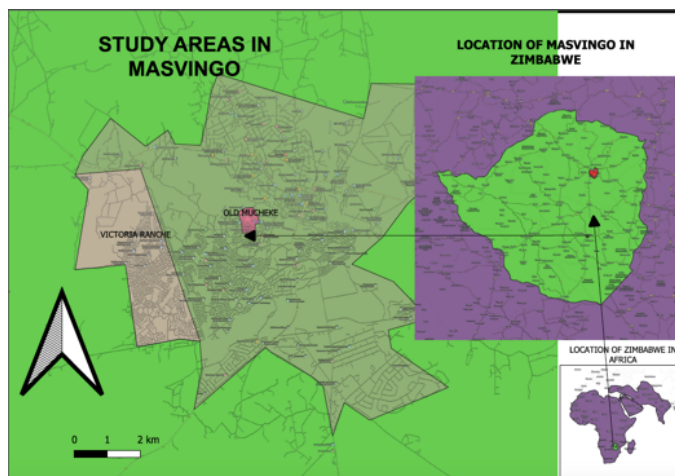


Revised Institutional Framework¹ for Infrastructure Emplacement and Sustainable Service Delivery in Victoria Ranch, Masvingo



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¹ Framework developed in a consultative manner under the leadership of the Infrastructure Planning and Environment Unit, Office of the President and Cabinet, Masvingo Province with technical support from the Development Governance Institute/Inclusive Urban Infrastructure (DEGI/IUI) Project

Background/Introduction

Victoria Ranch settlement, set up on Lot A and the Remainder from 2007 has more than 13 000 land parcels (stands) mainly for residential purposes. The farms are urban state land that nearby Masvingo City had applied to incorporate into its boundary unsuccessfully. National government's Urban State Land Office allocated blocks of stands to 15 land developers initially, which number has grown to 20.

The settlement was made possible by the availability of affordable urban state land on the city edge under the post-2000 land redistribution program. Demand for housing land peaked after Operation Murambatsvina of 2005 and the state response through Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle.

Victoria Ranch used the parallel development model and took advantage of the 2004 Circular No. 70, which adjusted planning standards for roads and stand sizes, among others. Government (Department of Physical Planning, now Spatial Planning and Development) prepared and approved a layout plan in a week. Developers sold stands to residents who were allowed to settle if roads had been opened and any blasting needed for future placement of water and sewer pipes had been done.

Councils for Masvingo City and Masvingo Rural District entered into a Memorandum of Agreement 4 years later in April 2011 to jointly oversee development of Victoria Ranch. Some 12 169 residential stands were submitted to the city, which got administration fees for 8 328 (68.4%). Further, developers submitted engineering designs for water, sewer and roads to the city paying the necessary approval fees. The two Councils shared fees on 70% to 30% to the city and RDC respectively.

Most residents have put up houses and now reside in the settlement. Compared to 776 residential stands sold by the city between 2011 and 2023 Victoria Ranch is easily the province's single biggest urban settlement in the last two decades. This achievement is however partial as basic services remain outstanding. Several factors explain the below par performance towards settlement sustainability.

Council-developer relations took long to be moderated as land allocation to developers and onward sales to beneficiaries did not adequately involve Councils. Developers saw Councils as opposed to their being allocated land while Councils

considered developers to be partisan, unwilling to be subject to Council supervision, and didn't do enough to meet their onsite obligations. Early phases of the settlement were during the Government of National Unity (2009 to 2013) where urban state land and housing were separated and held by Ministers from different parties. This constrained inter-Ministry and intergovernmental cooperation. The Office of the Provincial Administrator helped bring local and national government institutions together with developers but lacked technical clout.

After early progress coordination slowed before being completely halted. Developer-resident relations repeatedly faltered till an impasse was reached. Most residents now object to making payments to developers arguing previous payments did not yield infrastructure and services. Developers acknowledge this standoff and note that periods of state absence (being orphaned) and their being besmirched by the Uchena Commission of 2018-19 costed them their integrity.

Sixteen years on water, sewer, and roads infrastructure remains outstanding. Different developers struggled to collaborate towards settlement-wide onsite designs, getting these approved, and implementing at the same pace. Masvingo City, expected to provide bulk services to the edge of the settlement faced delays. Tunk sewer is only 87% complete while water infrastructure was completed but is not yet being delivered to residents. Approving engineering designs was slow. Engineering consultants hired by developers were paid late while city technical processes also bottlenecked the project. EMA services lagged too.

The approved layout was not progressed to the Surveyor General's Office. As such, there is no General Plan to guide developments at Victoria Ranch. Resident-financed electrification is progressing well but has run into problems of developer-resident conflicts affecting the signaling of household connections. The power utility has covered some illegally created properties creating an impression of condoning illegal development. These challenges have arisen because the original layout was rushed, missed some spatial details, and has been revised to add more stands. Some public sector officials are allegedly part of the illegalities. State actors at national, provincial, and local authority levels did not cooperate fully. Land information

sharing and provision of relevant technical support to the settlement were inadequate.

Key Issues that Stressed Model

Apart from the several stands made available and on which many home seekers have built decent shelter, Victoria Ranch isn't on a path to sustainability. The analysis presented above unclear institutional roles and weak performance at individual actor level as well as collectively pointing to model failings. IUI research findings and the facilitated reflections² confirmed an improving political landscape at settlement, local authority, provincial, and national government levels. At the same time critical model drawbacks were distilled as follows:

1. Uncoordinated Urban Development (Project Management more critically by 'developers'
2. Centralised Administration of Urban and Peri-Urban State Land meant for housing
3. Weaknesses in/of Urban (Physical) Planning
4. Mismanaged & Inadequately Supported Urban Infrastructure Funding for low-income housing
5. Fragmented, Polarised and Weakened Public Participation Structures and Processes for i) residents, ii) developers, and iii) technical teams

There were several assumptions made in setting up the housing delivery model nationally and at Victoria Ranch. One was that expanded land access was a 'silver bullet'. The state and its agents assumed that unlocking the land access bottleneck would make all else flow. Towards affordable, adequate housing and sustainable settlements. This ignored the downside of unchecked economic and political power those accessing the land gained and, in some cases, abused. As it turns out formal public institutions experienced degraded authority making it difficult for them to govern the settlement. Further, some potential private and civil society partners stayed away perceiving the delivery model as too risky creating and sustaining a negative perspective towards the settlement. This delayed movement from urban land politics to quality services.

Model/Framework Revision

With the political landscape at once better understood and somewhat less politicised, lessons from the last 16 years can be deployed better through

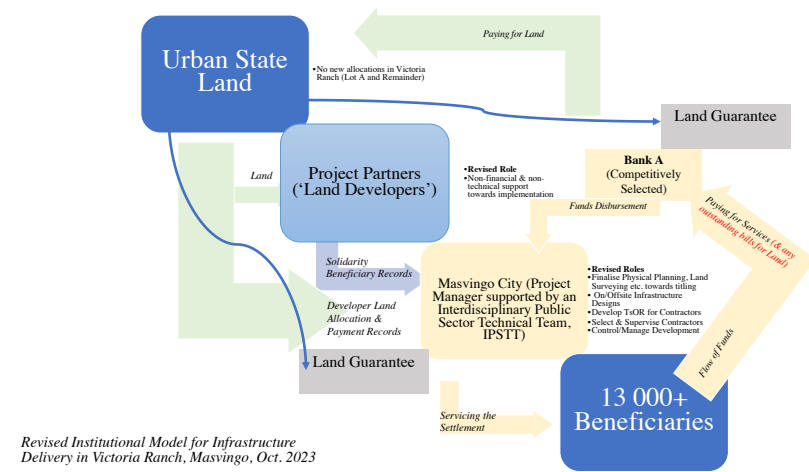
² Some 50 representatives of public sector agencies, banks, developers, and residents were involved in FGD sessions and key informant interviews. Insights from four separate sessions were

an adjusted framework. Further, the settlement has an indelible spatial, social, political, and economic footprint on the city, the RDC, provincial and national government. Different incentives to make the settlement develop sustainably exist. An expectation of using lessons not only for improving Victoria Ranch's development prospects but also to develop a template for other settlements in the province and beyond motivates state stakeholders. The previous financial performance and current success with electricity infrastructure are showing possibilities that may issue from unblocking infrastructure development in Victoria Ranch. Based on this understanding the proposed parameters of a revised institutional framework are as follows:

1. Empowering Masvingo City to anchor urban development of Victoria Ranch i) guided by an adapted MOA with Masvingo RDC, ii) supported by an interdisciplinary public sector technical team, and iii) leading provision of affordable infrastructure and services. The Technical Team will baseline Victoria Ranch land assets, infrastructure plans and costs, social impact and environmental assessments, beneficiary lists and their contributions to date.
2. Crowding-in a Financial Institution to build resident confidence regarding management of financial contributions towards infrastructure emplacement and delivery of basic service
3. Empowering the Councils and the Financial Institution through providing them with peri-urban state land to ensure the flow of infrastructure financing ahead of restarting of resident contributions, which need some social and political mobilisation having been variously disappointed by land developers
4. Establishing and appropriately empowering an Area Committee for Victoria Ranch to mobilise residents, and be a link with the city, land developers, and other stakeholders; and
5. Providing appropriate capacity development support to developers so that their enterprises do not completely fold.

The figure below illustrates the core aspects of the revised model in terms of agency roles, flow of funds and technical services.

consolidated through a facilitated internal reflection with the OPC Team in in September and October 2023



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...with the Development Governance Institute and Dialogue on Shelter implementing the research in Zimbabwe

