

# Transparency Watch

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## The tragedy of children and vulnerable communities in Zimbabwe's land evictions

SCORES of children are facing an uncertain future after being evicted from their homes alongside their families in a controversial land reclamation exercise by the government. The evictions, targeting “illegal settlers” on state land, have left many families, including dozens of children, homeless and stateless, disrupting their education and raising concerns about necessities such as food, shelter and healthcare. The evictions, part of President Emmerson Mnangagwa's recent blitz, have been met with criticism for their ruthless execution. Critics allege the exercise, while claiming to target illegal settlements, is ultimately meant to benefit a select few with political connections and influence.

Recently, a wave of evictions sweeping across the country has left a trail of devastation, particularly affecting school children and impoverished communities. A 16-year-old victim of evictions in Gutu said: “We lived on that land for generations. It's where my parents were born, and it was supposed to be mine too. Now, we're living under a plastic sheet, and I can't afford the bus fare to get to school anymore. My dreams of becoming a doctor feel so far away.”

Another 13-year-old victim said she was forced to leave her school following the evictions. “I was in the middle of my in-class examinations when they came and said we had to leave. I don't know when I can go back to school or if I can even finish. I miss my school, my friends. My parents are still looking for a place where we can settle as we do not have anywhere else to go,” she said.

The evictions, primarily targeting individuals who purchased land from Rural District Councils (RDCs) and village headmen (Sabhukus), have also sparked outrage as many of those affected are low-income earners who invested their life savings into acquiring the plots. “I bought this land five years ago with all the proper

paperwork from the RDC,” said Chipu Mutemwa, a single mother of three who recently received an eviction notice in Dema. “I built a small house here; my children go to school nearby. Now they say it's not legal? Where am I supposed to go with my children?” The ripple effects of these evictions are felt most acutely in poor communities, where access to necessities such as shelter, food, and healthcare is already precarious. “I lost my job a year ago. This land was my only hope, a place to grow my vegetables and raise some chickens. Now I'm left with nothing,” said Ntombizodwa Ncube, an elderly woman facing eviction in Gwanda. Civil society organisations and community leaders called for an immediate halt to the evictions and a thorough investigation.

“The human cost of the evictions is evident in the plight of the displaced children, many of whom were forced to abandon their education as their families struggle to find shelter and necessities. With their homes demolished and their previous communities shattered, these children face an uphill battle to regain normalcy and access to education, jeopardising their prospects,” said Tapiwanashe Chiriga, Information and Advocacy Officer at Heal Zimbabwe Trust.

He added that there is a need for the government to offer alternative land for the evicted people and for the Parliament to address land tenure issues. “A clear demarcation must be set on the authority of local councils and traditional leaders while the law and policy must be succinct on ending illegal partisan distribution of land. There must also be a humane approach to addressing this current problem,” he said.

“In areas affected by evictions and demolitions, no one has been offered alternative land and no temporary shelter has been provided even to the elderly, the poor and persons with disabilities. A nation that fails to take-

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## The Director's Note

As we continue our mission to combat corruption in Zimbabwe, it is with great humility and determination that I share our insights and reflections with you in this newsletter.

Land corruption is a pervasive issue that not only undermines the rule of law but also exacerbates inequalities, stifles economic growth, and threatens the environment. It is a complex problem that requires a multi-faceted approach and the collective efforts of various stakeholders.

First and foremost, the government plays a central role in establishing and enforcing policies that promote transparency and accountability in land administration. We urge authorities to prioritise the reform of land governance systems, enhance transparency in land allocation processes, and strengthen mechanisms for citizen participation and oversight.

Civic organizations have a crucial role to play in holding the government accountable and advocating for the rights of vulnerable communities affected by land corruption. Through our collective advocacy efforts, we can amplify the voices of those most affected and lobby for meaningful reforms that prioritize social justice and equitable land distribution.

Land developers, as key actors in the development landscape, must uphold ethical standards and adhere to legal frameworks to ensure that their activities do not contribute to land corruption. We call upon developers to embrace principles of corporate social responsibility and engage in dialogue with communities to address their concerns and priorities.

Lastly, the public is instrumental in driving change and holding all stakeholders accountable. We encourage



citizens to actively participate in community-led initiatives, demand access to information related to land administration, and report instances of corruption or abuse of power.

In conclusion, the fight against land corruption is a collective endeavor that requires the commitment and collaboration of government, civic organizations, land developers, and the public. Together, we can work towards creating a transparent and accountable land administration system that upholds the rights of all Zimbabweans and fosters sustainable development for future generations.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

*Tafadzwa Chikumbu*

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care of its vulnerable populations in such circumstances has completely lost its sense of humanity and empathy," Chiriga said.

In addition, the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) reports that dozens of villagers in Gwanda, Matabeleland South province, are facing prosecution for allegedly occupying state land without lawful authority. The 180 villagers, including individuals in their 90s, 80s, 70s, 60s, and younger individuals, were arrested on February 7, 2024, by Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) officers. They were charged with occupying "gazetted land without lawful authority" under the Gazetted Land Consequential Provisions Act.

Prosecutors allege that the villagers, residing in the

Nyandeni community of Gwanda North, unlawfully occupied land at Hollins Block Estate, which is designated as state land. Following their arrest, the villagers were detained for two nights before being released on February 9, 2024. This occurred after lawyers representing the villagers, Jabulani Mhlanga of ZLHR and Mitchell Chigova of Mabhikwa and Partners Legal Practitioners, challenged the legality of the arrests.

They argued that the arrests violated Section 50 of the Constitution and lacked sufficient evidence, suggesting they were conducted for investigative purposes rather than for prosecution. On February 23, 2024, the villagers were summoned to Gwanda Magistrates Court, where prosecutors sought to formally remand them. However, their lawyers again challenged this attempt.

## Transparency International Zimbabwe advocates for transparency and accountability in land administration



Corruption remains a big challenge in Zimbabwe, affecting all levels of society from grassroots communities to the highest echelons of government. Among the sectors deeply affected by corruption is land administration, with Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z) highlighting its detrimental impact on vulnerable groups such as women and the elderly.

Defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, corruption in land administration encompasses activities like double allocations, land grabbing by business entities linked to political elites, forced evictions, and the selling of land to non-eligible individuals. These corrupt practices not only undermine the rights of citizens but also exacerbate issues such as poverty and social inequality.

TI Z's extensive research, including studies like "An Analysis of Transparency and Accountability in Land Sector Governance in Zimbabwe" and "The Intersection of Women, Land, and Corruption in Zimbabwe," has shed light on the widespread nature of land corruption in the country. Building on these findings, TI Z has launched initiatives aimed at promoting transparency and accountability in land administration. TI Z noted that land corruption in Zimbabwe has been difficult to curb because of various factors such as;

- Poor record-keeping, lack of transparency, and accountability in government land agencies enable elites and government actors to illegally enrich themselves and manipulate land records.
- Unclear and uncoordinated responsibilities between private agencies and government institutions.
- Citizens have limited access to land and investment information held by government agencies, allowing corruption to flourish and hindering their ability to demand transparency.
- Lack of clear land claim formalisation procedures make it difficult for families and communities to register their lands.

- Lack of accountability for government officials, national elites, local leaders, and companies and investors.
- Lack of political will to address corruption within government agencies resulting in Zimbabwe scoring negatively on global governance index like Transparency International Corruption Perception Index
- Limited access to information by the public on the whole processes of land acquisition in Zimbabwe

Currently, TI Z is implementing its land corruption project in Harare and Bulawayo, focusing on communities in Epworth and Cowdray Park. These areas have been particularly affected by land corruption, leading to disputes, environmental degradation, and social unrest. Through community engagements and awareness campaigns, TI Z is empowering residents to report instances of corruption and demand accountability from authorities.

To address the systemic issues fueling land corruption, TI Z advocates for improved record-keeping, transparency in government agencies, and increased access to information for citizens. Additionally, the organisation offers free legal assistance to communities impacted by land corruption and facilitates dialogue between stakeholders to find sustainable solutions.

In light of these efforts, TI Z calls on citizens to actively participate in the fight against land corruption by reporting incidents of corruption, engaging with relevant authorities, and advocating for transparency and accountability in land administration. Together, we can work towards a Zimbabwe where land resources are managed fairly and equitably for the benefit of all.

## Unmasking land corruption: The Zimbabwean landscape

Land corruption is a pervasive issue that plagues many countries, and Zimbabwe is no exception. In its simplest form, land corruption refers to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain in land-related processes. It manifests in various ways, undermining economic development, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability.

In Zimbabwe, a nation rich in natural resources and agricultural potential, land corruption has been a longstanding challenge, deeply intertwined with historical and political factors. One of the most infamous episodes of land corruption in Zimbabwe occurred during the fast-track land reform program in the early 2000s. Intended to address historical inequalities in land ownership, the program was marred by irregularities, including the allocation of land to political elites rather than landless peasants.

The consequences of such corruption have been profound. Not only did it lead to widespread economic disruption, with the collapse of many commercial farms, but it also engendered a culture of impunity and patronage, where political connections mattered more than merit or legality. This has perpetuated a cycle of corruption, hindering Zimbabwe's efforts to attract investment and promote inclusive growth.

In contemporary Zimbabwe, land corruption continues to manifest in various forms. One prevalent issue is the manipulation of land allocation processes for personal gain. This can involve bribery, nepotism, or coercion, where well-connected individuals secure prime land at the expense of deserving beneficiaries. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and accountability in land administration exacerbates the problem, allowing corrupt practices to thrive unchecked.

Another facet of land corruption in Zimbabwe is the illegal sale of state land. Public land, intended for the benefit of all citizens, is sometimes unlawfully transferred into private

hands through fraudulent means. This not only deprives the state of valuable resources but also deprives ordinary Zimbabweans of access to land for housing, agriculture, or other productive purposes.

Moreover, the nexus between politics and land exacerbates corruption. The ruling party's control over land allocation processes can be exploited for political gain, rewarding loyalists while punishing dissenters. This politicisation of land undermines the rule of law and fosters a culture of fear and dependency, where citizens are hesitant to challenge the status quo for fear of reprisals.

Addressing land corruption in Zimbabwe requires a multi-faceted approach. Strengthening institutions responsible for land administration, such as the Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement, is crucial. This entails improving transparency, streamlining procedures, and enhancing oversight mechanisms to prevent abuse of power. Additionally, promoting civic education and citizen participation can empower communities to demand accountability and resist corrupt practices.

Furthermore, embracing technology, such as blockchain and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), can enhance the transparency and efficiency of land management systems, reducing opportunities for corruption. By digitising land records and establishing online platforms for land transactions, Zimbabwe can minimise human intervention and mitigate the risk of manipulation.

Ultimately, combating land corruption requires political will, institutional reform, and societal vigilance. It is essential to recognise that land is not just a commodity but a fundamental resource that shapes livelihoods, identities, and aspirations. By safeguarding the integrity of land governance, Zimbabwe can unlock the full potential of its land resources for the benefit of all its citizens.

**Did you know that you can now  
report corruption online on the  
Global Leaks platform?**

Use this link: <https://report.tizim.org/#/>

## Transparency International launches the research on corruption, discrimination, and land rights in Sub-Saharan Africa

Transparency International recently launched the research that seeks to identify the intersection between corruption, discrimination, and land rights as part of its Land and Corruption in Africa Phase II project. The project builds on the solid foundation of knowledge, networks and learnings acquired from the implementation of the previous Land and Corruption in Africa project (2015-2019) which targeted 7 Transparency International Chapters, namely; Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The research report aims to document, map and analyse discriminatory corruption in the land sector to identify where and how laws, policies and practice need to change.

The research produced the following key findings:

- Discrimination can result in greater exposure to corruption:** Marginalised groups facing discrimination often encounter significant barriers when seeking access to justice. Political and social marginalisation can impede their ability to challenge corrupt practices and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Certain acts of corruption are directly discriminatory:** Some corrupt behaviours specifically target and harm particular individuals or communities based on their protected characteristics. For example, bribery or extortion schemes might deliberately exploit the vulnerabilities of marginalised groups, resulting in differential and unfavourable treatment. In these cases, corruption becomes a tool for reinforcing and perpetuating discrimination, directly contributing to the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of already vulnerable populations.
- The impacts of corruption are felt disproportionately by groups exposed to discrimination:** While corruption affects society as a whole, its consequences are often unevenly distributed, with marginalised groups bearing a disproportionate burden. Factors such as social status, identity, and beliefs can amplify the negative effects of corruption on these groups. As a result, marginalised communities may experience heightened levels of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion due to the intersection of discrimination and corruption.
- Discrimination and corruption result in the denial of justice:** The political and social marginalisation of groups exposed to discrimination can impede their ability to challenge corrupt practices and respond to rights violations. Additionally, corruption within justice systems undermines public trust and confidence, further hindering marginalised communities' ability to seek redress for rights violations. This creates a vicious cycle where discrimination and corruption reinforce each other, perpetuating injustice and inequality.
- Corruption impedes the effectiveness of measures designed to advance equality:** A new dynamic identified through the research for this report which had not been identified during the development of the Defying Exclusion report concerns the role of corruption in the development and implementation of initiatives aimed at promoting equality. The research shows how corruption can frustrate programmes



aimed at redressing disadvantage for marginalised communities. Efforts to promote equality and address social disparities are hampered by corruption, which undermines the development and implementation of initiatives aimed at uplifting marginalised communities. Corruption distorts resource allocation, undermines institutional integrity, and erodes public trust, making it difficult to effectively address systemic inequalities. Consequently, marginalised groups continue to face barriers to access education, healthcare, employment, and other essential services, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalisation.

The interplay between discrimination and corruption exacerbates existing inequalities, undermines justice, and impedes efforts to achieve equality. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that tackle both the root causes and the systemic manifestations of discrimination and corruption in society. The report gives a summary of the challenges faced by various groups in accessing land. Key recommendations in the report include:

- Countries especially in Africa should review their policy frameworks to ensure that the legitimate tenure rights of all land users are respected and protected.
- Land reform processes should recognise the unique challenges experienced by marginalised communities in exercising their land rights. Positive action measures, including land restitution and redistribution programmes, should be adopted.
- Anti-corruption measures should be mainstreamed in all land governance laws, policies and regulations.
- Communities should be empowered to define the rules that govern the collective use and management of their land.
- States must ensure effective protection for those working to address discriminatory corruption and take into account the particular risks they face
- States should facilitate access to information, particularly in the context of land acquisitions and investment, and should monitor the impact of their laws and policies.

You can download the full report on: [www.tizim.org](http://www.tizim.org).

## Examining land governance: Prioritising transparent compensation and displacement procedures

Understanding the intricacies of large-scale land occupation and its impact on Zimbabwean communities necessitates a deep dive into the historical and socio-economic factors shaping land distribution in the country. Zimbabwe's land ownership journey, marked by colonisation and subsequent attempts to rectify past injustices, underscores the complexity of land governance and its effects on society.

Land reform policies in Zimbabwe have taken various forms, notably the Fast Track Land Reform Program initiated in the early 2000s. This program aimed to redistribute large commercial farms, primarily owned by white farmers, to black Zimbabweans. However, the compensation mechanisms during this period were often contentious, leading to forced evictions without adequate compensation and disparities in compensation for improvements made to the land.

Legal frameworks such as the 2013 Constitution and the Land Acquisition Act provide guidelines for land acquisition and compensation processes. Yet, challenges persist in ensuring adherence to these laws, resulting in disputes over fair compensation.

The impact of land occupation and compensation approaches on communities is multifaceted. While land redistribution can offer opportunities for marginalised individuals and promote agricultural development, it can also disrupt established farming systems and displace communities, particularly if compensation is insufficient.

Evaluating the compensation approach of companies involved in land occupation requires assessing fairness, transparency, and alignment with legal frameworks. Fair compensation should not

only consider the financial value of the land but also account for the socio-economic impact on affected communities, including loss of income, livelihoods, and cultural heritage. The complexity of land occupation and compensation underscores the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders, including affected communities, government officials, and experts. It is crucial to consider various perspectives to develop comprehensive solutions.

The enactment of Statutory Instrument 62 of 2020 by the Zimbabwean government highlights ongoing efforts to address compensation issues. However, challenges remain in establishing efficient and fair legal frameworks for land acquisition.

Internationally and regionally, there is a lack of specific laws governing compensation for communities displaced by mining operations. While fundamental human rights principles advocate for fair compensation, there is a need for clearer guidance on compensation frameworks for affected communities.

Recommendations for transparent, fair, and inclusive compensation processes include transparent valuation, market-based compensation, consideration of non-monetary factors, consultation with affected communities, legal framework strengthening, and monitoring mechanisms.

In conclusion, prioritising transparent compensation and displacement procedures is essential for equitable land governance in Zimbabwe. Collaborative efforts involving stakeholders at all levels are crucial to address challenges and ensure fair outcomes for affected communities.





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# Step by step guide in accessing land in the urban areas

Are you in search of residential accommodation in Zimbabwe? We understand that finding suitable housing can be a daunting task, which is why we're here to guide you through the process step by step. This guide ensures that you have the necessary information and support to navigate the housing allocation system with ease.



Navigating the housing allocation process may seem complex, but with this guide, we aim to make it clearer and more accessible for all citizens in Zimbabwe. You can call our Advocacy Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) on our hotline: [08677004072](tel:08677004072).

## **Step 1: Registration on the Waiting List**

Any person seeking residential accommodation in Zimbabwe must register on the Waiting List for a minimum of six months before being considered for allocation. Eligibility criteria include being a resident, aged 18 and above, and not owning property within specified areas.

## **Step 2: Application Methodology**

Obtain an application form from the Housing Allocation Section upon payment of a fee. Submit a completed form along with necessary documents, including identification, proof of income, and employment status.

## **Step 3: Renewal of Application**

Applications must be renewed annually to remain on the waiting list until land has been allocated to them.

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Transparency International Zimbabwe



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