were described as weak and fragmented, while declining green cover and waste management failures were attributed to underfunding and poor coordination among agencies.

OBJECTIVE 3: TO EXAMINE HOW RESOURCE ALLOCATION AFFECTS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Table 7: Themes and Sub-themes - Social and Economic Sustainability

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
1. Social Service Improvements but Uneven Quality	Better access to water and health services	Improvements where investment was prioritised.
	Persistent disparities	High-density areas remain underserved.
2. Moderate Economic Benefits	Increased livelihood opportunities	Recycling, small businesses linked to environmental projects.
	Limited job creation	Green jobs not fully supported.
3. Burden on Vulnerable Households	Rising service charges	Costs exceed affordability for many families.
	Reduced ability to cope	Households struggle with irregular services.

Participants commented as follows:

Key informant 21 said,

“Some communities have better access to water and health services now, but high-density suburbs still suffer.”

Key informant 8 said,

“There are small economic benefits—for example, recycling jobs—but nothing major.”

Key informant 9 said,

“Households are paying more for services that are not consistently delivered.”

Resource allocation has produced moderate social improvements, particularly in water access and service delivery. However, benefits are not evenly distributed and economic impacts remain limited, with insufficient support for green jobs. Many households are economically strained by rising service charges.

OBJECTIVE 4: TO EXPLORE STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON CHALLENGES INFLUENCING RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Table 8: Themes and Subthemes - Challenges to Resource Allocation

Theme	Subtheme	Description
1. Budgetary and Financial Constraints	Inadequate funding	Budgets far below sectoral needs.
	Over-reliance on donors	Reduces autonomy and long-term planning.
2. Political and Institutional Interference	Politicisation of priorities	Resource allocation influenced by political actors.
	Weak inter-agency coordination	Poor alignment, duplication and conflict.
3. Governance and Integrity Challenges	Mismanagement of funds	Leakage and inefficiencies reported.
	Poor accountability frameworks	Weak monitoring and evaluation.
4. Skills and Data Limitations	Inadequate technical expertise	Limits planning and project implementation
	Lack of reliable data	Hinders evidence-based decisions

Participants commented as follows:

Key informant 4 said

“The biggest problem is chronic underfunding. We’re always trying to stretch a very thin budget.”

Key informant 13 said,

“Politics often dictates where the money goes, not actual sustainability needs.”

Key informant 5 said,

“Without reliable data, we can’t allocate resources efficiently—planning becomes guesswork.”

Key informant 9 said,

“Coordination between agencies is very weak. Everyone works in silos.”

Stakeholders identified systemic financial constraints, political interference and weak institutional coordination as the most significant barriers to effective resource allocation. Governance issues, including mismanagement and poor accountability, further hinder optimisation of limited resources. Skills gaps and inadequate data also undermine the quality of planning and decision-making.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the current distribution of resources in Harare Metropolitan is unequal, meaning that water and energy is allocated more than solid waste management, transport, or green/public spaces. This trend is consistent with neo-liberalism and public choice thinking, that is, it is authorising expenditure on sectors exposed for services without sufficient funding for sectors that are vital for long-term urban sustainability. In this regard, budgeting is an efficiency-focused and politically partisan process, rather than a comprehensive planning process for sustainability, similar to that which Brown (2001), Lee (2007) and McCarthy (2007) expressed concerns about. The moderate composite adequacy score also reflects the fact that the capacity to mobilise funds is still limited by low fiscal capacity and poor local governance structures, as suggested by Manyena (2006) and Cheyne (2015). Thus, the results provide an answer to the question as to whether allocation decisions are simply technically driven, a question that highlights the fact that institutional power, fiscal pressure and prioritisation logics influence allocation decisions in ways that result in the exclusion of critical environmental services. The current achievements in water quality, waste management and reduction and air pollution on the environmental front are moderate and green cover and pollution control continue to be at a weak level. That has meant that money has not yet matched ecological benefits, particularly in areas where preventive maintenance and environmental protection will take long-term investment efforts, not just short-term solutions. The findings are consistent with those of Arshad *et al.* (2021) and Juarez-Quispe *et al.* (2025) who state that sustainability outcomes is not just reliant on funding, but also on having a discipline in lifecycle-oriented planning and implementation approach. The poor environmental results were due to resource mobilisation, which proved to be insufficient for transforming existing resources into actual environmental actions for multiple reasons related to coordination problems, among others, as pointed out by Spiegel (2015) and Spoann *et al.* (2018). The results also

corroborate the conclusions of Thondhlana *et al.* (2021) that cities in southern Africa need to move towards transdisciplinary, integrated solutions and not sectoral ones to achieve sustainability. Overall, the environmental evidence shows that under investment and fragmented implementation remain as factors reducing urban resilience.

Social and economic findings show that resource allocation has resulted in some modest achievements in access to services and benefits to the community, though in economic terms, these are less pronounced. From a social perspective, the findings indicate that there is potential for better access to basic services with spending, but yet overly dense and informal settlements continue to have service gaps, particularly highlighting the equity concerns identified by Brown (2001) and Makoni and Chatiza (2020). In this case, the findings are in agreement with the principles of the Public Choice Theory as stronger political and/or institutional environments provide advantages in allocating resources compared to weaker areas. On an economic level, the moderate level of the results scores and the poor green employment outcome indicate that current spending does not yet offer a powerful driver of local economic endeavour, or of business resiliency, or of inclusive growth, as seen by Magidi (2021) and Uduokhai *et al.* (2023). The results suggest that sustainable urban development goes beyond the need to invest in infrastructure, it is also essential to invest in affordable, job and space justice decisions.

Overall, the stakeholder findings confirm that financial constraint is a political interference, poor accountability and institutional weakness are the key concerns for conducting effective allocation. The results directly support the theory outlined in the study: neo-liberal austerity has a role to play in explaining the ongoing fiscal squeeze, the Public Choice Theory explains politicised prioritisation and the Resource Mobilisation Theory how a lack of networks and skills diminishes implementation capacity. The government and integrity challenges highlighted are more similar to Ahmad and Muslim (2024), Fenuku (2024) and Pratiwi *et al.* (2024), which reveal that transparency and accountability play a significant role in public spending. The study results also account for findings of Hammond and Knott (1999), Muchadenyika (2015) which indicate that there is a way political control of urban assets can influence the results of development. Combined, the evidence points to the need for

greater accountability and measurable service and environmental outcomes; depoliticised budgeting; stronger technical capacity; and more stable funding to achieve better sustainability outcomes in Harare.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that resource allocation decisions play a pivotal role in shaping environmental, social and economic sustainability in Harare Metropolitan. Persistent underfunding, weak financial management, politicisation of budgeting and fragmented governance structures undermine the capacity of urban local authorities to provide sustainable services. Mixed methods findings converge on the need for reforms that enhance transparency, fiscal autonomy, evidence-based planning and participatory decision-making. Given the uneven adequacy across sectors (e.g., waste management and transport lagging behind water and energy), Harare Metropolitan and surrounding rural district councils should adopt a needs-based allocation model that prioritises underfunded sustainability sectors. This includes increasing the capital budget for solid waste management equipment, collection vehicles and recycling facilities, allocating dedicated funds for green space restoration, urban forestry and environmental protection initiatives. A more balanced allocation approach would help address sector disparities and improve overall sustainability outcomes. There is need to enhance long-term budget planning and improve disbursement efficiency. Local authorities should introduce multi-year budgeting frameworks for sustainability programmes. There is need by local authorities to strengthen environmental management capacity and inter-agency coordination by providing technical training and capacity-building to staff in environmental planning, engineering and sustainability management. One of the most important recommendations is the need to address governance, political interference and integrity challenges. There is also need to establish transparent procurement, auditing and accountability mechanisms for sustainability projects. Councils should also mobilise additional funding and reduce over-reliance on donors by exploring public-private partnerships (PPPs) for waste management, renewable energy and green infrastructure. One way is to introduce green financing mechanisms such as environmental levies, carbon credits and sustainability bonds and to strengthen local revenue collection efficiency to support sustainability initiatives.

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