

Evaluation of Community-led Housing Development

A case of Area 49, Lilongwe, Malawi



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In 2000 UN General Assembly met and agreed on Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). It agreed to improve significantly lives of 100 million people in slums by 2020. Some of the goals mentioned at that forum were, for example, the provision of free primary education, reduction of mortality, housing for the urban poor and access to safe drinking water.

Malawi is now proud to actively contribute on housing front. Government, through Local Assemblies, has provided 220 plots in Area 49, Lilongwe where the first pilot project has already built. It has offered more land in Blantyre and Mzuzu which are yet to be built; and are not the subject of this paper.

Area 49 project has clearly shown that alternative mechanism to land and housing delivery exists. The authorities are ready to work with communities that are organized. There is therefore no reason for land invasions as has been seen in Lilongwe and other urban areas. The impact of Area 49 will be seen for many years to come a clear manifestation that urban poor, too, can make a positive contribution if and organised.

In Area 49 community members organized themselves to build 220 houses on self – help basis. Every member contributed towards the cost of the house and worked on the project by collect water, stones for foundations, sand or participate in making bricks or construction. The cost of the house was therefore reduced by more than half compared to similar house built by a contractor.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the challenge associate with the finished product and prescribe recommendations for future projects.

Shelter Situation Analysis

Basic General Data

Geography and Administration

Malawi, the warm heart of Africa, is in South Eastern of Africa and is bordered by Tanzania to the North East, Mozambique to Southeast and Zambia to the West. It has an area of 118,485 sq. km¹. Lake Malawi defines 548 kilometres of Malawi's eastern border and serves as an important economic resource and navigation channel. The physiology of the country is characterized by undulating terrain with five large plateaus namely Mulanje, Zomba, Dedza, Viphya, and Nyika, dominating the landscape.

It has three regions; North, Centre and south. Malawi has 3 Cities; Blantyre in the South, Lilongwe in the centre and is the centre of administration, and Mzuzu in the North. Zomba, the old capital city is the only Municipality. There are 27 district administration centres.

Demography and h

Health

The total population of the country as of 2004 was 12.4 million² (male 48%, female 52%) with a growth rate of 2.4%. Lilongwe, the Capital City, had a population of 1.346 million during same period.

About 47% of the total population lived in the Southern Region. The Central and Northern Regions had 41% and 12 % respectively.

Four towns account for the bulk of urban residents: Blantyre 40%, Lilongwe 30%, Mzuzu 5%, Zomba 5%. The remaining 20% live in smaller towns.

The population growth in Malawi has started showing signs of decline with total fertility rate standing at 6.3 in 2000, 6.0 in 2003 and 5.9 in 2004. The high population growth does exert pressure on, among other things, land, health facilities, education, housing etc. However, the high rate of urbanization has important implications for housing. Population projections for Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba show that

¹ Ulendo - Inflight Magazine of Air Malawi; Issue 8, 2006.

growth rates are very high, suggesting that the formal sector housing cannot cope up with the demand. For this reason, the informal sector will continue to provide for the needs of most urban households.

Sex-age Structure²

The sex ratio defined as the number of males per 100 females shows that more females lived in Malawi in 2004. About 51% of the total populations enumerated were females. This implies that the overall sex ratio at national level was 96 males per 100 females.

In the case of Lilongwe, 54% of city residents are men and 46% are women while over 56% of Lilongwe rural residents are women and less than 44% are men. This shows that more men migrated to urban areas in search of opportunities. This trend clearly underscores the fact that measures to arrest rural-urban migration has failed.

Economy

In Malawi, agriculture accounts for more than 35% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and about 85% of export earnings. Smallholder agriculture contributes about 30% of GDP and employs more than 80% of the rural labour force. Therefore increasing smallholder agricultural productivity is the key to rapid and sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction for Malawi.

Land Holding in Malawi

There are three classes of land holding in Malawi. The table below illustrates the rate of distribution. This, in part, explains land market has been imperfect and its delivery has also been slow particularly in urban areas.

Table. 1: Land Tenure Table³

Class		Distribution %
a. Customary land		65
b. Public land		21
c. Private land	Freehold	2
	Leasehold	12

² World Bank statistical data on Malawi

³ Malawi Land Policy 2003.

Urban Shelter Situation in Malawi

The problem of homelessness is huge and has been compounded by the lack of appropriate policies with which to confront the underlying issues. Out of a total land area of 32,127 hectares, only 6,564 hectares (or 20% of the land area) is occupied by low income groups who constituted 78% of the total population of the city. Specifically, whereas 44.2% of the people are in THAs 34.1% live in informal or squatter settlements. With a growth rate of over 6 % per year, the development of informal settlements in Lilongwe City could thus escalate within a relatively short time. Lilongwe being the capital it is set to attract more poor people from rural areas and other urban centres. The government and the city Lilongwe may not have adequate resources. The support being given to communities to help themselves is therefore commendable and should be followed by other urban assemblies.

In some cases, there are unrealistic assumptions that plots in THA need only enough room for two pit latrines, based on a density of around 6 people per plot. In practice plots accommodate 4 families with an average of 5 persons per family in THAs. The situation is giving rise to much concern as the number of people sharing pit latrines is very high.

Although homelessness is difficult to quantify, there is evidence that it does in fact exist. Considering urban population growth, low supply of serviced plots and the huge costs of house and infrastructure, for example, homelessness and overcrowding are likely to grow.

Housing Standard

The 1998 Malawi Population and Housing Census classified housing basing on the type of materials used for construction for roof, walls, and floor. The classification is as follows.

- a. **Permanent structure:** one having a roof made of iron sheets, concrete or asbestos, and walls made of burnt bricks, concrete or stones. These are structures one sees in low, medium, and high density residential areas.
- b. **Semi-permanent structure:** one having one of the construction materials of permanent structure for wall or roof e.g. a structure, which has iron sheet roof and sun

dried bricks or burnt brick walls with thatched roof. These are structures one sees in THAs and informal settlements.

c. **Traditional structure:** one having thatched roof with mud walls or walls made of mud and wattle. These are structures one sees in rural areas. However, the 1998 survey showed that 84% of houses were thatched, 53% had mud and wattle walls, and 32% were built of sun dried bricks. These temporary materials require frequent

Table 2: House Rent Survey table

Density of Area	Description	Estimated Average Total Floor Areas	Estimated rent
Low density	House with lounge, dining room, kitchen, pantry, 3 bedrooms with master bedroom en suite, separate bathroom, separate wc, garage and staff quarters	230m ²	K80,000.00 (\$570) to K100,000.00 (\$750) per month
Medium density	House with lounge/dining area, kitchen, 3 bedrooms, bathroom, wc, and staff quarters	120m ²	K35,000.00 (\$250) to K60,000.00 (\$450)
High density	House with lounge/dining area, kitchen, 2 to 3 bedrooms, shower room, and wc.	60m ²	K15,000.00 (\$100) to K35,000.00 (\$250) per month
Traditional Housing Area	House with lounge/dining area, kitchen, 2 to 3 bedrooms, shower, wc; OR a cluster of living quarters with or without running water and using pit latrines.	40m ² – 90m ²	From K500.00 (\$4) per living room to K20,000.00 (\$150) per house per month

These rates are way above what most people can afford. In THAs very few of the vulnerable group members would afford a reasonably habitable house at monthly rentals as in the above table. Either they live in run down homes where at least 5 families with an average of 5 members per family would live on a plot or they would go to join other poor groups in squatter areas. Obviously, Area 49 Project concept is a better alternative to stopping the creation of squatter areas.



The kind of house that an urban poor would live in and pay about K500.00 per month

Identification of Critical Shelter Problems

Objective of the report

The purpose of this proposal is to evaluate the pilot project in Area 49, Lilongwe. There is need to look at the whole project from economic to social, physical and cultural aspects so that future projects should have monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in them.

What has not been covered in this report, though, is the evaluation of every stage of the construction stage of the houses.

The shelter situation analysis has given a gloomy picture of a way how imperfect housing delivery system is and how it has failed to meet the expectations of urban low income groups. This paper, therefore, would like to focus on acceptable quality housing as a finished product. It is hoped that it will provide an opportunity for new developments.

The project also gives a forum that encourages public/private sector investment in urban poor.

It also focuses on long term sustainability and safety through design and control.

It encourages full community participation leading and property ownership.

The project will also focus on community's ability to create neighbourhoods with emphasis on quantity with quality.

Profile of Area 49 Project

Area 49 Project is the first of its kind in Malawi. The concept of self-help was borne when urban poor started organizing themselves into groups called Homeless Peoples' Federation. Their main goal was/is to lobby with government on the plight of urban poor. The laws of Malawi do not recognize squatters and spontaneous settlements. However, government has gradually acknowledged housing as a priority.

In Area 49 the community through Centre for Community Development (CCODE) organized themselves into working groups. Women were responsible for collecting foundation stones, water and sand from the river. The men would then make bricks and build the walls. They built the houses by themselves ensuring that they made huge savings. The cost of each house was about K120,000.00 (\$850) while a similar house built by a contractor would cost about K350,000.00 (\$2,500).

Self – Help Housing Concept



Self-Help Built House with accommodation comprising sitting room, store and 2 bedrooms

Analysis of Critical Shelter Problems

This part will focus on the role of actors on project, SWOT analysis of the policy/administrative matters, actors, community and individuals. It will also provide a forum to identify problems with the houses as built and prescribe recommendations.

Actors in the project

Government departments have been responsible for policy formulation and implantation. Ministry of Lands, Housing & Surveys have been involved in the facilitation and coordinating the various activities in the project.

Lilongwe City Assembly has been responsible for the identification and clearance of land in Area 49.

Centre for Community Development (CCODE), a local NGO, has been responsible for organizing the community.

There has been no donor in this project although it must be appreciated that the project provoked a lot of interest that it is not surprising that Shack Dwellers International, an international NGO, provided the Malawi Government with the first donation.

Comparative Method of Evaluation – Self Help house vs Contractor built

An informal construction sub-sector exists which concentrates on building activities in rural areas as well as in urban informal settlements. This sub-sector operates largely outside official building regulations and is, therefore, well-suited to the progressive construction methods that are made necessary by the lack of credit. Below is a table which analyses the pros and cons of the two systems and at least the cost if either method is used.

Table 3. Analysis

Self-Help Houses	Contractor built
Labour intensive	Capital orientated
Emphasis on quantity	Quality is of essence
No formal training required	Formal training required
Mostly family members: formal employment not required	Formal employment
Cost: K120,000.00 (\$850)	Cost K350,000.00 (\$2,500)

Project SWOT Analysis

This SWOT analysis has covered four areas namely policies and administrative matters, actors, the community in the project area and the individual beneficiaries. It will be appreciated, though, that the initial construction stages have not been covered.

Factors	Internal	External
Positive	Strengths	Opportunities
Policies/Administrative Matters	<p>Availability/existence of enabling legislations for land services.</p> <p>Elaborate land and housing policies.</p> <p>Availability of pro – poor land and housing programmes.</p>	<p>Enabling cross-cutting government policies and strategies such as decentralization, HIV/Aids, Gender Mainstreaming, Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy, Vision 2020, Environmental policy, and others.</p> <p>Conducive political environment to combat poverty and corruption.</p>
Actors	<p>Availability of Institutional and management capabilities to deliver programmes and services.</p> <p>Availability of data/information management system on land and housing services</p> <p>Availability of political and management leadership</p> <p>Availability of skeleton staff to deliver services.</p>	<p>Donor support</p> <p>Increase in number of individuals and institutions involved in pro-poor shelter development.</p> <p>Strong stakeholder interest and involvement in human settlement delivery.</p>
Community level	<p>Existence of housing activities for revenue generation.</p> <p>Availability of funds on monthly basis for delivery of basic services.</p>	<p>Supportive communities to pro-poor programmes.</p>
Individual level	<p>Great sense of security & empowerment</p> <p>Desire to own project</p>	<p>Ability to make savings towards project.</p>

Negative	Weaknesses	Threats
Policies/Administrative issues	<p>Poor communication collaboration and co-ordination</p> <p>Poor relationship among members of federation.</p> <p>Lack of a clear and responsive house maintenance strategy</p> <p>Inadequate human resource capacity in government.</p> <p>Poor utilization of the available human resource capacity in government</p> <p>Lack of office accommodation for CCODE and federation members</p>	<p>Uncertainty about the Ministry's future and mandates/frequent changes to the Ministry</p> <p>Institutional arrangements</p> <p>Donor fatigue</p> <p>High staff turnover in government</p> <p>Declining financial allocations/increased competition for financial resources.</p> <p>HIV/AIDS pandemic.</p> <p>Fraud and corruption practices.</p> <p>Inflation and high interest rates.</p> <p>Fragmentation/ overlaps/duplication of functions or services among various ministries, departments and local assemblies.</p> <p>Environmental degradation.</p> <p>Political interference and directives.</p> <p>Natural disasters.</p> <p>Omission of Housing in major planning strategies and policies such as Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy.</p>

Negative	Weaknesses	Threats
Actors	<p>Weak leadership and management capacity levels.</p> <p>Limited administrative and management capacity among senior levels.</p> <p>Poor communication collaboration and coordination</p> <p>Poor monitoring and evaluation system.</p>	<p>Donor fatigue</p>

Negative	Weaknesses	Threats
Community level	<p>Absence of results oriented culture and management systems.</p> <p>Poor relationship among members of federation.</p> <p>Lack of training and development strategy among federation members.</p>	<p>Population increase/high fertility rates</p> <p>Uncontrollable settlements.</p> <p>Persistent poverty</p> <p>Negative traditional or cultural beliefs and Practices.</p> <p>Insecurity, violence and criminal acts.</p> <p>High rates of Urbanization.</p>

Negative	Weaknesses	Threats
Individual level	Weak financial base Lack of skills Lack of employment opportunities	Security and crime Persistent poverty

Proposals for Change

Issues	Challenge	Improvement
The size of the house is 80m2 and has sitting room, store and 2 bedrooms	Poor design: No privacy with an average family size of 5 members	The size of the house is big enough to accommodate at least 3 bedrooms. Recommendation is made to increase the size to enhance privacy
The nearby neighbourhood has electricity and running water	Non availability of electricity and running water	There is need to set aside funds for the installation of water and electrical materials
Preventative maintenance	No allowance was made for the activity	Preventative maintenance is very important if the quality of house is maintained. However, this is a poor community who may not have resources to deal with problem when it arises. The community must be encouraged to save for the activity.
House incremental	No provision for house extension	This is also linked to size of plot which Town Planners could consider giving slightly bigger plot as long as that does not increase the cost of plot.
Current Housing Policy was prepared in 1992 and was very descriptive	Non availability of Housing Act to regulate housing sector	There is need to quickly revise Housing Policy in order to come up with Housing Act which should encompass Building standards and controls
Social exclusion	No provision for middle class to participate	Middle class is not too poor community but it requires a guiding hand. Financial institutions should open up for loans to the group at favourable interest rates
	Emphasis was on quantity	Emphasis should be placed at mass house production without compromising on quality. Poor house costs more on maintenance
Quality of life to be improved	Poverty levels will move with the community in short term	Support income and employment generating activities in project areas,

		including house construction, so as to reduce poverty and promote project sustainability.
	Quality of infrastructure	Government should be encouraged to set aside funds in its budget to subsidise the cost of infrastructure and services in areas opened for urban poor. The fund should be managed by local NGOs through Local Assemblies to encourage transparency and accountability.

Development plans

As far as township development is concerned, there is a need to have a system of public participation in which the views of present and future residents can influence the location, design and standards of new residential areas or services to be provided.

Again, there is need for the present local government system to allow the provision for the regular revision of Development Plans and appropriate devolution of information and services to communities involved in development programmes.

Some of the relevant legislation to be used in the project

Land Act

Town & Country Planning Act

Registered Land Act

Environmental Management Act

Adjudication of Land Act

Cooperatives Act

Local Government act

Some of the relevant policies to be used in the project

Malawi Economic Growth and

National physical development plan

Development strategy

Malawi National Housing policy

Malawi national Land policy

National sanitation policy

National decentralization Policy

Environmental policy

Action Plan

Variables	Indicators	Source	Time frame
Community participation	Role of government: facilitation	Institutional reports.	Short term
	Role of NGO: facilitation/implementation		Short term
	Role of Local Assembly: Implementation		Short term
	Role of community: Implementation	Interviews	
	Role of individuals: participation		
Building issues	Number of hours working on the building	Institutional reports	Short term
	Number of houses built		
Technical Assistance	Number of training activities	Institutional reports	Short term
	Number of workshops		
Financial issues	Cost of house on self – help basis	Institutional reports	Short term
	Cost of house using contractor		
	Number of income generating activities		
	Number of donations		
	Availability of seed capital		
	Creation of savings		



Communities like the beneficiaries above can be encouraged to own income generating activities like small-scale fish farming and vegetable gardening as in the above pictures