



**CITY PROFILING REPORT 2025**

# Bulawayo



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**COVER PHOTO:** The National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) Building, in the city of Bulawayo.

Photo: Prince Phumulani Nyoni – <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39288201>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Bulawayo City Profile Report is part of the African Cities Profiling project, designed to enhance our understanding of urban dynamics across the continent. As Africa experiences rapid urbanisation, cities like Bulawayo face numerous challenges, including the proliferation of informal work and settlements, as well as gaps in service delivery.

The report aims to support local authorities by providing comparative data to identify areas for improvement and learn from peer cities. It also provides information for national governments to regulate and assist local authorities more effectively. For residents, the report serves as a resource for understanding the developmental context of Bulawayo, thus promoting transparency and encouraging civic engagement.

This report on Bulawayo is part of a series of city profiles being developed by GGA for ten cities across the SADC region (with plans to extend to other African cities). Other cities in the GGA SADC sample include Harare, Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, Johannesburg, Lilongwe, Luanda, Lusaka, Maputo, and Ndola. The selected cities represent a mix of primary and secondary urban centres in the region. Where relevant, comparisons are made between Bulawayo and these cities.

Overall, the project enables stakeholders (local authorities, national governments, and citizens) to compare urban challenges and successes, share best practices and foster collaboration.

## 2. URBAN GEOGRAPHY AND HUMAN SETTLEMENT

### 2.1. HISTORY

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city, was formally established in the 1890s and became a municipality in 1897, gaining city status in 1943. Its urban form was shaped by colonial-era planning, which enforced strict racial and spatial segregation. During this period, central and low-density areas such as Hillside and Kumalo were reserved for white settlers, while Black Africans were housed in high-density townships such as Makokoba (the city's oldest African township). These were located close enough to the city centre to supply labour but kept socially and spatially separate.

Following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the city's population growth has been more controlled than that of the capital, Harare, but it still faces pressures from rural-to-urban migration.

The rise of informal settlements in the city was partly driven by the displacement triggered by the Gukurahundi violence in Matabeleland and the Midlands between 1983 and 1987.<sup>1</sup> Many survivors sought refuge in Bulawayo, and with poverty, housing shortages and social exclusion, lived in informal settlements like Killarney, Ngozi Mine and Trenance.<sup>2</sup> These settlements often lack essential services such as piped water, functional sanitation and electricity, forcing many residents to rely on informal solutions like pit latrines and communal boreholes. In 2020, the World Bank estimated that 22% of Zimbabwe's urban population lived in informal settlements.<sup>3,4</sup>

### 2.2. BULAWAYO'S SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT

Although Bulawayo's built-up area has expanded over time, it has done so more gradually than that of Harare. The city is widely considered to be better planned, with a more clearly structured urban form and less sprawl. Nonetheless, growing housing demand and constrained

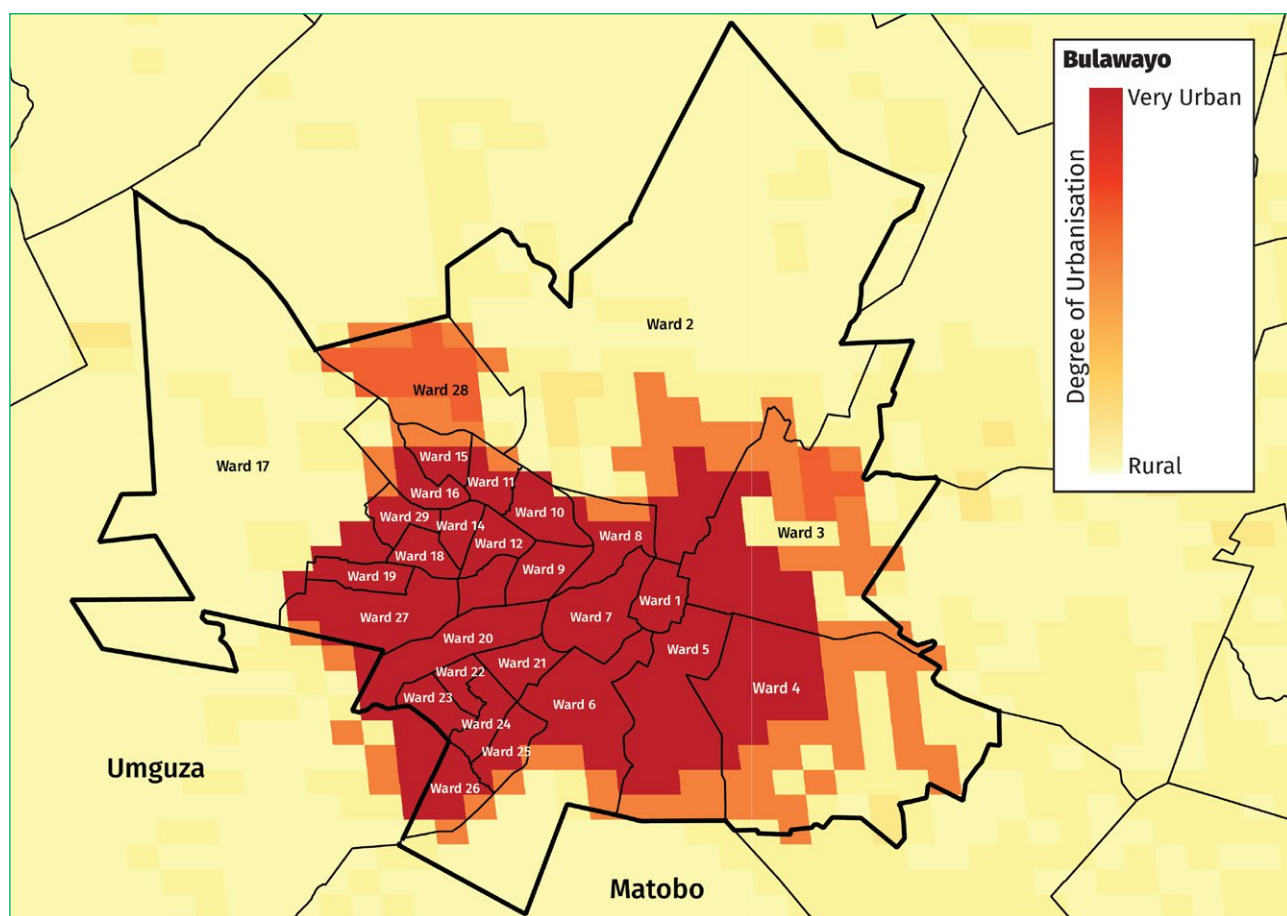
1 Ndlovu, T., Ndlovu, T., & Ncube, A. (2025). Participation as a Capability for Poverty Reduction in Informal Settlements: A Case of Bulawayo Urban, Zimbabwe. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(10).

2 Mpofu, B. (2012). Informal Sector a Threat to Zimbabwe Economy, *The Standard*, 26/08/12; Mpofu, W. J. (2021). Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: An Epistemicide and Genocide. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 37, 40-55.

3 Statistics on the percentage of informal settlements for Bulawayo city were not located.

4 World Bank (2024). "Population living in slums (percentage of urban population) - Zimbabwe". <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators/Series/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS>. Accessed 11/01/2025.

**Figure 1: Map of Bulawayo showing settlement density**



local government resources make it difficult to keep up with infrastructure and service needs, especially in new or informal settlements.<sup>5</sup>

Environmental challenges also affect urban development in Bulawayo. Water scarcity is a longstanding issue, exacerbated by climate variability and the limited capacity of the city’s supply dams. This has implications for both human settlement and economic activity, as industrial and household users compete for limited water resources.

The CBD has remained a commercial and administrative centre, while high-density suburbs like organised into a central business district (CBD), surrounded by industrial zones and a mix of low-, medium-, and high-density residential Pumula, Njube and Luveve accommodate a large share of the city’s population. Low-density areas, such as Hillside and Burnside, are more affluent and better serviced.

Bulawayo’s functional urban area also extends beyond its administrative boundaries, increasingly integrating surrounding rural and peri-urban areas (Figure 1). Bulawayo shares many of the same urban challenges as Harare – including informal growth, service delivery shortfalls, and ageing infrastructure – but must tackle these with fewer resources and often less political visibility at the national level.

The city covers an area of 479 km<sup>2</sup> and lies at an altitude of 1350m, on the western limits of the central watershed of Zimbabwe. This is generally flat and featureless except to the south, where the topography is disrupted by intrusions of the granite kopjies (hills). There are four main seasonal rivers: the Umguza, the Khami, Mpopoma and Matsheamhlope. The Umguza River has the largest catchment area, while the Khami is the main river to the western part of the city – both rivers are dammed.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Rainfall is prevalent in summer between October and March, and the area is characterised as hot and wet, with an average temperature of 25°C. The remaining months experience an average temperature of 15°C under cool and dry conditions.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

#### 3.1. POPULATION

Bulawayo is Zimbabwe's second-largest city by population. In the early 20th century, its growth was driven by its position as an industrial and railway hub, mainly because of its proximity to Botswana and South Africa.<sup>7</sup> By 1980, when Zimbabwe gained independence, Bulawayo had a population of approximately 400,000. Since then, the city population grew rapidly until 1992, when the growth rate slowed, reaching a peak of 676,000 in 2002, after which it declined until 2020.<sup>8</sup> The 2022 population census estimated the population at 666,000, with moderate growth since, reaching 690,000 in 2024, with a current growth rate of 1.23%.<sup>9</sup> Notably, the City of Bulawayo website provides a much higher population figure of 1.5 million.

#### 3.2. HOUSEHOLDS

The city had 179,000 households in 2022 based on the national housing and population census, with an average household size of 3.7 people per household.<sup>10</sup>

#### 3.3. POVERTY

Bulawayo is characterised by large disparities between rich and poor, with the poorest households resembling their rural counterparts on the periphery of the city. The Moving Zimbabwe survey found that income poverty is very prevalent, with 76% of urban households in Bulawayo

classified as poor, with 34% of very poor.<sup>11</sup> These socio-economic challenges are compounded by environmental pressures, including recurring water shortages due to drought conditions, limited dam capacity, and land degradation around the city's outskirts.

A useful indicator of broad-based poverty is the International Wealth Index (IWI), which measures the position of households regarding assets, access to services and housing.<sup>12</sup> In 2022, Bulawayo recorded an IWI of 68.9, slightly higher than Harare's 64 and above average for the ten SADC cities in the GGA sample of 64.4. Scores for cities in the sample range from 28.7 for Lilongwe to 89.4 for Cape Town.

Bulawayo has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.65, which is higher than Harare's 0.62 and equal to the average of the 10 SADC cities in the GGA sample. The HDI across these cities ranges from 0.52 in Lilongwe to 0.76 in Cape Town. Internationally, London has an index of 0.98, Sao Paulo 0.83, Mumbai 0.84 and Mexico City 0.83.

Poverty is a central challenge that continues to worsen in Zimbabwe. Between 2011 and 2017, extreme poverty – using the national extreme poverty line of 2011 PPP US\$1.83 per day – rose from 23% to 30% and then increased to 38% in April-May 2019.<sup>13</sup> Simulations of the impact of rapid price rises and poor crop yields in 2019 suggest extreme poverty increased still further, reaching 42% in 2019.<sup>14</sup>

#### 3.4. EDUCATION

The level of education in Bulawayo is relatively high compared to other SADC cities in the GGA sample. Adults aged 20 and older have an average of 10.6 years of schooling, exceeding the city average of 9.6 years for GGA's sample but slightly lower than Harare's 11.1 years. This places Bulawayo behind Johannesburg (12.8 years) but ahead of Lusaka

6 Ibid; Mutengu, S., Hoko, Z., and Makoni, F. S. (2007). An Assessment of the Public Health Hazard Potential of Wastewater Reuse for Crop Production. A Case of Bulawayo City, Zimbabwe. *Phys. Chem. Earth, Parts A/B/C* 32 (15–18), 1195–1203. doi:10.1016/j.pce.2007.07.019.

7 Manjengwa, J. & Nyelele, C. (2012). Urban Poverty in Zimbabwe. <http://hdl.handle.net/10625/51350>. Accessed 25/04/2025.

8 Macrotrends (2024). Bulawayo, Zimbabwe Metro Area Population (1950-2025). <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/cities/22510/bulawayo/population>. Accessed 03/12/2025

9 Macrotrends (2024).

10 Zimstats (2022). 2022 Population and Housing Census. [https://www.zimstat.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/Demography/Census/2022\\_PHC\\_Report\\_27012023\\_Final.pdf](https://www.zimstat.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/Demography/Census/2022_PHC_Report_27012023_Final.pdf). Accessed 03/05/2025.

11 Manjengwa & Nyelele (2012).

12 Global Data Lab. These assets include seven consumer durables (possession of a TV, fridge, phone, bike, car, a cheap utensil and an expensive utensil), access to two public services (water and electricity) and three housing characteristics (number of sleeping rooms, quality of floor material and of toilet facility).

13 World Bank (2021) Poverty and Equity Brief: Africa Eastern and Southern, Zimbabwe. [https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext\\_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2021/Global\\_POVEQ\\_ZWE.pdf](https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2021/Global_POVEQ_ZWE.pdf)

14 Ibid.

(9.16 years) and Lilongwe (6.52 years). Literacy rates for the population aged 15 years and above stood at 96.7% in 2022.<sup>15</sup>

### Schools

The Bulawayo City Council (BCC) operates several municipal schools, mainly at the primary level, providing affordable education to residents, especially in high-density suburbs. The Council runs 29 primary schools scattered around the city, with a total enrolment of 35,280 children and a teaching staff complement of 862.<sup>16</sup> Staffing of schools is the responsibility of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, while the City Council provides the facilities and is responsible for the welfare of the children.<sup>17</sup>

Broadly, Zimbabwe has achieved near-universal primary education enrolment, and its literacy rate for adults aged 15 and above stood at 90% in 2022, among the highest in Africa.<sup>18</sup> However, there are challenges, particularly at the higher education level. Nationally, completion rates for secondary education are low, with a significant drop-off due to economic constraints, school fees, and limited resources in public schools.<sup>19</sup>

## 3.5. HEALTH

### Health outcomes

Health indicators in Bulawayo highlight both progress and challenges. The infant mortality rate is 35.2 per 1,000 live births, below Harare's 43.9 and the average of 48.9 across the GGA SADC sample, but slightly higher than cities like Johannesburg (32.5). Similarly, the under-five mortality rate in Bulawayo stands at 48.4 per 1,000 live births, lower than the city average of 53.4 and well below Harare (63.6), Dar es Salaam (94.2) and Maputo (79.1).

Life expectancy for Bulawayo stood at 62.6 years compared to the national life expectancy of 64.7 years, according to Zimstat.<sup>20</sup> This is comparable with cities such as Cape Town (62 years) and Johannesburg (67 years).

### Role of Bulawayo City in providing health services

The BCC's Health Services Department has two branches, the Personal Health Branch and the Environmental Health Branch. The administration section facilitates the functioning of the branches by providing various support services and expertise in financial and human resources management.<sup>21</sup>

According to the BCC, the Personal Health Branch of the city's Health Department is responsible for delivering primary healthcare services through a network of 21 clinics and one infectious diseases hospital.<sup>22</sup> It offers a wide range of curative, preventive, and promotive health services, including outpatient care for minor ailments, chronic conditions, tuberculosis, and HIV/STI management. The branch also provides maternity care, child and adolescent health services, immunisations, and family planning. Special initiatives include HIV counselling and testing at the Nkulumane Clinic New Start Centre, and prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission across 18 clinics. Moreover, the branch coordinates community health initiatives in partnership with local leaders and organisations to promote public health awareness and participation.

The Environmental Health Branch focuses on safeguarding public health through food safety, water quality control, pollution management, and solid waste services. Health inspectors oversee hygiene standards in food premises, conduct regular inspections, and enforce bylaws. The branch monitors air and water quality, manages pollution controls, and regulates fuel-burning appliances. Its Cleansing Services division handles solid waste management, combats illegal dumping, maintains public conveniences, and runs anti-litter campaigns. Pest control activities target mosquitoes and rodents, while the department also supervises cemetery maintenance, grave digging and cremation services to ensure compliance with health and environmental standards.

<sup>15</sup> Zimstat (2022).

<sup>16</sup> City of Bulawayo (n.d.). Council Schools. <https://www.citybyo.co.zw/Entities/Schools>. Accessed 25/04/2025.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank (2024). Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS>. Accessed 21/01/2025.

<sup>19</sup> Chipenda, C., & Cochrane, L. (2024). Out of school children in the context of new policy trajectories and interlocking crises in Zimbabwe: a transformative social policy perspective. *Social Sciences*, 4(7), 131.

<sup>20</sup> Moyo, N (2024). Bulawayo life expectancy at 63 years: ZimStat. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/theindependent/local/article/200021946/bulawayo-life-expectancy-at-63-years-zimstat>. Accessed 25/04/2025.

<sup>21</sup> City of Bulawayo (n.d.). Health Services. <https://www.citybyo.co.zw/Department/Health>

<sup>22</sup> Bulawayo City Council. 2023. "Budget speech".

### 3.6. HOUSING

Bulawayo's housing profile reveals a history of inadequate provision, spatial inequality, and institutional neglect. Since colonial times, the city has been divided between well-resourced white suburbs and overcrowded Black townships like Makokoba. The phrase "Bulawayo burning" has been used metaphorically to describe Bulawayo's degeneration into a state of violence and protest in the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> It further alludes to the Zhii riots of 1960 that took place in Makokoba, in which black Africans protested against the exclusionary urban practices of the colonial city council.<sup>24</sup>

Post-independence housing efforts failed to meet growing demand, especially for low-income earners. By the late 1970s, housing shortages were severe, driven by rural-to-urban migration during the liberation war. Squatter settlements emerged around suburbs like Killarney and Trenance as the City Council and national government failed to provide formal housing.<sup>25</sup>

In the early 1980s, the *Gukurahundi* campaign (launched by the national government after a political rift between ZAPU and the ruling ZANU-PF) forced many villagers in Matabeleland and the Midlands to flee to Bulawayo as refugees. By 1985, although the city prioritised low-income households, its waiting list reached nearly 11,000 people, partly due to the influx, but financial constraints and high building costs halted delivery. The situation deteriorated further under structural adjustment policies in the 1990s, and by 2002, the BCC had stopped direct funding for low-income housing. The national government's Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 worsened matters, with thousands rendered homeless and pushed into peri-urban squatter camps like Killarney, which lacked water, sanitation, and health services.<sup>26</sup>

Bulawayo's response to informality has largely been punitive or indifferent, with both local and national authorities evading responsibility for squatter settlements.

Although some efforts were made in 2012 to resettle families in Hyde Park in partnership with World Vision and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), squatter communities face repeated evictions and little access to formal support.<sup>27</sup>

## 4. ECONOMY

As Zimbabwe's second-largest city, Bulawayo is a vital contributor to the national economy, ranking second after Harare in GDP contribution between 2021 and 2023.<sup>28</sup> The basic objectives of the city's Master Plan 2019–2034 are to promote local economic development by enhancing the local investment climate and encouraging industrial and commercial activities in the city.<sup>29</sup>

According to the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), in 2023, Bulawayo's economy was driven by five major sectors: wholesale and retail trade (33.1%), manufacturing (13.3%), finance and insurance (10.6%), information and communication (9.2%), and construction (5.3%).<sup>30</sup>

### GDP per capita

The city's strong economic profile is further reflected in its 2022 GDP per capita of US\$6,119, which is above the average of the GGA SADC city sample (US\$5,975) and well above Lilongwe (US\$1,126), although still far below Johannesburg (US\$16,370), the highest-ranking city.

### Employment

Bulawayo also demonstrates strong labour market participation, with a 2024 labour force participation rate of 63%, significantly higher than the national average of 48%, and an employment-to-population ratio of 45% compared to the national ratio of 37%.<sup>31</sup>

22% of economically active people in Bulawayo were unemployed in 2025, 38% for the 16 to 25 year age group.<sup>32</sup>

23 Vera, Y. (1998). *Butterfly Burning*. Harare: Baobab Books; Ranger, T. O. (2010). *Bulawayo burning: The social history of a Southern African city, 1893-1960*. Boydell & Brewer.

24 Ranger, T. O. (2010).

25 Mpofu, B. (2012). Perpetual 'outcasts'? Squatters in peri-urban Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. *Afrika Focus*, 25(2), 45-63.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Moyo, S. (2025). Bulawayo ranks second in GDP contribution. <https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/bulawayo-ranks-second-in-gdp-contribution/>. Accessed 03/05/2025.

29 Moyo, L. (2021). Local government as an enabler of local economic development: A case study of the Bulawayo city council.

30 Moyo, S. (2025).

31 Ibid.

32 Zimstat (2025). 2025 Second Quarter Labour Force Survey Report.

However, manufacturing sector capacity utilisation in Bulawayo stands at 45.8%, lagging behind provinces like Mashonaland East (75.6%), indicating room for industrial revitalisation.<sup>33</sup>

Bulawayo also hosts a substantial informal economy, which plays a key role in livelihood sustenance, particularly in high-density areas. At least 228,000 people were employed in the informal sector in 2019.<sup>34</sup> Informal trade, including street vending and home-based businesses, contributes significantly to local commerce but remains largely unregulated and vulnerable to economic shocks.

Industrial areas like Belmont and Donnington, once central to Bulawayo's manufacturing strength, now suffer from underinvestment, unreliable electricity, and deteriorating infrastructure, hindering industrial recovery. While the city retains strategic logistical advantages, especially through its rail and road links to Botswana and South Africa, inadequate reinvestment has curtailed its regional trade potential, and Zimbabwe's economic instability adversely impacts revenue and outcomes.<sup>35</sup>

Globally, Zimbabwe ranks 140 out of 190 countries in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index.<sup>36</sup> The Index has been applied only to Harare but serves as a measure of the business environment in the country.

## 5. LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

### 5.1. LEGISLATION

Zimbabwe's local government framework is defined by several acts that provide the legal and administrative foundation for decentralised governance. These include:

- Chapter 14 of the **Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe (2013)** establishes the principles of devolution and outlines the roles and responsibilities of provincial and local governments.
- **The Urban Councils Act (1995) and Rural District Councils Act (1988)**. These govern urban and rural

local authorities, detailing their functions, powers, and obligations.

- **The Local Government Laws Amendment Act (2016)** introduced reforms aimed at improving the accountability and efficiency of local authorities.
- **The Public Finance Management Act (2009)** ensures financial transparency and accountability within local government operations.

The core administrative unit of local governance in Zimbabwe is the district, with 59 districts established across the country. Local government is divided into urban councils (responsible for cities and towns) and rural district councils (serving predominantly rural areas and responsible for growth points).

### 5.2. FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Councils in Zimbabwe are tasked with promoting local development and ensuring that essential services are provided to residents. Their functions include providing:<sup>37</sup>

- Potable water and wastewater management services.
- Trafficable roads.
- An efficient and effective public transport system.
- An efficient and effective solid waste management system.
- Decent and affordable accommodation.
- Comprehensive and accessible health services.
- Comprehensive and accessible social services.
- Efficient public safety and emergency services.
- Sound local governance.
- Sound environmental management systems.
- Coordinated and orderly spatial development.
- Efficient utilisation of resources.

The primary functions of councils in Zimbabwe include promoting development within their areas through initiatives such as housing projects, support for local enterprises, and community development efforts. They are also responsible for maintaining road infrastructure to ensure connectivity and mobility. Moreover, councils play a key role in providing access to basic services, including the provision of clean

<sup>33</sup> Moyo, S. (2025).

<sup>34</sup> City of Bulawayo (2019). Bulawayo Master Plan. [http://www.citybyo.co.zw/Downloads/GetPublication?fileShortName=Draft\\_Final\\_Written\\_Statement\\_TD\\_11\\_Nov\\_Public\\_Display\\_TD.pdf](http://www.citybyo.co.zw/Downloads/GetPublication?fileShortName=Draft_Final_Written_Statement_TD_11_Nov_Public_Display_TD.pdf). Accessed 03/05/2025.

<sup>35</sup> Sibanda, P. (2017). Challenges of local authorities service delivery: a case study of Bulawayo city council (BCC).

<sup>36</sup> World Bank Group (2020). Doing Business in 2020: Comparing Business Regulation in 190 Economies. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group). <https://archive.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/z/zimbabwe/ZWE.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Harare Metropolitan Province (n.d). Harare City. <https://harareprovince.co.zw/harare-city/>. Accessed 09/04/2025.

**Table 1: Functions and associated institutional responsibilities in Bulawayo, 2025**

FUNCTION	INSTITUTION PROVIDING	NOTES
Water supply	Bulawayo City Council (BCC), Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA)	ZINWA oversees bulk water infrastructure and raw water sources; BCC manages treatment and distribution.
Sanitation	Bulawayo City Council	BCC is responsible for sewerage, wastewater treatment, and sanitation.
Electricity	Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA)	National utility in charge of power generation, transmission, and distribution.
Roads – major	Zimbabwe National Road Administration (ZINARA)	National roads connecting Bulawayo to other provinces are managed by ZINARA, including roads running through the city.
Roads – local (streets)	Bulawayo City Council	BCC handles internal roads, including maintenance and street lighting.
Public transport	The Bulawayo City Council Public Transport system; Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO); private operators	The BCC public transport system manages, runs, monitors, and evaluates Bulawayo's public transport system; ZUPCO is a state-owned entity but provides limited services in Bulawayo; most public transport is run by private operators approved by the city.
Solid waste management	Bulawayo City Council	
Community services	Bulawayo City Council	
Emergency and security services	Bulawayo City Council (fire brigade, municipal police), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)	ZRP handles policing; BCC provides fire and ambulance services. BCC also has its own by-law enforcement municipal police who sometimes work with support from the ZRP.
Primary health care	Ministry of Health and Child Care, Bulawayo City Council	BCC manages municipal clinics; the national Ministry regulates and supports the public health system.
Education	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Bulawayo City Council	BCC operates some primary schools and early childhood centres; the Ministry is responsible for staffing

water, waste removal, and sanitation, which are essential for public health and overall quality of life.

### 5.3. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Zimbabwe has a unitary governance system comprising three tiers: national, provincial, and local authorities. Although the Constitution recognises the autonomy of local authorities like the BCC, in practice, the central government exercises significant control over administrative and fiscal matters.<sup>38</sup> This centralisation often restricts the ability of local councils to make independent decisions and deliver services effectively. The Ministry of Local Government and Public Works supervises urban councils like the BCC, with responsibilities that include approving budgets, development plans, and senior council appointments.<sup>39</sup>

Legally, the BCC is mandated to deliver key urban services (like water, sanitation, solid waste management, urban planning, and road maintenance), but its functions often overlap with national bodies.<sup>40</sup> For instance, the Zimbabwe National Road Administration (ZINARA) collects vehicle license fees and allocates road maintenance funding, even though urban roads are a municipal responsibility. Similarly, national ministries often intervene in housing allocation and spatial planning, occasionally bypassing municipal authority.

The BCC operates through internal municipal departments, such as the Department of Engineering Services (water, roads, waste) and the Health Services Department (clinics, health education). However, like other urban councils, BCC faces challenges linked to outdated systems, limited digital

<sup>38</sup> Chigwata, T. C., Marumahoko, S., & Madhekeni, A. (2019). Supervision of local government in Zimbabwe: The travails of mayors. *Law, Democracy & Development*, 23(1), 44-67.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Sibanda, P. (2017).

infrastructure, and underfunding.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, political dynamics complicate intergovernmental collaboration and weaken institutional coordination.

Overall, despite its constitutional mandate and status as one of Zimbabwe's most administratively stable cities, Bulawayo's institutional performance is constrained by centralised fiscal authority, overlapping responsibilities, ageing infrastructure, and financial limitations.

## 6. ACCESS TO SERVICES

### 6.1. WATER SUPPLY

Bulawayo's water supply is managed by the BCC through its Department of Engineering Services. The city sources its water from a network of six surface reservoirs located in the Matabeleland region: Insiza, Inyankuni, Upper Ncema, Lower Ncema, Mtshabezi, and Umzingwane dams. These water sources are supported by major treatment facilities at Ncema and Criterion Water Works, which together treated over 50 million cubic metres of potable water in a single year.<sup>42</sup> The city also draws supplementary water from the Nyamandlovu Aquifer, which pumped over 142,000m<sup>3</sup> in 2008 despite frequent power cuts and equipment maintenance disruptions.

As of the most recent figures, 99.3% of Bulawayo households have access to improved sources of drinking water, one of the highest rates nationally.<sup>43</sup> The city provides 148 million litres per day (Mℓ/day) against a required 156 Mℓ/day, meeting about 95% of its daily demand.<sup>44</sup> However, this balance is fragile, especially given the variability in rainfall and siltation of the dams caused by environmental degradation and gold panning along riverbanks.

Droughts are also frequent, and the city often derives most of its water supply from elsewhere as nearby sources

are polluted. The current situation was highlighted in a recent interview with the mayor, Senator David Coltard, who noted that failures in the water supply system were resulting in water-shedding periods being extended and that even after good rains, insufficient water was reaching the city supply dams, with dam levels remaining at 49%.<sup>45</sup>

Non-revenue water is estimated at 69%, with high losses attributed primarily to old infrastructure and inadequate resources to construct, manage, operate and maintain water systems.<sup>46</sup> Key infrastructure, like the Tuli Hill Reservoir and ageing pipelines, needs fixing. The roof of the Tuli Hill Reservoir is also leaking, which may contaminate the water. Frequent pump breakdowns, especially at Ncema Water Works, alongside shortages of spare parts and fuel, have hampered maintenance operations.<sup>47</sup> However, water quality has remained high despite increasing treatment costs, driven largely by the rising price of chemicals and deferred infrastructure refurbishment. Filter beds at Ncema, for instance, are overdue for resanding, and this is beginning to compromise the efficiency of purification, while non-revenue water, caused by leaks, vandalism, and unmetered usage, places further strain on the system.<sup>48</sup>

To manage water stress, Bulawayo introduced a water rationing programme in 2005, which continues to adjust daily domestic allocations depending on dam levels.<sup>49</sup> Public communication campaigns have accompanied rationing efforts to promote conservation. But with a growing population and an expanding urban footprint, the need for alternative water sources has become urgent. Projects like the Mtshabezi Dam pipeline (linking it to Umzingwane Dam) and the long-delayed Gwayi-Shangani Dam under the Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project (considered critical to Bulawayo's long-term water security and economic resilience) have seen slow progress due to funding challenges.<sup>50</sup>

41 Ibid.

42 City of Bulawayo (n.d). Water Supplies. <https://www.citybyo.co.zw/AZServices/WaterSupplies>. Accessed 16/05/2025.

43 Amali Urban Governance Research Lab (2024a); Sanitation and Water for All (2020). 2020 Zimbabwe Country Overview. [https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020%20Country%20Overview\\_Zimbabwe.pdf](https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020%20Country%20Overview_Zimbabwe.pdf). Accessed 16/05/2025.

44 Ibid.

45 CITEZW. 2025 "Bulawayo Mayor David Coltard Breaks Down City Challenges | The CITE View" April 2025.

46 African Development Bank (AfDB) (2015). Bulawayo Water and Sewerage Services Improvement Project. [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Environmental-and-Social-Assessments/Zimbabwe\\_-\\_Bulawayo\\_Water\\_and\\_Sewerage\\_Services\\_Improvement\\_Project\\_-\\_ESMP\\_Summary\\_%E2%80%93\\_11\\_2015.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Environmental-and-Social-Assessments/Zimbabwe_-_Bulawayo_Water_and_Sewerage_Services_Improvement_Project_-_ESMP_Summary_%E2%80%93_11_2015.pdf). Accessed 16/05/2025.

47 City of Bulawayo (n.d). Water Supplies. <https://www.citybyo.co.zw/AZServices/WaterSupplies>. Accessed 16/05/2025

48 Ibid.

49 Sibanda, P. (2017).

50 City of Bulawayo (n.d). Water Supplies. <https://www.citybyo.co.zw/AZServices/WaterSupplies>. Accessed 16/05/2025.

More recently, the city identified the proposed Glassblock Bopoma Dam as a viable interim intervention ahead of the completion of the Gwayi-Shangani project. Designed to hold 130 million cubic metres of water and deliver an additional 68 megalitres per day to Bulawayo through a 32-kilometre pipeline to Ncema, the dam has secured government backing and significant private-sector interest. Once completed, it will be Bulawayo's seventh supply dam and is planned to substantially strengthen the city's medium-term water security.<sup>51</sup>

## 6.2. SANITATION SERVICES

Sanitation in Bulawayo is overseen by the BCC, primarily through its Health Services Department (Cleansing Section). The department is responsible for managing wastewater systems, street sweeping, waste disposal, and public education on sanitation. It employs 184 council workers and an additional 282 community members for street-level cleaning services.<sup>52</sup> Sanitation oversight is also shared with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, which governs environmental policy and regulation, and the Ministry of Health and Child Care, which oversees healthcare waste in areas outside the city's jurisdiction. Private sector actors are involved in recycling and the collection of non-municipal solid waste.<sup>53</sup>

Bulawayo has one of the highest rates of access to improved sanitation in Zimbabwe, and 94.5% of households use a flush toilet connected to a sewer or septic system.<sup>54</sup> Despite this, the city's sanitation infrastructure is under serious strain. Much of the sewer network is ageing and prone to collapse, which has reduced the system's capacity to manage wastewater effectively. Of the 80 million litres per day (Mℓ/day) of wastewater expected to be treated, only 30% reaches treatment facilities, while 70% is discharged untreated into streams and rivers.<sup>55</sup> This uncontrolled discharge poses severe environmental and public health risks, especially to communities living near polluted water sources.

Ageing pipelines and overloaded systems limit the city's ability to manage sewage safely and sustainably. During periods of water scarcity, residents, particularly in high-density suburbs, face difficulties maintaining basic hygiene, further increasing the risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid.

## 6.3. SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Solid waste management in Bulawayo is overseen by the BCC primarily through its Health Services Department (Cleansing Section). In 2018, the city collected an estimated 242 tons of waste per day out of a total of 327 tons generated (based on a generation rate of 0.30 kg per person per day).<sup>56</sup> This means that while collection coverage is relatively high – 91% of households receive waste collection services – an estimated 85 tons of waste go uncollected daily, potentially accumulating in open spaces and creating environmental and health risks.<sup>57</sup>

Collection and sweeping services are provided directly by the city in the Central Business District (CBD) and eight of the 29 municipal wards, primarily low-density areas, while in the remaining 21 wards, waste is collected under a Community Refuse Removal Program, where residents transport household waste to a Council refuse compactor stationed at designated temporary transfer points. This programme uses 45 trucks, and waste is collected once a week in residential areas and six times a week in commercial zones.<sup>58</sup>

Bulawayo operates a total of 18 compactor trucks: 12 with a 20m<sup>3</sup> capacity, four with 15 m<sup>3</sup>, and two with 12m<sup>3</sup>; however, the city lacks key supporting infrastructure, including a materials recovery facility (MRF), composting plant, and transfer stations, limiting its ability to sort or process waste before final disposal.<sup>59</sup>

The city's waste is disposed of at the 30-hectare Richmond Sanitary Landfill, owned and operated by BCC. The landfill

51 Cite (2025). Explainer: The Glassblock Bopoma Dam project and its impact on Bulawayo. Accessed 19/11/2025.

52 UN Habitat (2022). Bulawayo. [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/07/bulawayo\\_en.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/07/bulawayo_en.pdf). Accessed 16/05/2025.

53 Ibid.

54 Amali Urban Governance Research Lab (2024b). 2024 AMALI City Profile: Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6501633490eb0f80ffc80116/678e48365918e5ce4e5a1c70\\_BULAWAYO%20AMALI%202024%20city%20profile%20data%20-%20BULAWAYO.docx.pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6501633490eb0f80ffc80116/678e48365918e5ce4e5a1c70_BULAWAYO%20AMALI%202024%20city%20profile%20data%20-%20BULAWAYO.docx.pdf). Accessed 04/05/2025.

55 African Development Bank (AfDB) (2015).

56 UN Habitat (2022).

57 Amali Urban Governance Research Lab (2024b).

58 UN Habitat (2022).

59 Ibid.

receives approximately 275 tons of waste per day and features a bottom clay liner to minimise groundwater contamination. A weighbridge is being installed to improve data accuracy. The site operates eight hours a day, with daily compaction and soil covering occurring three to four times a week as part of its standard operating procedures.<sup>60</sup>

Bulawayo's waste composition is typical of urban Zimbabwean centres: 38% food waste, 15% plastics, 9% paper, and smaller proportions of textiles, metals, glass, and ash/soil.<sup>61</sup> The absence of formal recycling and composting facilities means that all waste, both biodegradable and non-biodegradable, is routed to landfills.

#### 6.4. ELECTRICITY AND ENERGY

Zimbabwe's energy sector has a total installed capacity of 2,771MW, of which 1,795MW is operational. The country's peak demand is 1,693MW. The Zimbabwe Power Company (ZPC) manages four thermal and one hydropower station, with Kariba hydropower (1,050MW) and Hwange thermal (920MW) the largest contributors. Independent power producers add 140MW, mostly from renewable sources like bagasse and mini-hydro projects. The sector is overseen by the Ministry of Energy and Power Development (MoEPD), regulated by the Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority (ZERA), and operationally managed by ZESA Holdings, through ZPC (generation) and ZETDC (transmission and distribution).<sup>62</sup>

The average national electricity access rate is 62%, with urban and rural access rates of 86% and 37%, respectively.<sup>63</sup> Bulawayo fares better, with 93% of households having access to electricity as of 2019, according to Global Data Lab. However, even in urban areas like Bulawayo, electricity supply remains unreliable due to frequent load-shedding caused by limited generation capacity, ageing infrastructure, and inefficiencies in the transmission network.<sup>64</sup>

The financial position of Zimbabwe's electricity companies is a key constraint on the sector's development.<sup>65</sup> Low tariffs, often politically influenced and kept below cost-reflective levels, limit the company's revenue generation. Poor billing systems and low payment compliance further exacerbate revenue shortfalls. ZESA, which oversees most of the country's electricity operations, is also burdened by high operational costs, including maintaining an ageing infrastructure and importing electricity to cover deficits.

Debt accumulation has worsened the sector's financial woes, with ZESA owing millions of dollars to regional electricity suppliers, including Eskom (South Africa) and Hydro Cahora Bassa (Mozambique), for imported power.<sup>66</sup> This debt has occasionally led to supply disruptions. Investment in infrastructure has been inadequate, leading to frequent breakdowns in thermal power stations and inefficiencies in the generation and transmission systems. While the government strives to attract foreign investment into the energy sector, currency instability, low return on investment, and unclear regulatory frameworks often deter potential investors.

Historically, charcoal has been widely used as a cooking fuel in urban areas of Zimbabwe, with up to 80% of households using this fuel.<sup>67</sup> However, since its use was made illegal, it is likely declining in urban areas, including Bulawayo. Recent data on the extent of charcoal use in Bulawayo could not be located.

There is a growing effort towards renewable energy use in Zimbabwe amid challenges. The country has renewable energy targets of an additional 1,100MW by 2025 and 2,100MW by 2030.<sup>68</sup>

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Zimstat (2022). Zimbabwe 2022 Population and Housing Census Report. [https://www.zimstat.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/Demography/Census/2022\\_PHC\\_Report\\_27012023\\_Final.pdf](https://www.zimstat.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/Demography/Census/2022_PHC_Report_27012023_Final.pdf) Accessed 11/01/2025.

64 The Energy Poverty PIRE in Southern Africa (EPPSA) (2023). State of Knowledge Energy Access in Zimbabwe. [https://eppsa.cpc.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/23-7097-CPC-EPPSA\\_Report\\_Zimbabwe\\_Final-1.pdf](https://eppsa.cpc.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/23-7097-CPC-EPPSA_Report_Zimbabwe_Final-1.pdf). Accessed 29/01/2025.

65 Ibid.

66 360 Mozambique (2023). Zimbabwe Owes Over \$100M to Regional Power Companies, Including Mozambique's. <https://360mozambique.com/oil-gas/energy/zimbabwe-owes-over-100m-to-regional-power-companies-including-mozambiques/>. Accessed 11/01/2025.

67 Campbell, B. M., Vermeulen, S. J., Mangono, J. J., & Mabusu, R. (2003). The energy transition in action: urban domestic fuel choices in a changing Zimbabwe. *Energy Policy*, 31(6), 553-562.

68 SADC Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency – SACREEE (n.d).

## 6.5. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Zimbabwe's information and communications technology (ICT) sector has grown over the years, becoming a key driver of economic activity and social transformation. Guided by the National ICT Policy (2022-2027)<sup>69</sup>, the government aims to leverage technology to foster economic development and improve service delivery.

Mobile telecommunications and fintech are key growth areas, with companies like Econet Wireless, NetOne, and Telecel expanding mobile and internet penetration. According to the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), mobile penetration stood at 96.1% in Q1 2024, with internet penetration at 75.4% in the same quarter.<sup>70</sup>

### Access to information

Internet access is not just about technology and availability but also the freedom to access content. In this regard, Zimbabwe aligns with other SADC countries in the GGA sample. According to the 2024 Freedom House Freedom on the Net report, Zimbabwe scored 48 out of 100, significantly lower than South Africa's 73, which is comparable to the United States at 75.<sup>71</sup>

### Digital inequality

Fintech services, particularly mobile money platforms like EcoCash, play vital roles in financial transactions, especially in the informal economy where traditional banking is minimal. These platforms have enabled millions of Zimbabweans to access financial services. However, digital inequality is a key challenge. Urban areas often enjoy better access to ICT infrastructure compared to rural regions, largely due to limited connectivity and affordability.<sup>72</sup>

Zimbabwe faces challenges in ICT adoption and infrastructure development. Internet speeds are often constrained by outdated equipment, while the high cost of devices and data limits access for many Zimbabweans.<sup>73</sup> Efforts to improve e-government services are progressing slowly, with limited online portals for accessing public services and low levels of digital literacy among the population.<sup>74</sup>

As Zimbabwe's second-largest city, Bulawayo plays an important but secondary role in the country's ICT landscape compared to the capital, Harare. The city has a moderate level of digital infrastructure and growing adoption of ICT tools among households, though integration into public service delivery is deficient.

According to the Global Data Lab 2019 estimates, 28.1% of households in Bulawayo own a computer, slightly above the city average of 25.7% across the GGA SADC sample. Phone ownership is relatively high at 97.3%, above the 90.8% average, while 39.6% of households have internet access, below the 46.6% average. Though this level of access provides a foundation for digital inclusion, it still demonstrates a digital divide, particularly in low-income and peri-urban areas where internet penetration is low.

69 Government of Zimbabwe (2022). National ICT Policy 2022-2027. <https://www.ictministry.gov.zw/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/National%20ICT%20Policy%202022-2027.pdf> Accessed 21/01/2025.

70 Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) (2024). Postal & Telecommunications Abridged Sector Performance Report Fourth Quarter 2024. <https://t3n9sm.c2.acecdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/POTRAZ-2024-4th-quarter-sector-performance-report.pdf>

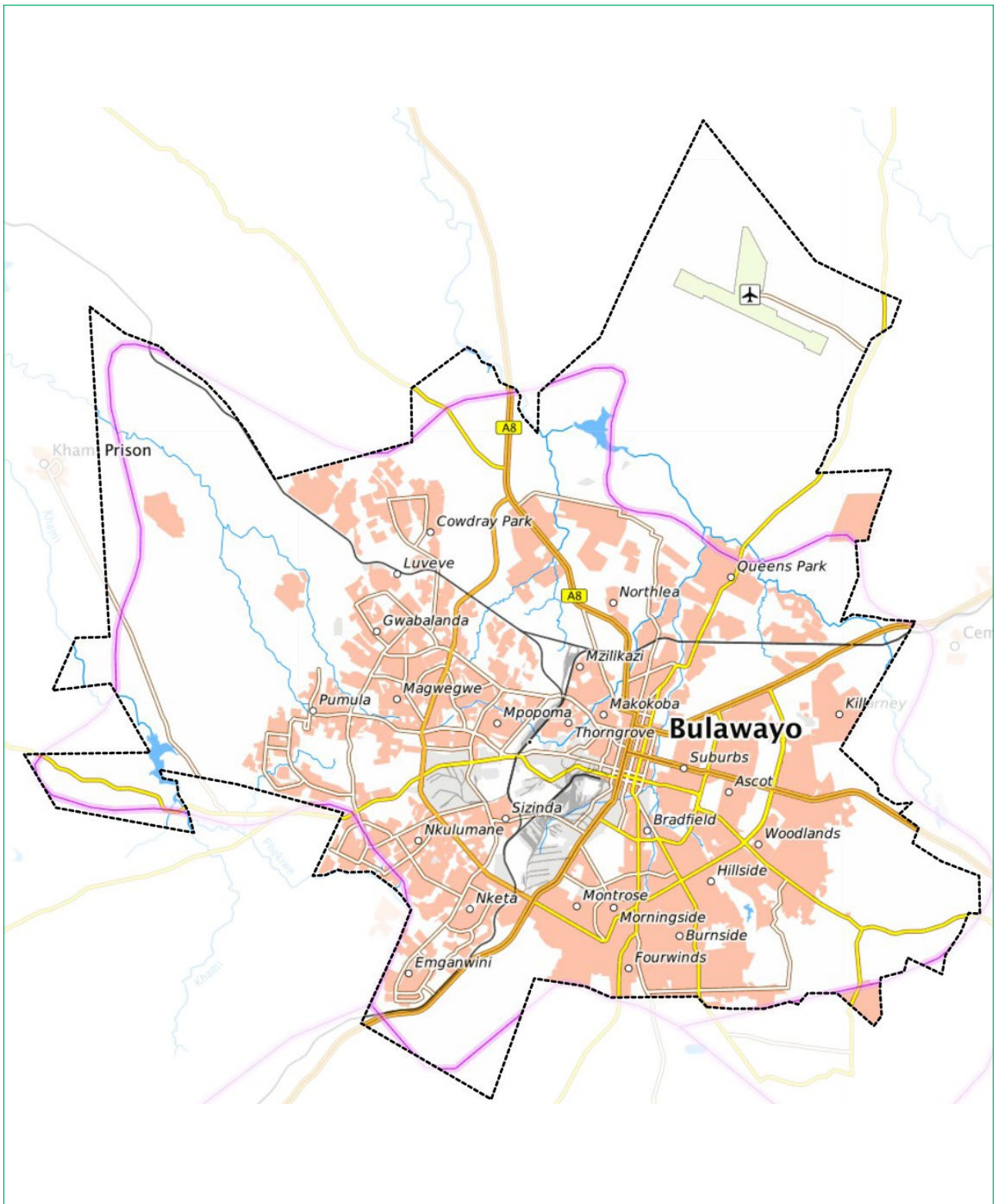
71 Freedom House (2024). Freedom on the Net. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net>. Accessed 29/01/2025.

72 Gwaka, L. T., May, J., & Tucker, W. (2018). Towards low-cost community networks in rural communities: The impact of context using the case study of Beitbridge, Zimbabwe. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 84(3), e12029.

73 Freedom House (2024). Freedom on the Net 2024: Zimbabwe. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/zimbabwe/freedom-net/2024>. Accessed 21/01/2024.

74 Simanje (2024). Zimbabwe's digital leap falls short in bridging access to justice gaps. <https://www.apc.org/en/news/zimbabwes-digital-leap-falls-short-bridging-access-justice-gaps>. Accessed 21/01/2025.

Figure 2: Map of Bulawayo showing major roads<sup>78</sup>



## 6.6. ROADS

Road transport is the dominant mode of transportation in Zimbabwe, carrying approximately 80% of the country's trade by volume.<sup>75</sup> This network includes primary and secondary trunk roads that link major cities and economic hubs, as well as tertiary feeder and access roads that connect rural communities to essential services. While the road density is relatively high compared to other developing countries, much of the network, especially its secondary and tertiary roads, is in poor condition following decades of underinvestment and inadequate maintenance.<sup>76</sup>

The Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development in Zimbabwe is responsible for oversight of roads in the country. The national road network is managed by the Zimbabwe National Road Administration (ZINARA) which includes regional trunk roads, primary roads, secondary roads and some tertiary roads, including national roads passing through the cities and towns.<sup>77</sup> The BCC manages internal urban roads.

A map of major roads in Bulawayo is shown as Figure 2 with road categories and lengths given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Road lengths for Bulawayo**

CATEGORY	KM	SPLIT
Trunk	54	1.7%
Primary	29	0.9%
Secondary	100	3.2%
Tertiary	185	5.9%
Residential & service	2,139	68.6%
Paths, tracks etc	450	14.4%
Unclassified	159	5.1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>

Source: OpenStreetMap (n.d) accessed via <https://data.humdata.org/>

The total road length per capita in Bulawayo is 4.55 km/cap, which is particularly high compared with other cities in the SADC sample (Lusaka is lowest at 2.0 km/cap, with Cape Town at 4.22 km/cap and Lilongwe at 4.23 km/cap) and above the city average of 3.65 km/cap. This is associated with a low density of settlement, with greater lengths of road required to connect properties. OpenStreetMap data shows 293 km of Bulawayo's roads are paved, 9.4% of the total, which is below the average of SADC cities in the GGA sample of 19.7%.

Road conditions in Bulawayo are poor and in dire need of improvement. The BCC notes that the city's road network spans approximately 2,100 km,<sup>79</sup> but 70% of this is in poor condition, with over half requiring immediate rehabilitation.<sup>80</sup> Many of its roads have exceeded their designed service life, ranging from 15 years for local streets to 20 years for major roads, making them vulnerable to deterioration, especially after heavy rainfall.

The council has prioritised main arterial routes, roads to institutions, and those in the central business district for maintenance, while most local streets remain neglected due to financial constraints.<sup>81</sup> According to the city's Road Condition Survey, an estimated US\$690 million is required to restore the network to a good or better condition, with US\$69 million needed annually to prevent further decline.

In response, the city has initiated efforts to attract investment, including the "Adopt a Road" scheme and listing road rehabilitation in its investment prospectus. Planned interventions focus on cost-effective maintenance like resealing, slurry, and crack sealing, given that full reconstruction is significantly more expensive.<sup>82</sup> However, heavy rains have often delayed or halted these works, further compounding the challenge.

75 Logistics Cluster (n.d). Logistics Capacity Assessments (LCA): Zimbabwe Road Network. <https://lca.logcluster.org/23-zimbabwe-road-network>. Accessed 21/01/2025.

76 Mbara, T. C., Nyarirangwe, M., & Mukwashi, T. (2010). Challenges of raising road maintenance funds in developing countries: An analysis of road tolling in Zimbabwe. *Journal of transport and supply chain management*, 4(1), 151-175.

77 CPCS (2017). Zimbabwe National Transport Master Plan Main Volume. [https://acpcliima.dev4u.it/document/acp\\_policies/ZW/Zimbabwe%20Transport%20Masterplan.pdf](https://acpcliima.dev4u.it/document/acp_policies/ZW/Zimbabwe%20Transport%20Masterplan.pdf). Accessed 23/07/2025.

78 <https://tools.paintmaps.com/map-cropping/ZW/4-421171051/samples>

79 This figure does not match the 3,117 km in Table 2 probably as national roads, paths, tracks and unclassified roads are excluded.

80 City of Bulawayo (2017). Road Condition Status. <https://citybyo.co.zw/Notices/PressReleasePoorStateofRoads>. Accessed 21/05/2025.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

## 6.7. PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Bulawayo is a key transport hub in southwestern Zimbabwe, connecting to national and regional trade routes, including road links to Plumtree near the Botswana border and Beitbridge in the south. The city is also connected to Hwange and Victoria Falls, making it strategically important for both domestic mobility and regional access. The location of low-income housing on the western part of the city requires public transport since this is far from the city centre, industrial areas and employment opportunities.<sup>83</sup>

Public transport in Bulawayo includes formal and informal systems. Bulawayo's public transport system is managed and monitored by the BCC, which oversees the approval and regulation of operators within the city. In 2024, the Bulawayo City Council reported that only five operators were legally licensed under its public transport policy: Bulawayo City Transit Trust, the Bulawayo Urban Transporters Association (BUPTA), Bulawayo West Transporters Private Limited, Tshova Mubaiwa Transport Co-operative Company, and VUTA Taxis.<sup>84</sup> While the Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO), a state-owned entity, operates in Bulawayo, its service is smaller than in Harare. The bulk of public transport services are provided by private operators, including commuter omnibuses, subsidised buses, metered taxis, and informal "pirate" taxis operating outside of formal licensing frameworks.<sup>85</sup>

Public transport in Bulawayo is heavily reliant on informal and semi-formal services, which vary in quality, reliability, and safety. Although private services fill critical gaps in urban mobility, they are often uncoordinated and poorly regulated, with concerns about roadworthiness, driver competency and service standards.

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

### Carbon emissions

Bulawayo's carbon emissions are estimated at 0.37 tons of CO<sup>2</sup> per capita per year, significantly lower than the average of 1.04 tons across the ten cities in the GGA sample. This places Bulawayo above cities like Lilongwe (0.12 tons) but below more industrialised cities such as Harare (0.97 tons) and Johannesburg (3.20 tons).<sup>86</sup> Bulawayo's carbon footprint shows its low industrial base and relatively low levels of private car ownership.

### Air quality

Bulawayo faces air pollution from vehicles, charcoal, wood, informal waste burning, and the domestic use of solid fuels. However, it does not experience the same level of industrial pollution found in larger economic centres. The city's average PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentration is 14 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, slightly lower than the 10 SADC city average of 17 µg/m<sup>3</sup>. This suggests that Bulawayo has relatively better air quality than the regional average. While the city has a relatively small industrial base, industrial emissions are a concern, partly influenced by ageing manufacturing facilities that rely on outdated technologies.

### Water quality

Like many urban areas in the region, Bulawayo faces environmental challenges related to inadequate solid waste and wastewater management, which leads to poor water quality in urban stormwater channels and receiving rivers.<sup>87</sup> Aside from environmental concerns, this poses long-term sustainability and public health risks. For example, untreated sewage and poorly treated wastewater from treatment plants have been found to enter the Umguza and Khami rivers, causing high nutrient and heavy metals loads.<sup>88</sup>

83 Mudzengerere, F. H., & Madiro, V. (2013). Sustainable urban traffic management in third world cities: the case of Bulawayo city in Zimbabwe.

84 Herald Online (2024). Only five public transporters operating legally in Bulawayo - Town Clerk Christopher Dube. <https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/only-five-public-transporters-operating-legally-in-bulawayo-town-clerk-christopher-dube/> Accessed 18/11/2025.

85 Amali Urban Governance Research Lab (2024b).

86 Global Human Settlements Layer.

87 CITEZW. 2025 "Bulawayo Mayor David Coltart Breaks Down City Challenges | The CITE View" April 2025.

88 Siziba, N., Mwedzi, T. and Muisa, N. 2021. "Assessment of nutrient enrichment and heavy metal pollution of headwater streams of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe". Physics and Chemistry of the Earth, Parts A/B/C Volume 122, June 2021.

## 8. ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Bulawayo is divided into 12 constituencies and 29 wards. Each ward is represented by an elected councillor in the BCC. Councillors are responsible for local governance functions like passing by-laws, overseeing urban administration, and coordinating service delivery and development projects at the community level.

Like Harare, Bulawayo has long been governed by the opposition (Movement for Democratic Change, now Citizen Coalition for Change) while the national government remains under the control of ZANU-PF. This political divide has sometimes led to tensions between the city and the central government, particularly over fiscal control and resource allocation and has proved retrogressive for effective local governance.

The BCC is often celebrated for local government excellence in Zimbabwe.<sup>89</sup> However, the centralisation of public funds restricts the council's financial autonomy. The national government has also progressively undermined the powers of the city mayor, reducing the position to one that is largely symbolic.<sup>90</sup>

As with other urban councils in Zimbabwe, intergovernmental transfers are low, making up only 4% of total government spending in Zimbabwe.<sup>91</sup> This means the council relies heavily on local revenue sources, such as rates and service charges, or borrowing. This constrains fiscal capacity, while poor revenue collection can delay service delivery, worsen infrastructure backlogs, and undermine the council's ability to meet residents' expectations.

Public frustration with these shortfalls contributes to low compliance with municipal levies and rates, further deepening the council's financial challenges. In addition, Bulawayo's local economic development plan and efforts

are constrained by the pressures of a growing urban population, rising demand for service delivery efficiency, housing, and jobs, and the lingering effects of large-scale de-industrialisation.<sup>92</sup>

The Afrobarometer Round 9 Institutional Responsiveness Survey provides a snapshot of public perceptions of Bulawayo's governance quality. Bulawayo's institutional quality index score is 1.1 out of 3, slightly higher than Harare (0.9) and the city average of 1 across GGA's SADC sample. This suggests a moderate level of public trust in the council's transparency and responsiveness, though key gaps remain. Comparatively, Bulawayo's score is on par with Cape Town and Maputo but falls behind cities like Dar es Salaam (1.3), which is perceived as having more effective local governance structures.

**Table 3: Afrobarometer Institutional Responsiveness Survey, 2024**

CITIES	COUNTRY	INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY INDEX (0-3, HIGHER IS BETTER)
Bulawayo	Zimbabwe	1.1
Harare	Zimbabwe	0.9
Johannesburg	South Africa	0.9
Cape Town	South Africa	1.1
Da es Salaam	Tanzania	1.3
Lilongwe	Malawi	1.0
Luanda	Angola	0.8
Lusaka	Zambia	1.0
Maputo	Mozambique	1.1
Matola	Mozambique	1.0

<sup>89</sup> Moyo, L. (2021).

<sup>90</sup> CITEZW. 2025 "Bulawayo Mayor David Coltart Breaks Down City Challenges | The CITE View" April 2025.

<sup>91</sup> Finn, B. M., & Bandaiko, E. (2024). Dwindling funds and increased responsibilities: Decentralization, unfunded mandates, and Harare's infrastructure crisis. *Habitat International*, 148, 103087.

<sup>92</sup> Moyo, L. (2021).

## 9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

The operating revenue budget for BCC for 2023, taken from their website, is escalated to 2024 figures and summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4: Budgeted operating revenue, financial year 2024<sup>93</sup>**

REVENUE ITEM	AMOUNT US\$ M	SPLIT	US\$/CAP
Property rates	85.1	50%	124
Fines, licenses, penalties, levies & permits	21.9	13%	32
Other non-tariff revenue	21.6	13%	32
Service charges - Water	38.6	23%	56
Service charges - Waste water management	3.5	2%	5
Service charges - Waste management	-	0%	-
Transfers for operating costs	-	0%	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>170.6</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>249</b>

Notably, the city does not receive transfers for operating costs. What they do receive from the national government is used to fund capital items. The per capita revenue of US\$249 is comparable with Harare (US\$329 per capita), substantially lower than South African cities (Cape Town US\$706 and Johannesburg US\$716 per capita) but much higher than the six SADC cities in the GGA sample, excluding South African and Zimbabwean cities, which average US\$47 per capita.

Budgeted property rates, at US\$124 per capita, is substantial and comparable to Cape Town, Harare and Johannesburg, at US\$137, US\$159 and US\$150 per capita, respectively.

However, Bulawayo's collection of revenue falls far below the budgeted amount. For the January to March 2024 three-month period, revenue received was only 57% of the amount billed. This puts the BCC in a precarious

financial position as debtors escalate rapidly, and there are insufficient funds to cover expenditure.

Budgeted expenditure for 2023 from the City budget statements and escalated to 2024 figures, is summarised in Table 5.

Bulawayo, like other Zimbabwean cities, is unusual in relation to many SADC cities in that it is responsible for both infrastructure-intensive services (water, sanitation, and roads) and social services, specifically healthcare.

South African cities do not have social services responsibilities (although some undertake health care as an agency for provinces), and no other countries in the SADC sample, other than South African and Zimbabwean cities, have substantial responsibility for infrastructure-intensive services.

Budgeted operating expenditure of US\$275 per capita is above the revenue amount, indicating BCC was budgeting for a deficit on the operating account. The figure of 33% on governance and administration is close to the average of 30% for eight of the ten SADC cities in the GGA sample for which data is available. Other observations on the position of Bulawayo compared with other SADC cities include:

Expenditure on health at US\$30 per capita is similar to Harare but well above all other cities in the sample. However, only four of the non-Zimbabwean cities provide primary and secondary healthcare (Luanda, Dar es Salaam, Cape Town, and Johannesburg, with the latter two sharing the service with provinces). Their budgeted expenditures are US\$8, US\$6, US\$16, and US\$11 per capita, respectively.

Bulawayo's expenditure on public order and safety of US\$25 per capita is similar to Harare and Johannesburg, less than Cape Town (US\$54 per capita) and much higher than SADC cities in the sample, excluding South Africa and Zimbabwe (all less than US\$1 per capita).

### Capital account

The capital budget for the 2023 financial year is shown in Table 6.

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**Table 5: Budgeted operating expenditure, 2024 financial year**

REVENUE ITEM	AMOUNT US\$ M	SPLIT	US\$/CAP
Governance and administration	62.0	33%	91
Planning, regulation & development facilitation	9.3	5%	14
Environmental protection	1.5	1%	2
Public order and safety	16.9	9%	25
Community services	19.2	10%	28
Housing	7.6	4%	11
Health	20.4	11%	30
Education	6.0	3%	9
Roads and drainage	7.8	4%	11
Water supply	19.4	10%	28
Sanitation	16.1	9%	23
Solid waste management	2.3	1%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>188.7</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>275</b>

**Table 6: Capital budget, 2023 financial year<sup>94</sup>**

ITEM	AMOUNT (US\$ M)	SPLIT
Education facilities	6.8	6%
Health facilities	2.6	2%
Water & sewer infrastructure	43.4	41%
Roads & stormwater drainage	17.5	16%
Social amenities	20.8	20%
Electricity infrastructure	1.6	2%
Operational assets	13.4	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>106.1</b>	<b>100%</b>

The budget provides for this to be funded through borrowing (52%), grants (23%), public subscriptions (23%) and donations (2%). While Bulawayo's financial position is precarious, it has been able to borrow, though there is uncertainty about achieving the budgeted amounts. The city also faces uncertainty regarding transfers of grant funding from the national government.

## 10. CLOSURE

Bulawayo plays a vital role as Zimbabwe's second-largest city and an important contributor to the national economy. The city council is often celebrated as one of the best in delivering local government excellence in Zimbabwe. It provides a broader range of services than its non-Zimbabwean SADC peers in the GGA sample. Yet it faces fundamental structural and financial constraints.

While it has less political visibility than the capital, Bulawayo bears substantial service delivery responsibilities, from water and sanitation to housing and local economic development. The effects of prolonged de-industrialisation, low national fiscal transfers, and ageing infrastructure strain the city's ability to meet the needs of its residents. This is especially evident in recurring water shortages, driven by unreliable rainfall, limited dam storage, and deteriorating supply systems, posing serious challenges for residents as well as local industry.

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