Profile: Harare City Council

Highly Commended - Special Award Excellence in City-Led Transformation
In this series, we profile the winners and commendees of the 2016 FT/IFC Transformational Business Awards to share how they are delivering sustainable solutions and making a difference in their markets, countries and communities.

Harare City Council: Building a New Relationship with the Urban Poor
A girl whose mother can now afford to pay her school fees. A three-person tailoring shop working to buy fabric, fulfill orders, and create jobs. A family that started a small business to save enough money to buy land for their home. These are the stories of Harare’s poorest families working to get out of extreme poverty - with some help from a forward-thinking city council and non-government organizations that approached its mission with a simple idea that the urban poor ought to have a voice in planning and implementing reforms that touch their lives.

Over half of the world’s population today lives in cities. By 2045, the urban population is set to increase by 1.5 times and reach 6 billion people worldwide. The developing world’s urban centers, too, are expected to burgeon, drawing almost 1.4 billion additional people by 2030. Yet unfettered growth can burden already-stressed public infrastructure and basic services, leading to proliferation of slums, where the cities’ poorest residents live without clean water, safe housing and formal property rights. In regions like Africa, where the quarter of the world’s 828 million slum dwellers live, reaching the poorest urban residents with basic health, education and sanitation services is critical to ending extreme poverty.

Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe and home to 1.5 million people, has found a way to use its limited resources to improve the lives of its poorest residents with creativity and innovation. For the last five years, Harare City Council, the finalist of the 2016 FT/IFC Transformational Business Awards in the “City-Led Transformation” category, has led an ambitious Slum Upgrading Project (HSUP) that puts the city’s poorest residents in the center of its efforts. The project focuses on identifying the city slums, working together with the 200,000 residents to improve them, deliver vital services to the urban poor, and provide creative financing that creates opportunities for the slum dwellers.
“This project is about working with communities that are often invisible in our city – slum dwellers who live in informal settlements with only minimal services,” said Dr. Beth Chitekwe-Biti, the Executive Director and founder of Dialogue on Shelter Trust, a non-governmental organization working with landless and homeless communities in Zimbabwe. “Our work demonstrates new ways that the local authorities can work with the urban poor. The general narrative about Zimbabwe today tends to focus on the economic and political challenges, so it was important for us to demonstrate the amazing ingenuity of our city and our citizens.”

Succeeding Against the Odds

Like many urban centers in Africa, Harare is operating with a severe shortage of resources while facing demands for improved delivery of essential services from the increasingly active citizens mobilized by civil society organizations. The city responded to these challenges by becoming more inclusive of all stakeholders in the slum upgrading process, involving the poor in the regulations review and governance, and adopting community-based service delivery approaches that bring basic services like water, sanitation and road access. An example of the Council’s new approach is the Dzivarasekwa site, where 480 families have access to secure land, housing, water and sanitation. The Council also prioritized ecological sanitation, waste recycling and solar energy, which powers the new Community Resource Center where young people can learn about technology.

The urban poor also have access to the Harare Slum Upgrading Finance Facility – a jointly funded pool of money with the initial capital of $200,000 that provides revolving loans for housing and livelihood costs, galvanizing economic activity in construction and fabrication, supporting the craftsmen and creating jobs.

The Awards Help Drive Political Support, Connect with Others

“The FT/IFC Award has helped us bring more attention to our work and expand it beyond the pilot phase,” adds Bridget Mandizha, the City of Harare’s Housing Manager. “It helped us gain the political support within the city and created the opportunity to link with other partners, including the private sector, around the Slum Upgrading Finance Facility. We’ve used our success to position Harare as a learning platform for other local authorities in Zimbabwe.” The project has helped create a learning platform with six other municipal authorities in Zimbabwe (Bulawayo, Masvingo, Kadoma, Epworth, Chinhoyi and Kariba) who can now leverage Harare’s experience to address the challenges of slum upgrades in their own cities.

“Harare achieved remarkable results in an exceptionally challenging environment,” said Billy Cobbett, President of the City Alliance and one of the Awards judges. “It is building a new relationship with the urban poor, introducing significant reforms and sharing its experience with other cities.”

A partnership of The Financial Times, one of the world’s leading business news organizations, and IFC, a member of the World Bank Group and the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets, FT/IFC Transformational Business Awards is a major global program that recognizes ground-breaking, long-term private sector solutions to key development issues. The awards, now in their thirteenth year, are open to all financial and non-financial private sector organizations. The 2017 judging panel is co-chaired by Michael Skapinker, Associate Editor at the Financial Times, and Nena Stoiljkovic, IFC Vice President, Global Client Services. Click here to learn more and apply.

For the 2017 awards programme information and to enter the awards please visit:

live.ft.com/transformationalbusiness