

**COUNTRY STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF
STRATEGIC PLANNING BY URBAN LOCAL
AUTHORITIES IN MALAWI:**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 1987 census gave the total population of Malawi as 7,988,507 persons compared to 554,746 in the 1977. This gives the population increase of 44% during the intercensal period 1977 to 1987 with an annual growth rate of 3.7% compared to annual growth rate of 2.86% during the 1966-1977. To date 1999 the population of Malawi can be estimated at 10,000,000 persons, as announced from preliminary 1998 census results. 48% of the total population in 1978 census, were males and 52% females similar to 1977 census result.

89% of the total population in 1987 lived in rural areas while 11% lived in urban areas. Out of the total population living in urban areas, 39% lived in Blantyre City, 20% in Lilongwe City, 5% in each of Mzuzu City, and Municipality of Zomba. The remaining 25% lived in other smaller urban areas. This ratio is likely to be the same to date.

The process of urbanization in Malawi started with the arrival of the British Colonial Administration in 1891 and with the arrival of Europeans and Asians who were interested in commercial and professional services. This was also accompanied by the expansion/or introduction of missionary activities and the introduction of the cash exchange system into the indigenous subsistence economy. New created settlements developed around the colonial administrative centres and increasingly developed urban characteristics.

Urbanization in Malawi is therefore defined as the process whereby the functions of rural settlements or village increasingly become oriented towards non-farm activities such as the production of goods, marketing, commercial and professional services etc.

The average annual growth rate of urban population is estimated at 6.7%. It is estimated that by the turn of the century (2000) the urbanization rate in Malawi will be at 12% of the total population.

The paper reviews the state of art in strategic planning by Urban Local Authorities in Malawi – The study focuses on four major Local Authorities i.e., Blantyre, Lilongwe, zomba and Mzuzu. Mainly reviewing the basic planning approaches against the planning legislation as well as the Local Government Act. The paper describes the status of plans available in the major urban areas and examines the extent to which these plans have spearheaded socio-economic development.

PLANNING HISTORY AND STATUS

First urban planning schemes were introduced in the four major towns of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba in the early 1950s and were regulated by the 1948 planning act adopted from the 1947 British Planning Act.

The primary objective of these schemes were to present a broad based land use categories and make specific proposals for roads, schools and acquisition of land for public open spaces.

The schemes show what land uses are permitted in each part of the urban area. In most cases these schemes also contain a number of recommendations concerning the provision of and phasing of urban services and development of the towns in a projected term usually 10 years. The aim of these urban structure plans or zoning schemes being to ensure orderly, coordinated and efficient development to ensure proper conditions of health, safety and amenity (aesthetics). It is however, appreciated that this cannot be achieved by land use planning alone, complementary action is needed by

Authorities responsible for providing and managing urban services, and development of facilities in the cities.

The schemes provide the context within which detailed planning schemes (detailed Layout Plans) can be prepared. These detailed schemes show the proposed layout of plots, road reserves and other facilities in particular areas of the Cities.

The plans are therefore principal policy instruments and guidelines for effective development control.

The outline Zoning Schemes of Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba have four identical planning principles:

- i) **TO MAKE MORE EFFICIENT USE OF LAND:** Efforts will be made to ensure that plot sizes are not excessive in relation to the likely scale of development. Plot sizes are proposed to be smaller than in the past. Layouts for housing, industrial, commercial and other areas will be designed to make maximum use of the land consistent with minimising infrastructure costs per plot, and reducing distances and energy consumed in daily travel.
- ii) **TO CONSOLIDATE THE URBAN FORM:** Vacant sites within the built-up area will be developed before new sites or areas are opened up for development. This is the most economic and efficient way of developing the urban areas. It will also help prevent long distance travel and transport problems as the City /Municipality grows.
- iii) **TO ACHIEVE A MORE BALANCED PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT:** The aim is to ensure that each sector of the

City/Municipality has a full range of housing types, employment opportunities and other facilities and services.

- iv) **TO INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF SERVICED LAND:** There are currently few serviced plots in planned areas to provide a housing alternative to sprawling unplanned housing areas, and to create new commercial and industrial areas envisaged in this plan. New serviced land is therefore integral to this plan.

The case of Blantyre City is slightly different in that, it is the largest and oldest city. The first plan for Blantyre was prepared in 1951 when Blantyre and Limbe were separate municipalities and the plan provided for amalgamation of the twin towns. In 1961 the outline planning scheme was extended with major extension of boundary in 1964. After attainment of city status in 1966 the plan only covered part of the planning area.

In 1971 government appointed the Blantyre Planning Team to examine and put forward proposals for future development of Blantyre. The Blantyre structure plan is based on the team's plan/report comprising teams several technical reports on different sectors of city e.g., Commercial, Transport, Residential etc.,

The Blantyre structure plan 1976, the statement of proposals and policies together with the Blantyre Structure Plan Map 1976 constitutes the Outline Planning Scheme for City of Blantyre. The structure plan provides for growth of Blantyre to a population of about 500,000, the plan is therefore already outdated. Three levels of plan are proposed:

- a) The structure plans
- b) District plan
- c) Layout plans.

District Plans are supposed to cover all districts of the city at a larger scale than a structure plan. The district plans provide a framework for Layout plans for areas to be developed. They prescribe the type of development to be permitted and how development will be undertaken. As well, what services should be provided.

On the other hand, Layout plans are detailed plans showing the pattern of plot development, road pattern, open spaces, local centres etc.,

The Blantyre structure plan applies a land use zoning to all parts of the city.

PROBLEMS OF STRUCTURE PLANS

In all the four cities a number of proposals in the structure plans or Zoning Schemes have not been implemented.

Enforcement of permitted uses in each zone has not been very successful. There are a lot of problems with zoning schemes as the public is not in favour of a rigid scheme. For example, houses being converted into Lodges, Schools, Clinics, Saloons, Restaurants etc.,

Malawi had its first democratic elections in 1994, prior to this, Cities experienced massive resistance to rigid planning and this has continued to date:

- Most of the open-spaces, and road reserves are encroached for Low Income housing, smallscale industries etc.,
- Vendors mushroomed in City Centres encroaching road reserves, open spaces, shop fronts and parking spaces,

- Changing homes to Commercial ventures e.g., Lodges, Clinics, Garages, Saloons, etc.,
- Contravening planning and development regulations/rules and any effort to enforce meet still stiff political pressure
- Alteration of buildings without planning permission,
- Minibuses congesting city centres and competing for parking lots and obstructing free traffic flows, etc.

The enmass violation of planning standards is clear testimony of failure of structure planning in Malawi and a clear call for alternative planning strategies which calls for need to combine planning and urban management in order to promote sustainability of effective development.

The failure of structure plans is also a call for the need to review planning Act legislation which is obvious obsolete.

At independence in 1964, Malawi inherited the old Town and Country Planning Act which was enacted in 1948. This act was based on the British colonial office models which were themselves derived from the English Town and Country Planning Acts of 1932 and 1948 which have since been replaced by the England and Wales Country Planning Act of 1971. In Malawi, up to 1988, the 1948 Act was still in force and had remained unchanged except for a few minor points. The last most significant change was passed to fulfill the requirement that only certain materials be used in the construction of buildings and construction of fences around buildings in certain designated areas.

The Legislation is by and large restrictive, rigid and is based on a loose legal framework. Only physical planning is emphasised as it predominantly focuses on the preparation of zoning schemes and development control. Very little of country planning (national physical and district physical development planning) was evident. Therefore, urban planning lacked a national framework under which to operate. Planning is not comprehensive and does not take seriously into account the social economic and political structure of the country. There is need to review the 1988 planning act to facilitate innovative planning strategies.

THE NATIONAL PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The preparation of the National Physical Development Plan has been the single most important planning effort carried out in the country. It was under this exercise that the 1948 Act was replaced with the Town and Country Planning Act 1988 which embraces and gives efficacy on each of the following three levels of planning, namely:

a) national physical development planning (NPDP) which gives the planning perspective of the entire country; The National Physical Development Planning Plan consist of such statements of policies and principles such as background studies, report maps, plans and other materials concerning such information and analysis of demographic, economic, energy, environmental, land use and tenure, physical, rural, social welfare, transportation, urban and the like matters as are necessary to enable the plan to achieve its purpose.

b) district physical development planning deals with spatial planning aspect of social and economic development in the district and may extend to more than one district where necessary. It elaborates more on the provision of the NPDP;

c) local (or urban) physical development planning is primarily concerned with physical planning aspects of a locality, always taking into account the provisions of the district plan and ultimately the NPDP. Outline Zoning Schemes fall in this category.

However, The Ministry of Physical Planning has not been able to prepare districts Plans since 1987 and they have no capacity, in terms of staff position to prepare District Plans or even to review the NPDP which is already outdated.

Infact District Physical Planning would be useful in guiding local plans. The absence of a co-ordinated planning effort between NPDP, District and urban Planning make all the effort embodied in the 1988 Planning Act hypothetical.

ALTERNATIVE PLANNING STRATEGIES

At Local Government Level there is a new Local Government Act 1998 which already calls on Local Authorities to prepare council development plans as an urban management tool for effective planning. The introduction of Integrated Development Strategy (IDS) was one of the initial attempt which complemented structure plans in urban management. With the IDS being prepared the strategy has established an appropriate framework for analysis of councils development problems e.g., especially setting prospects of city development potential such as basic housing need, employment potential and the general infrastructure and services requirements.

At the start, 1990 only Lilongwe City Council had an Integrated Development Strategy which integrated urban and individual policy issues. Three years later Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba also produced their strategies which provide them a better general understanding of the development needs. In short the IDS ensures that council development strategies are adequately intergrated i.e.,

both institutional (organisational and financial aspects) and urban (infrastructure and services) are addressed.

ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Integrated Development Strategy deals with City/Municipal/Town/District development issues which have impact on local authorities such as:

- Provision and maintenance of infrastructure roads and drains, serviced land etc.,
- Delivery of services e.g., health, sewerage, refuse collection, landscape,
- etc.,

It also deals with council development issues which have an impact on council interms of organisational structure and financial structure.

Lastly the IDS also deals with policy development issues which have impact on council's policy and budgetary planning within an annual planning and review cycle.

The Integrated Development Strategy's of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and zomba are almost similar in that they do indentify the high population growth and its impact on infrastructure and service provision as a primarily concern.

The most conspicuous being:

- high level of squatting and limited access to serviced land;
- high level of unemployment and the ever increasing informal sector and lack of appropriate strategies for supporting informal sector.

- deteriorating sanitation and environmental degradation.

This situation made councils identify projects which would help solve their city priority problems such as:-

- sewerage, squatter upgrade, sites and service programmes, public toilets, cleansing service equipment etc.,

Council Development Plans also made serious review of organisation structure and manpower situation in order to adequately or efficiently provide the services required.

The need to provide the required infrastructure services was finally weighted against financial resource available and opportunities.

The City Assemblies have acknowledged the importance of the IDS and in the light of political changes it is hoped that the strategies could be adopted with vigor. In the interim period members of councils appeared to lose track of the objective of strategies in endorsing decisions both on the institutional front and when approving capital budgets.

There have been 4 major shocks to the implementation of the strategies. The first is the unprecedented wage rise brought about by local labour unrest of 1992. The second is the leap in inflation which has had a knock-on effect on commodity and utility prices and the World Bank's Local Government Development Project (which is tied to the central bank's base rate which doubled in less than 2 years). The third being the referendum and its attendant problem.

Fourthly there has been a devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha which has complicated affordability of the councils and crippled the national and city's economy to a situation where it has been impossible to undertake major capital projects. (1990: 1US\$ = K7.5, 1999: 1US\$ = K45)

These problems coupled with the management versus council relationship creates a difficult environment within which the success of the IDS can be tested.

The question of real decentralization need to be put to practice as at present the local authority system is still that of deconcentration. Devolution has yet to be experienced. The Ministry of Local Government (MLG) needs to provide more support to enhance performance of city assemblies. In the past MLG would summon Town Clerks to Ministry without notice and agenda to resolve crisis (resulting from rumours and/or anonymous letters). There has been little underlying system of policy development support and/or coordination of urban-based projects.

In the 1990's though an urban management advisor attempts had been made to reverse this situation by creating policy and coordination meetings where councils can liaise with central government on operational issues. The success of such meetings is yet to be experienced.

MERITS OF INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

In evaluating the success of the IDS it is perhaps necessary to examine the challenge of establishing an urban management system. Urban management is the process of:

Planning for, providing and maintaining a city's infrastructure and services, and Making sure that the city council is in a fit state organizationally and financially.

The integrated development strategy provides a systematic approach of providing a comprehensive urban management tool. In Lilongwe City Council's case a performance appraisal was done in about April, 1993.

Generally, the IDS has proved a good tool in providing a rational city management policy guideline. The IDS provides adequate strategy to govern the twin process of city building and institutional development. It is supposed to be reviewed, updated and improved annually. The council's budget supplements the strategy; the budget is also prepared and reviewed annually. Unfortunately, this is apparently not the case.

DEMERITS OF THE INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The main weakness, however, is the inability to turn the development proposals (in the IDS) into infrastructure and buildings. The problems are due to:

- > **Major technical constraints** due to lack of adequate urban management, expertise. General proposals and indicative costings are not hard to formulate but twinning such proposals into working drawings and tender documents is more difficult. There is very little design capacity within city council's/local government.
- > **Financial constraints** to enable employment of consultants to prepare working drawings and documents for construction and more so paying for the construction itself.
- > **Lack of support to City Assemblies from Ministry of Local Government** by way ensuring progress on the policy review and resolving particular policy issues with central government, e.g., what agency is responsible for arterial roads, the issue of payment of city rates by government or review of local government act. The new Local Government Act 1998 is in place but it needs to be operationalised.
- > **Political Machinery** – the relationship between councillors themselves and between councillors and staff/management. The councils have had

no councillors since 1995. Elections are expected at the end of this year. This will bring a whole range of new problems.

- > If these constraints are removed then the effectiveness of the integrated development strategy is likely to improve.

The most important achievement is the appreciation of the importance of IDS by city councils and central government. All the city councils and municipal councils have their own development strategies; the challenge is to turn these strategies into physical development, this challenge faces both local government and central government. In fact all Local Authorities are mandated by Law to prepare development plans.

CONCLUSION

Urban Structure plans in Malawi are the basic instrument of physical plan and the process of preparation and their application to urban development are guided by the Town and Country Planning Act which was just introduced in 1948 by adoption of the British Planning Law and was revised in 1988 to allow for incorporation of National Physical Development Plan and District Physical Development Plan.

However, the application and enforcement of physical development through the Law especially with regard to urban development is grossly compromised as a result of lack of flexibility and participatory approach to planning process. It is therefore hoped that the search for alternative strategies will assist to ensure appropriate urban development which will promote sustainable socio-economic development in Malawian town without negative impact on physical development of our Cities. The alternative strategies should embrace physical design of cities by complementary urban management strategies which promote participatory development.

There is need to review the planning act to accommodate changing social and economic environment in our cities. The relationship between the structure plan and Council Development Planning will need to be investigated more closely in order to come up with physical solutions to the problem of urban development and management.

Over the years we have seen new planning initiatives coming up to address pertinent urban development issues. Initiatives such as Sustainable Cities Programme, Urban Agenda 21, etc., These initiatives should be examined vis-à-vis Orthodox planning strategies in order to create an acceptable and workable planning alternative. There is definitely an obvious conflict between the two approaches which need to be resolved in the interest of sustainable urban development.

For example, some Landscape architect in Lilongwe, having observed the deteriorating condition of City Centre, has initiated an urban design proposal for part of old town centre. The basic objective being to improve the economic of the city centre. It is hoped that through comprehensive and co-operative design process a greater understanding of planning process will be achieved. The proposal will recognise the urban development framework as contained in the Outline zoning Scheme and the Integrated Development Strategy. This will be a pilot urban design process in Malawi. Professionals will be drawn from Ministry of Physical Planning, Lilongwe City Assembly, Design and Landscape Department, Department of Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Private Sector including the vendors.

Urban design process will also conduct survey on existing physical development and collect information on national planning legislation and standards including local building by-laws, highlight characteristics in the design area suitable for improvement. The group will also collect socio-economic data on what various

users, perceive as problems and opportunities. This will include all stakeholders. Comparative study will be done with other design programmes elsewhere e.g., urban Design Group and Urban Design Alliance in U.K. A steering committee will be established to review progress made by the urban design group.

It is hoped that this initiative will consolidate urban development by creating an orderly and sustainable Civic image. To achieve this special attention will be made to –

- a) Street character – overall appearance;
- b) Traffic circulation - on-off street, deliveries and safety;
- c) Parking on end off street;
- d) Street furniture – seating, shelter & litter bins;
- e) Road and pavement improvement;
- f) Drainage and lighting - Security, safety and service areas;
- g) Soft landscaping;
- h) Street Activities – vending areas, cultural;
- i) Public Convenience and sanitation;
- j) Accommodating the disabled.

To achieve this maximum consultation will need to be made and physical development will need to be combined with civic education and establishment of self policing measures.

It is hope such participatory initiative could promote intergrated urban development and restore the lost glory in our cities.

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