

Zimbabwe: No hope for new houses

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Low-income earners who have been on the housing waiting list for years said it would take a 'miracle' for them to ever own a house.



Half-built houses that are part of the Batonga Housing Co-operative in Kariba

Many submitted applications years ago and have long since given up hope of something becoming available.

"I applied for a stand in 1993 and since then I have been waiting, but nothing has materialized. We applied when we were newlyweds, but our family has grown and we are still tenants, almost twenty years down the line," said Grace Nzvimbo.

Some people accused the housing department of corruption and helping others to 'jump' the queue.

"I have been on the waiting list since 1998 and I thought I would get a house under the Garikai/Hlangani Kule housing scheme, but after I inquired, I found the recipients had paid the authorities or were aligned to a certain political party. It's not fair because we were all affected by the clean-up exercise instigated by the government in 2005," said Brian Gukwe.

Not in his lifetime

There are also reports that some people on the waiting list did not live to see their dream of owning a house come true.

“My father was on the city’s housing waiting list for years and every time he talked about it, he beamed with happiness. Due to ill health, he never owned a house and he died a tenant,” said another Harare resident.

House seekers have been duped by bogus housing cooperatives countrywide. In 2005, more than 30 housing cooperatives exploited the country's haphazard land reform programme to swindle thousands of home seekers billions of dollars by allocating them stands on unserviced government or council farms. Their structures were later demolished under the clean up exercise.

The City of Harare’s Housing Department revealed that the housing backlog currently stands at a whopping 500 000 residents, with 200-220 housing cooperatives not yet short-listed for any residential stands. Zimbabwe’s housing backlog stands at a staggering 1,2 million applicants, a figure the government says could soar if a proper survey was conducted.

National Housing and Social Amenities Minister Giles Mutsekwa revealed the statistics in response to questions from MPs in the House of Assembly who wanted to know what the government was doing to alleviate housing problems in the country.

“The government alone will not be able to satisfy the housing needs of the population,” he said, adding that reducing the housing backlog was a top priority for his ministry.

“I will strongly recommend that housing becomes the third most urgent matter after health and education,” he said.

NSSA – get involved

Mutsekwa said it was time the National Social Security Authority and conglomerates like Old Mutual played a part in addressing the housing crisis.

Zvishavane MP Obert Matshalaga asked Mutsekwa what would be done to help MPs secure housing, as most of them did not have own accommodation.

“The housing problem also affects ministers. The policy is that, for every project, we reserve 20% for civil servants and these also include MPs. For those not in government service, we will demand \$10 000 deposit, and for government employees we will demand \$3 600 deposit while the rest will be paid over five years,” Mutsekwa said.

The minister warned those settling in undesignated areas that they would be removed. “We will displace you, but my ministry has a policy that we will not displace a person and fail to find a replacement for them,” Mutsekwa said.