The concept of urban forestry in Zimbabwe is applicable to pockets of forested plots that remain in the urban areas, as well as to newly established woodlots and vegetated parks for recreational and aesthetic purposes. Urban forestry also covers the planting and maintenance of ornamental trees, shrubs and bushes along the main streets, roads and avenues, by private residents to beautify their homes, and in undeveloped areas.

Urban trees and forests provide firewood for energy, timber for use in construction, fruits, medicines and other useful minor forest products. Wood is still the main source of cooking energy, because alternative sources, when available, are unaffordable to the majority of urban residents. It is illegal to harvest and market forestry products without a permit, wherever they are found. Despite the existence of such legislation there has been serious loss of trees within the major urban centers in Zimbabwe. The loss of trees within urban areas has led to another problem, that of long distance marketing of firewood. This has resulted in a number of rural lands surrounding the urban centres such as Harare, Chitungwiza, Bulawayo and Gweru loosing trees for firewood.

THE (NATIONAL) POLICY FRAMEWORK
The forests that the government is concerned with and that are specifically mentioned in government’s policy are not located in the urban areas of Zimbabwe. About 54% of the land area of the country (21 million hectares) is under woodland and forest. None of these recognised forests are located in the urban areas of the country as the draft policy clearly shows. It therefore does not make any specific mention of urban forests or the need to protect, create or conserve them. The policy does, however, give general strategic directions on the management and conservation of forests in the country. Some of these strategic directions can be used from a policy point of view to encourage the creation of urban forests in the country.

These strategic directions include the strengthening of the Forestry Commission’s capacity to provide advice and support for implementing sustainable forest management programmes.

FORESTRY COMMISSION
The Forestry Commission, established in 1954, is the sole government institution that is directly tasked with managing forestry areas and forestry issues in the country. Its responsibilities include: advice on all forestry matters and making recommendations to the Minister of Environment and Tourism; control, management and exploitation of state forests, forest nurseries and plantations; establishment, maintenance, improvement and renewal of plantations and forest nurseries. Given these wide-ranging powers and adequate resources and capacity, the Forestry Commission in Zimbabwe can play a pivotal role in ensuring the growth of urban forestry in the country.

THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK
National Laws
The Forest Act: Chapter 19:05 is the principal Act dealing with forest issues in Zimbabwe. It provides for the establishment of a Commission for the administration, control and management of state forests. It also provides for the setting aside of state forests, protection of private forests, trees and forest produce, control of tree cutting for mining purposes, conservation of timber resources and the compulsory afforestation of private land. The Act deals extensively with forestry issues in the country generally without specifically touching on the issue of urban forestry.
There are general provisions in the Act that can, however, be used to address the issue of urban forestry.

**Protection of private forests**

Section 37 of the Act states that “The owner of any private land who has placed or intends to place such land or any portion of such land under a system of forest management approved by the Forestry Commission may make an application to the Minister for the declaration that such land or a portion of such land shall be protected under this Act”. Most of the titled land in the country is located in the urban, farming and plantation areas with rural land regarded as state land. Only those who hold title to their property can therefore make use of these provisions to establish private forests on their land. Urban dwellers can therefore also take advantage of this provision by making sure that they establish plantations on their land, which will then be protected by the law. A big incentive provided for this provision is that the forest cannot be accessed or destroyed by other persons since it enjoys the protection of the law. The owner of the forest on the other hand is not restricted in the way that he or she may use or exploit the forest and its produce (Section 42 (a)). Indigenous timber on private land is, however, subject to Forestry Commission and Ministerial regulation regarding its exploitation for sale or manufacturing purposes. Compulsory afforestation of private land

In its preamble, the Act provides for the compulsory afforestation of private land. This is usually done when the private land is degraded and run down and the owner has made no effort to rehabilitate the land leading to other environmental problems like soil erosion and siltation of public rivers, dams and other water sources. The Forestry Commission is then allowed to force the owner of the private land to afforest his/her land. As indicated earlier, land in the urban areas is usually privately owned and when an owner of urban land is forced to afforest the land, urban forestry will be promoted in the process.

The Environmental Management Act

This is one of the newer pieces of legislation in Zimbabwe that are regarded as progressive in that they look at issues from different perspectives, i.e from the environmental, social, economic and developmental perspectives and in relation to global trends. The Act touches on forestry as an environmental issue, particularly the control of invasive exotic species, which will be of relevance to the establishment of plantations in Zimbabwe, usually established using exotic trees. The most popular exotic species that are used in the establishment of plantations in Zimbabwe include the Australian wattle, the pine as well as eucalyptus trees. The three species have not been declared exotic species by the government although the wattle is considered as such by environmentalist and conservationists.

**MUNICIPAL BY-LAWS**

Local authorities in Zimbabwe are allowed to make by-laws to govern issues that occur within their areas of jurisdiction. There are by-laws that have been put in place by some urban local authorities to deal with the issues of urban forestry, amongst other things. Harare and Bulawayo are the two largest cities in Zimbabwe.

**City of Harare By-laws**

The Harare (Trees and Plants) By-laws Statutory Instrument 141/1987 allow private individuals to plant trees or any other plants in public places as long as they have permission of the Director of Works in the Council. Section 4 (1) states that “No person shall without the consent of the Director of Works plant any tree or plant in or upon any public open space, public street, road, footpath or sidewalk”. The reverse of this, however, is that with the authority of the Director of Works, a person can plant a tree or any other plant in the mentioned places in the City of Harare, thereby promoting urban forestry. The planting of the trees or plants is to be supervised by the Director of Works, who is also supposed to determine whether any expense in relation to the planting of any tree or plant shall be borne by the person applying to plant the tree or by the Council. In terms of section 8 of the by-laws, it is an offence to willfully and without the prior written authority of the Director of Works, destroy, damage or remove any tree, tree guard lawn or flower bed from any place where it is planted. The by-laws do not only promote the growth of regulated urban forestry in the city by allowing the planting of trees but also ensure that the trees are protected in order to sustain the growth of urban forestry. The Harare (Control of Vegetation and Waste Material) By-laws Statutory Instrument 704/1982 require the owner or occupier of any private land to ensure that the vegetation that occurs on their property, whether natural or introduced, is kept in a neat, clean and tidy condition. By implication such owners and occupiers are by law allowed to plant and maintain trees and other plants provided they keep them in a tidy condition.

**City of Bulawayo By-laws**

Section 10 of this city’s by-laws states that “No person shall cultivate any municipal land or plant, sow, tend or reap any plant, shrub, bush, flower, vegetable, fruit or crop on any municipal land without the prior written approval of the Council”. The by-laws clearly allow cultivation of municipal land provided authority has been sought from the Council. The types of plants that can be planted on this municipal land are not limited and therefore forestry can be accommodated in the context of these provisions. The only hurdle is that there are no regulations in this city that specifically provide for the planting and management of trees, which could be used confidently in promoting urban forestry in the city.

**CONCLUSION**

Forests and forest produce and resources in Zimbabwe are respected and regarded as immensely beneficial to the country and its people with respect to their cultural, economic, social and aesthetic values. In communal areas people depend on the forests for fuel, food, medicine, pasture for their livestock, poles for building their homes and many other things. In the urban areas on the other hand forests are a way of beautifying the landscape and can be a source of income if managed on a commercial scale. Either way they play an important role, hence the need to revisit the legislative, policy and institutional frameworks for urban forestry in Zimbabwe. There is a need to positively and specifically provide for urban forestry so that forests are established and nurtured in urban areas where they have been destroyed by development.