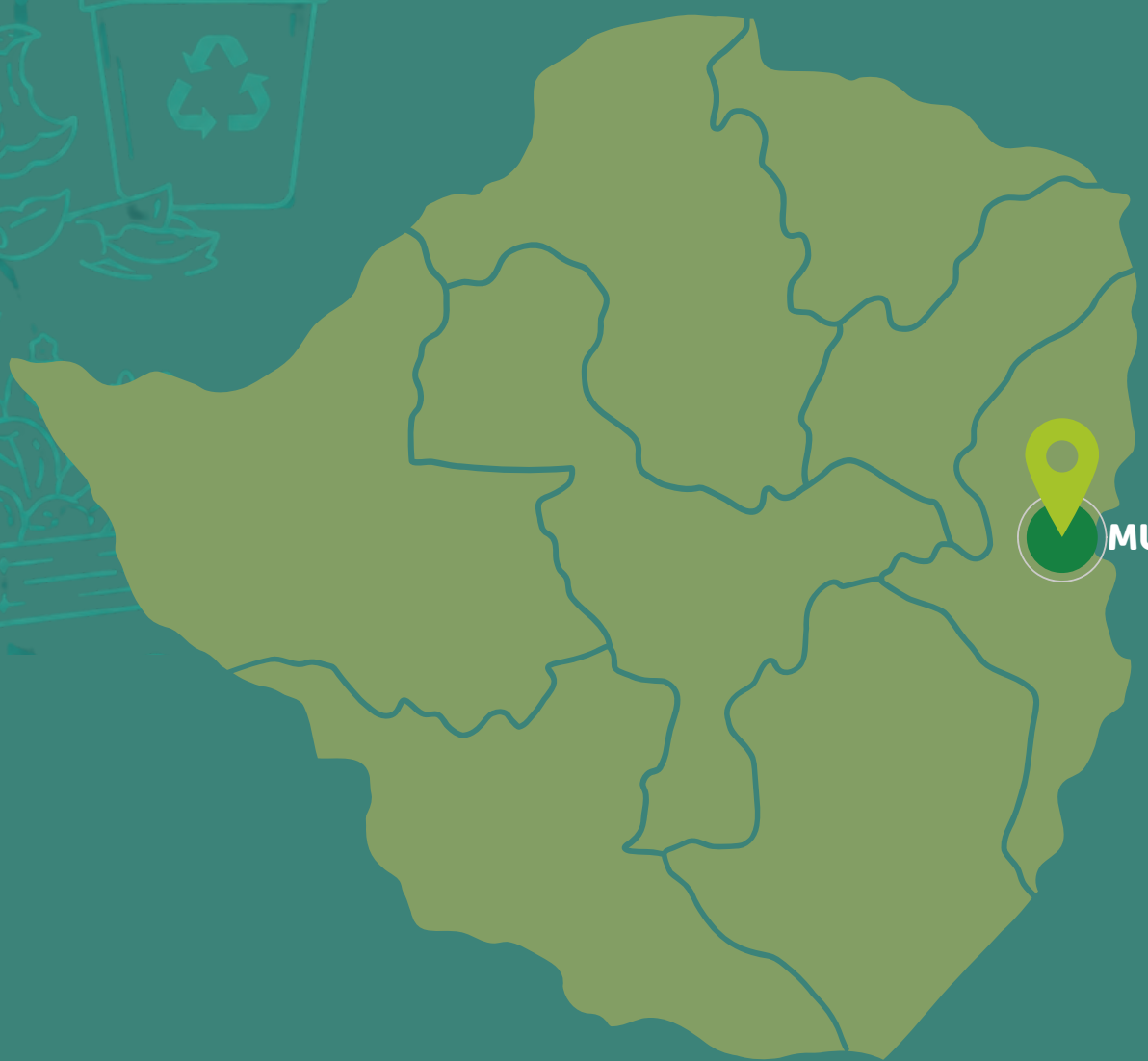




Integrating Urban Agriculture, Organic Waste Reuse, and Community Governance in Mutare

POLICY BRIEF

2026

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief is developed by Green Governance Zimbabwe (GGZ) under its Urban Futures Program. The brief provides an analysis of the legal, institutional, and governance framework shaping urban agriculture and waste management in Mutare, and identifies policy entry points for integrating organic waste recovery with urban farming and community-led stewardship. The brief is developed within a context where Mutare City Council is reviewing its by-laws regulating urban agriculture and related land use and waste management.



1. POLICY & LEGAL PROVISIONS

Mutare has existing legal instruments that govern both urban agriculture and waste management. However, our analysis shows that these instruments remain fragmented and are found across separate by-laws rather than integrated into a single circular economy policy system. The City of Mutare (Urban Agriculture) By-laws regulate land allocation, permits, offences, and penalties. This legal framework confirms that urban agriculture is recognised as a formal land-use activity.

On the other hand, the City of Mutare (Environmental and Natural Resources Conservation) By-laws provide for waste management sites, solid and effluent waste control, burning of vegetation, invasive alien species control, and environmental rehabilitation. Our analysis shows that the legal framework remains oriented toward

control, sanitation, and enforcement and falls short of explicitly providing for source separation, composting, nutrient recovery, vermiculture, biogas production, or the reuse of organic waste for urban agriculture.

Policy implication: Mutare's existing legal framework is sound for regulation, but there are gaps in how the framework should support circular systems and linking waste recovery to food production, soil regeneration, and climate resilience.



2. INSTITUTIONAL MANDATES & COORDINATION

Multiple institutions are mandated to govern urban agriculture and organic waste. Mutare City Council is central to waste collection, licensing, land regulation, service delivery, and by-law enforcement while environmental compliance and food safety are managed by institutions such as the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), the Ministry of Health and Child Care and the Standards Association of Zimbabwe (SAZ). The latter are often governed through national-level policies and regulations.

Within this governance framework, there is fragmentation, duplication, and weak coordination. Responsibilities are spread across institutions, with limited harmonisation of inspections, data sharing, and decision-making which presents implementation challenges and missed opportunities to harmonise urban agriculture, environmental health, and waste reuse.



Policy implication: There is a need for clearer inter-agency coordination mechanisms and shared accountability on composting, waste separation, and safe reuse of organic waste.



3.ORGANIC WASTE STREAMS & URBAN FARMING POTENTIAL

Mutare urban has several organic waste streams with strong agricultural potential. The streams include household food waste, market waste, school waste, garden waste, crop residues, sawdust, and selected animal waste streams. With proper separation and processing, these materials have huge potential to support composting, vermiculture, biogas production, mulch production, soil restoration, and other productive reuse.

There is significant urban agriculture in backyards, riverbanks, mountainsides, and designated plots in Mutare urban. However, urban agriculture remain constrained by insecure land access, water shortages, infrastructure damage, drainage problems, land disputes, and public health risks.

The existing urban agriculture activities can be linked to household backyard gardening and small-scale cultivation with low-cost organic soil inputs, which can reduce dependence on purchased fertilisers while improving soil health and urban food security.

Policy implication: Progressive and innovative policies should treat organic waste as a resource stream that supports soil regeneration, lower input costs, and resilient urban food systems rather than just a problem to be solved or managed.



4.BARRIERS TO ORGANIC WASTE RECOVERY

In Mutare, there are various constraints to circular organic waste recovery. Some of the constraints include weak source separation, limited composting infrastructure, low technical capacity, fragmented institutional mandates, and a regulatory framework that is traditionally focused more on disposal than recovery.

With no waste separation in Mutare, most organic waste is mixed with other waste and ends up at the dumpsite rather than being recovered for productive use. As a key timber-producing community, Mutare produces a lot of sawdust, which could support composting or biomass applications, but is still mostly being burnt.

Overall, Mutare has a fragmented and underdeveloped organic waste management value chain. There are few waste actors who deal with plastic and light metal cans. The organic waste chain, on the other hand, has no known active players and it exhibits weak collection, poor coordination, limited recovery infrastructure, and minimal linkage between waste streams and urban farming needs.

Policy implication: The current policy framework and practice treat organic waste primarily as a sanitation burden rather than as a resource and input for agriculture, soil health, and green livelihoods.





5.COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION & GOVERNANCE GAPS

Youth participation and wider community engagement in decisions about land and waste management systems remain limited in Mutare. Although the council has existing consultative processes, stakeholders indicated that they are largely limited and often not communicated widely and in good time resulting in decision-making being dominated by older stakeholders and established actors.

This consultative approach results in a top-down governance model. The top-down model limits local ownership of composting, waste separation, communal gardens, and recycling systems.

Evidence from various stakeholder engagements indicates that informal vendors, urban farmers, youth groups, and residents are not clearly positioned as co-managers of land or waste resources. The absence of structured participation mechanisms also weakens transparency, accountability, and benefit-sharing.

Policy implication: The community governance approach and practice is currently consultative rather than participatory, which limits legitimacy, compliance, and long-term sustainability.



6.EXISTING INITIATIVES & ENABLING CONDITIONS

In Mutare urban, there are few dedicated composting or recycling programmes. However, several enabling areas exist, such as agroecology, climate-smart agriculture, environmental rehabilitation, waste management, sustainable food systems, and green livelihoods. Even though specific municipal programmes on composting and recycling remain limited, these provide the foundations and potential building blocks for circular economy interventions

Research done as part of developing this brief shows that informal waste recovery exists in Mutare and is already playing an important role, especially in plastics and cans. However, much more needs to be done to better link municipal systems, community groups, and small-scale initiatives to organic recovery. Robust environmental governance instruments and youth-enterprise opportunities would create further space for climate resilience and green livelihood initiatives for Mutare.

Policy implication: Mutare has the foundations for a circular economy approach, but not yet a mature implementation framework.



7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the policy brief recommends that Mutare should move from a disposal-oriented system toward a circular organic waste economy. To achieve this, the city should adopt a coordinated package of policy, institutional, and community actions which are detailed below.

7.1

RECOGNISE ORGANIC WASTE AS A MUNICIPAL RESOURCE

Mutare should shift towards viewing organic waste as a productive resource rather than a sanitation burden. To make this achievable, there will be a need to include organic waste recovery in municipal policy, service planning, and environmental management frameworks. The city should ensure that the By-Law review introduces provisions for source separation, composting, vermiculture, biogas feedstock recovery, and the safe reuse of organic materials in urban agriculture and rehabilitation sites.

Viewing organic waste as a resource will provide a strong basis for investments into the organic waste value chain and help reframe organic waste as part of soil regeneration, food security, and green livelihoods rather than simply something to be removed, buried in narrow pits and dumped.

7.2

INTRODUCE SOURCE SEPARATION SYSTEMS AT HOUSEHOLD, MARKET, AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Mutare should consider introducing practical separation requirements for households, vegetable markets, schools, food enterprises, and public institutions. Currently, waste in Mutare is managed without separation at source, which makes waste recovery difficult and costly. Separating organic waste from plastics, metals, glass, and other contaminants at the point of generation improves recovery quality and reduces processing costs which are both key in promoting a circular economy and turning waste to money.

Clear separation rules create opportunities for informal actors, community groups, and private recyclers to recover clean organic material for composting and other reuse pathways and is key in promoting separation at source.

Promoting separation at source requires gradual behavioural change of citizens who for long have been used to just dispose their waste with no effort on separation. This behavioural change calls for public awareness campaigns and other practical steps such as colour-coded collection guidance, separation bins, and demonstration pilots in markets, schools, and selected wards.

7.3

DEVELOP COMPOSTING AND RECOVERY INFRASTRUCTURE

Mutare needs designated composting and waste recovery facilities. These facilities can be set up at both central and community level with central composting hubs, ward-based composting sites, market-waste recovery points, and smaller decentralised facilities linked to gardens and urban farming areas.

Given the current state of infrastructure and what is needed, the city can begin with pilot composting sites in high-waste areas such as markets and expand to community composting spaces, school-based systems, and enterprise-led processing sites. Infrastructure investments should also consider safe storage, leachate control, odour management, and product quality assurance.

7.4

LINK ORGANIC WASTE RECOVERY DIRECTLY TO URBAN AGRICULTURE

Mutare should connect organic waste recovery strategies and pathways to existing urban farming spaces and practices such as designated urban farms, backyard gardens, community gardens, school gardens, tree nurseries, and rehabilitation sites for improved soil fertility, reduced fertiliser uses and costs, and strengthening of urban food quality.

Linking waste management with land use planning and food production ensures sustainability and improved food systems that are environmentally friendly. Doing so should ensure that recovered materials are used locally, creating visible benefits for communities and strengthening public support for source separation and composting.

7.5

STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION

Mutare should institute formal coordination mechanism that include key stakeholders in waste and urban agriculture managements such as Mutare City Council, EMA, health authorities and agricultural actors.

This coordination mechanism would clarify mandates, reduce duplication, and ensure that waste, land use, environmental health, and food safety are treated as interconnected issues. This will draw substantial benefits from joint planning, shared inspections, data exchange, and monitoring of recovery activities. It should also include effective coordination between focal persons or units within institutions responsible for waste recovery and urban agriculture.

7.6

FORMALISE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL STEWARDSHIP

Mutare City Council should move community participation beyond consultation to co-governance. An effective co-governance architecture will include establishment and coordination of ward-level waste committees, community environment committees, and urban agriculture user groups that will have the active participation of residents, youth, vendors, informal workers, women, and small-scale farmers.

For more meaningful involvement, these structures should have defined roles in planning, monitoring, site selection, and feedback on waste and land decisions. They can also play other active roles in the actual waste and land management activities such as supporting community composting, local stewardship of public spaces, and oversight of service delivery. Formal participation will improve legitimacy, compliance, and local ownership.

7.7

RECOGNISE AND SUPPORT INFORMAL ACTORS

Mutare City Council should recognise informal waste workers, small-scale collectors, and community-based recovery actors who are already playing a major role in the waste system but continue to be overlooked, charged for offering support or stigmatised by the local authority and the community at large. Give their already active role in plastics and can collection and market clean-up. These actors should be included in policy and planning rather than being treated as peripheral

Some of the direct support that can be given to these actors include training, protective equipment, simplified (and free) licensing, aggregation points, and opportunities to participate in composting and source-separation systems. Recognising informal actors would improve recovery rates while also protecting livelihoods and creating pathways for more dignified work.

7.8

PROMOTE YOUTH-LED GREEN LIVELIHOODS

Youth and Youth serving organisations in Mutare can be positioned as central implementers of composting, waste sorting, transport, processing, and recycling enterprises so as to leverage on the employment potential. Mutare City Council has an opportunity of creating and expanding youth-led green enterprises, especially those linked to organic waste collection, compost production, vermiculture, and biomass recovery.

Such youth groups require training, start-up support, access to land, local procurement, and partnerships with civic organisations and private actors. These youth-led initiatives will be especially important for Mutare City Council because they combine livelihood creation with environmental management and local innovation.

7.9

SUPPORT PILOT PROJECTS AND SCALABLE CIRCULAR ECONOMY MODELS

Mutare should establish or support practical pilot projects that demonstrate the value of organic waste recovery. To build a solid business case and demonstrate the potential for scalability, the pilot projects on market-waste composting hubs, school-based separation and biogas pilots, backyard composting

demonstrations, or compost supply partnerships with urban farmers and tree nurseries are essential to establish and support.

The pilots will give an opportunity to test governance arrangements, cost models, participation mechanisms, and product quality before scale up and full scale investments in the circular economy. Successful pilots can then be scaled across wards and linked to municipal planning. Demonstration projects are important because they turn policy intent into visible results and build evidence for wider adoption.

7.10

IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PUBLIC REPORTING

The city should improve access to information and public reporting on waste management, composting sites, land allocation. They should regularly and widely publish waste and land-use plans, report on waste diversion, disclose composting and recycling sites, and consult communities before allocating land for environmental uses. Such practices will strengthen trust, make it easier for communities to participate and understand what is being recovered, where materials are going, and how benefits are shared.

7.11

INTEGRATE CLIMATE RESILIENCE INTO PLANNING

Mutare should frame organic waste reuse beyond waste management and as part of climate adaptation and broader sustainable development for the city. Integrating organic waste recovery into climate resilience, environmental rehabilitation, and food security planning will allow Mutare City Council to have its waste policy aligned with broader city goals and the sustainable development agenda that contemporary cities are pursuing.

7.12

CREATE ENABLING CONDITIONS AND SUPPORT ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL ENTERPRISE

The city must support the establishment of viable local enterprise models that supports organic waste recovery and effective urban land use. Such support will include access to safe and designated land, basic processing equipment, technical training, quality control support, and market access for compost and related products. The city can also encourage local procurement of compost and other organic inputs, creating stable demand for recovered products. This would help move the system from project-based activity to a more durable circular economy.



Priority sequencing

GGZ recommends that a practical way to implement these recommendations would be to begin with three immediate priorities:

1	ESTABLISH SOURCE SEPARATION AND PILOT COMPOSTING IN SELECTED MARKETS AND WARDS.	2	ESTABLISH THE COORDINATION PLATFORM THAT LINKS COUNCIL, EMA, HEALTH, AND KEY AGRICULTURAL ACTORS INCLUDING CSOS AND EXISTING VENDORS AND WASTE COLLECTORS.
3	FORMALISE WARD-LEVEL PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES WITH YOUTH, VENDORS, INFORMAL WORKERS, AND FARMERS.		

These steps will set the needed foundation for governance and a technical basis for scaling composting, urban agriculture linkages, and green livelihood opportunities across the city.

CONCLUSION

Mutare already has a regulatory foundation for waste control, environmental protection, and urban agriculture. The main gap is that these functions remain separated rather than integrated. The Policy Brief argues that organic waste streams, urban farming practices, and informal recovery systems already exist, but they are not yet connected through clear mandates, source separation, recovery infrastructure, and participatory governance.

Overall, the most effective policy shift that Mutare should consider is to treat organic waste as an asset for the city, urban agriculture as a resilience and livelihoods strategy for its citizens, and community participation as the governance mechanism that links these cogs together.

ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

Published By:

This policy brief was developed by Green Governance Zimbabwe (GGZ) under the Urban Futures Project to inform ongoing discussions on urban agriculture, organic waste management and community governance in Mutare. The brief draws on inputs gathered through a series of consultative and participatory processes, including policy dialogue meetings, stakeholder engagements and interviews with key stakeholders involved in urban agriculture, waste management, environmental governance and community development.

The perspectives and experiences shared through these processes helped to identify existing governance gaps, opportunities and practical policy entry points for strengthening the integration of organic waste recovery, urban agriculture and community-led stewardship in Mutare.

The brief is intended to support continued dialogue among local authorities, communities, civil society organisations, youth, informal actors, urban farmers and other stakeholders towards more inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban food and waste systems.

With Support From:

This policy brief was produced through the generous support of Hivos under the Urban Futures Project. The views and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of Green Governance Zimbabwe and do not necessarily reflect the views of Hivos.

Disclaimer:

The information contained in this publication is intended for general policy and informational purposes. While reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the information presented, Green Governance Zimbabwe does not guarantee that the information is complete or free from error.

The recommendations presented in this brief reflect stakeholder inputs and the analysis undertaken by Green Governance Zimbabwe at the time of publication.

 17 Jason Moyo Ave Murambi, Mutare
 @greengovzw
 Green Governance Africa
 @greengovZw1
 @greengovZw
 www.greengovzw.org