

Country Brief

MALAWI

2023

A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world



A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL IN AN URBANIZING WORLD

We promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all.



UN-HABITAT

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URBAN CONTEXT AND TRENDS

Malawi is one of the most rapidly urbanizing countries in the world, at 4.1% per annum (2021), according to the World Bank. The share of national population residing in urban areas has progressively increased from 6.4 percent of the national population at independence in 1964 to 10.1 per cent in 1987 and estimated at 18 per cent in 2021. Projections by the Malawi National Statistics Office (NSO) indicate that 30% of the population will be urban based by 2030 and 50% by 2050. The major drivers of urbanization are increase in high disasters, rural-urban migration and immigration. Urban population is mainly concentrated in four major cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba. This constitutes 15% of an estimated national population. The rest of urban population resides in urban centers of various sizes including towns, municipalities, district and main market centers. Local Government Act of 1998 obligated all assemblies to draw up plans for the social, economic and environmental development of their areas. Urban planning in Malawi has traditionally been based on the structure planning concept demarcating the urban space into land use zones.

Land in Malawi is governed by the Land Act of 2016 and the Registered Land Act of 2016. Various land and land related bills are yet to be enacted by Parliament in order to operationalize the Malawi National land Policy of 2002, which seeks to ensure tenure security and equitable access to land and its sustainable use.

The most significant urban sector challenges facing Malawi today are rapid urbanization and growing urban poverty. The rapid urbanization has led to a pressing housing demand that far exceeds the rate of new housing delivery. As a result, 80% of the demand is met through informal housing, resulting in insecure tenure, poor quality of housing and overcrowding. Other challenges includes;

- Weak rural-urban linkages
- Poor coordination in urban governance
- Inadequate capacity for development of urban infrastructure and basic services
- Limited economic opportunities and urban poverty
- Poor urban environmental management and weak resilience to disaster and other shocks
- Social exclusion and marginalization in urban development.
- Inadequate resources for urban development.



FACT SHEET

Country urban figures

- Total Country Population (2018): 17,563,749
- Urban population (2021): 18%
- Urban growth rate: 4.1%
- Major Cities and population (2018): Blantyre (800,264); Lilongwe (989,318); Zomba (105,013); Mzuzu (221,272)

Housing and informality

- Slums in Malawi: 39
 - 70% are in slums
 - 58% units are semi permanent/temporary
 - 30% earnings go to rent
- Slums in major urban areas and population:
- Lilongwe: 14
 - Blantyre: 16 (580,914 people)
 - Mzuzu: 4
 - Zomba: 5

Provision of basic services

- 10.3% connected to piped water
- 61.7% use boreholes
- 8.1% community standpipe
- 3.0 % served by flush toilet
- 46.3 % pit latrine with slab
- 28.3 % open pit latrine
- 5.9 % bush

Solid Waste Management services

- Lilongwe – 8% is collected
- Blantyre – 28% is collected
- Mzuzu – 7% is collected

Urban roads network

Inadequate and poor urban roads network: Lilongwe- 300 km of 585 km surfaced (2010)

Urban public transport: 30% Pedestrians, 40 % Min Buses, Taxis, 3% Motorcycle Taxis and 2 % Bicycle Taxis, motorized tricycles , 10% private vehicles.

Housing and informality

- Over the past 5 decades, 19 major floods affecting 100,000 people yearly and 7 droughts affecting 1.5 million people yearly
- 2023 Cyclone Freddy affected 14 Districts and 2 Cities. An estimated 2,267,458 people were affected, 659,278 (336,252 female; 323,026 male) displaced, 689 killed, and over 530 people declared missing; total disaster effect is US\$ 546.5 Million, while the total cost of recovery and reconstruction is US\$ 680.4 Million.



Ms Eruzsina Straus hands over keys to Mayor for Zomba City His Worship David Maunde for a truck to be used for solid waste collection in the city provided under the Adaptation Fund project, March, 2023

UN HABITAT IN MALAWI

Since 2005, UN-Habitat has supported the Government of Malawi and the Habitat Agenda Partners in Malawi in moving forward the sustainable human settlements agenda in the country, covering a wide range of the agency's mandate. Previously, UN Habitat has supported disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, water and sanitation and slum upgrading works in Malawi, including development of the Safer Housing Construction Guidelines and the National Urban Policy. UN Habitat implemented a living with floods projects which, among others, constructed demonstration flood resilience houses and an evacuation center in the Lower Shire. It has supported Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba cities to develop their urban profiles. It also implemented a participatory slum upgrading project with the Malawi Government in Mzuzu, focusing on solid waste management and risk reduction. UN Habitat has also implemented the CityRAP process in Zomba City and Lilongwe City (Mtandire informal settlement area).

In terms of urban resilience, UN Habitat's urban resilience project financed by the Adaptation Fund is a flagship project that will not only build the resilience of Zomba City to floods, but also provides multiple opportunities for learning and upscaling. Apart from work at the sub-national level, the investment can also be considered as one of the vehicles to strengthen the urban resilience architecture in Malawi by supporting urban resilience capacity building and development of tools and instruments that will facilitate urban resilience building in the country, while can also cascading to district councils in Malawi.

United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) focus areas aim at supporting implementation of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III, Malawi 2063 and Malawi Government's key policy instruments on urban development and resilience, in particular the National Urban Policy, National Resilience Strategy, National Disaster Risk Management Policy, National Climate Change Management Policy and the Integrated Urban Development Programme

Our Thematic Focus

We contribute to the achievement of sustainable urban development in Malawi through the following areas:

urban planning



Urban Planning is critical in the achievement of sustainable urbanization, especially in the unlocking of financial and economic potential of secondary cities. UN Habitat is keen to ensure development of issue responsive urban plans.

Climate Change, Urban Resilience, Disaster Risk reduction and Recovery



With the increase of climate related disasters and risks in Malawi, UN Habitat team is working with Local and international partners to come up with sustainable solutions to remedy this.

Access to Urban Basic Services



Our approaches aim at aiding in the provision of critical infrastructure and services like solid waste management, water and sanitation. green building, water systems, connectivity and public transport system, and energy.

Housing and Slum Upgrading



Innovative approaches to tackle slums and informal settlements while advancing technologies, sustainable and environmental friendly housing techniques.

About Our Projects

Current Ongoing Projects



UN-Habitat is currently implementing a 2-year urban preparedness project jointly with UNDP and funded by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG-ECHO) in Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe and Mzuzu cities. ECHO has committed Euro 1,500,000 towards the project, with UN Habitat responsible for Euro 795,000 of the grant. The project will run from January 2023 to December 2024, focusing on various actions to build resilience and preparedness for ease of response to disasters. Key actions include setting up community-based early warning systems, clearing and rehabilitation of drainage networks, prepositioning of relief supplies, strengthening protection systems and responding to emergencies through a crisis modifier component.



UN-Habitat is implementing the South-Eastern Africa (SEA) Urban Resilience Project through the Adaptation Fund to reduce the impact of climate change in urban areas. The total budget for the project is US\$14, with approximately US\$2.4 allocated to Malawi. Key achievements to date include construction of two evacuation centers; flood risk reduction through gabion baskets; construction of a bridge and construction of drainage networks. The project has also assisted in strengthen disaster risk reduction and climate change policy works in Malawi.



CityRAP training for lecturers and students of the Malawi University of Science and Technology, March, 2023

About Our Projects

Recently completed projects



In 2022, UN-Habitat implemented a nature-based solution action in Lilongwe City targeting Mchesi and Kawale 1 and 2 settlements with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. The project focused on flood risk reduction through nature-based solutions (NbS), solid waste management, capacity building and strengthening of bye-laws. Through the project, there has been an increased community capacity to respond and effectively address hazards that increase vulnerability to effects of climate change. This is notably due to training that targeted local governance structures in the communities, including civil protection committees (45 people) and the ward sanitation committees (45 people). The structures are now actively enforcing community-developed bylaws to counter behaviors that contribute to flooding and destruction of biodiversity. More than 30,000 people were directly and indirectly reached with awareness messages on NbS, leading to an improvement in the attitudes and practices to manage and restore biodiversity. As a result of the project, the communities are planting and taking care of trees, waste and their general environment, with 3,500 trees and giant bamboos planted. The project has mobilized community interest in taking care of the environment and refrain from practices that put in danger such as deforestation, river bank cultivation and wanton disposal of waste.



In 2022, UN-Habitat implemented the Urban Law for Resilient and Low Carbon Urban Development in Malawi, Namibia, And Zimbabwe, financed by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. The project focused on assessing the country's policy and legal instruments and how these support environment and climate change action. The project enhanced awareness on the state of urban law for resilient and low carbon development in the country by presenting findings to key policy makers, civil society and the academia.

About Our Projects

Recently completed projects



In 2022, UN-Habitat implemented the Africa Urban Mobility Observatory research project (AUMO) whose key objective was to promote inclusive, low-carbon mobility in African LIC cities (6), by piloting Big Data applications to generate data, benchmark performance, and draw policy insights. This data was then used to co-develop Mobility Action Plans in two of these cities, and catalyze broader uptake via web data platform, workshops and research. In Malawi, the AUMO project was being implemented with Blantyre City Council and the National Planning Commission.



Other key past projects and activities

- Supported policy review and development: the Malawi Urban Housing Sector Profile (2010), National Housing Policy (2019), Safer House Construction Guidelines (2010), Lilongwe Waste Management Policy and Bye law (2018).
- Slum upgrading and improving the living conditions of slum dwellers through the development of Urban profiles for Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba (2011); the Citywide slum upgrading and prevention strategy in Mzuzu; Upgrading of Salisbury lines slum settlement (2015).
- Improving provision of basic services through different programmes such as Creating waste for wealth in Mtandile/Lilongwe (2010-2012); Promoting dignity and learning through improved toilets in homes, schools, health facilities and markets using the Ecosan technology in Lilongwe, Karonga and Mzuzu (2015-2017); Provision of water in peri urban areas (schools and communities) in Mzuzu and Karonga (2014-2016); Karonga Water treatment plant (2015); Strengthening capacity of the Northern Region Water Board.
- Supported Malawi's response to disasters to create safer and resilient human settlements by contributing to the National Disaster Recovery Framework (2019/2020).

About Our Projects

Recently completed projects



Other key past projects and activities

- Addressing national challenges at municipal level in Blantyre through the Urban Youth Fund Programme and development ITC skills for disadvantaged youth; Assessment of impact of HIV and AIDS
- Urban Planning in Karonga and Zomba - development of Urban Structure Plan for Karonga (2013); and City Resilience Plans for Zomba (2015)
- Bringing urbanization into National Agenda through the National Urban Policy (2019), Malawi Urban Forum (2008, 2011, 2018), establishment of the Department of Urban Development at MLUD (2015), Malawi Sustainable Urban Development Programme (2019), Malawi Vision 2063 (2020)



A drainage to control flooding and an evacuation centre occupied by households displaced by Tropical Cyclone Freddy in Zomba City

PIPELINE PROJECT IDEAS



A bridge on an evacuation route under construction in Zomba, March 2023, supported by the Adaptation Fund



Tropical Cyclone Recovery

UN Habitat intends to implement a post-disaster recovery to address the effects of Tropical Cyclone Freddy that affected Malawi, focusing on affected cities and other urban areas. Actions will include support reconstruction of damaged housing focusing on informal settlements, construction of evacuation centers, rehabilitation and construction of drainage networks, strengthening of early warning system, flood mitigation works, strengthening governance system for effective disaster risk management.

PIPELINE PROJECT IDEAS



Review of urban profiles for cities in Malawi

Urban profiles for Lilongwe, Blantyre and Mzuzu were developed in 2011, with support from UN Habitat and the EU and ACP Group of States. The Profiles, while being used by the cities, have not been reviewed. The process would involve the review of implementation of the Profiles, collect additional data on new developments in the cities since last profile was developed (including through using input from the CityRAP process), and develop revised Profiles.



Urban solid waste management

Solid waste management remains a major problem in Malawi, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas. It has contributed to disease outbreaks and flash flooding. UN Habitat has wide experience and expertise in solid waste management across the globe, including through its previous and current work in Malawi using sustainable waste management approaches that also enhance economic well-being of communities.



Sustainable slum upgrading

Between 50% to 60% of the urban population in Malawi's cities live in informal settlements, which are prone to shocks and lack access to basic services. Improving access to decent secure shelter and basic services for the low income and vulnerable households living in these informal settlements is paramount. UN Habitat has led the implementation of slum upgrading programmes in multiple countries, including in Mzuzu, Malawi. The intervention would provide resilient affordable housing and tenure security to poor and vulnerable households, support upgrading of informal settlements through re-planning of the settlements and provision of basic infrastructure and services. The intervention would further enhance community participation through capacity building interventions like trainings, creating job opportunities within the communities.



Housing Development

The intervention aims at supporting housing development in urban areas of Malawi, including through proper planning, siting, design and development of new settlement areas for the urban population. Poor households would be supported with materials to build better houses or retrofit/rehabilitate existing houses in the urban areas of the country. Dissemination of the Building Regulations and the Safer Housing Construction Guidelines in the urban areas would also be enhanced through this intervention.

PIPELINE PROJECT IDEAS



Strengthening urban resilience to disasters and climate change

Recent trends of disasters in Malawi have demonstrated that urban areas are equally, and in some cases more vulnerable, to disasters and other effects of climate change and climate variability. However, the number of stakeholders supporting resilience building in urban areas in Malawi is very limited. While some of the proposed actions in this concept note would contribute to building urban resilience.



Investment in the projects identified through the CityRAP process in Mtandire, Lilongwe (long-term and short-term investments)

- i. Water and sanitation (US\$7,000,000)
- ii. Strengthening disaster risk management governance systems (US\$155,000)
- iii. Road and drainage improvements (upgrading, rehabilitation and constructing new drains) (US\$440,000)



Improving drainage systems in urban and per-urban areas

The majority of locations in Malawi lack proper drainage systems. Where drainage systems have been provided, often close to primary roads, these have often been clogged with debris and other solid waste management, rendering them irrelevant. Poor and/or lack of drainage systems has contributed to flash flooding, destruction of roads and infrastructure and a decline in community hygiene. This will involve designing, rehabilitation and construction of new drainage channels in the urban areas of Malawi. The activity will have to be closely linked to the solid waste management dimensions as without proper solid waste management system, drainages risk being turned into dumping sites for solid waste.



Integration of climate resilience elements in Safer Housing Construction Guidelines

This activity intends to integrated climate and disaster resilience elements in the safer housing construction guidelines and explore opportunities for application of the guidelines in urban areas, where it stands higher potential for adoption.

PIPELINE PROJECT IDEAS



Develop guidelines for assessing climate change impacts and for climate proofing infrastructure in urban areas in Malawi

Three key sub-activities are anticipated for this action, which is in part being funded by the Adaptation Fund.

- i. Conduct stock-taking exercise on existing tools used for climate change impact assessment, including disaster assessments
- ii. Develop concept note
- iii. Develop the guidelines



Additional areas that require investment include:

- i. Strengthening urban governance structures for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation;
- ii. Urban forestry programmes, that offer multiple benefits, including livelihood support for the urban poor and vulnerable;
- iii. River retraining and other flood mitigation works (including ecosystem-based approaches) to reduce the risk of flooding;
- iv. Development of by-laws to curb malpractices that contribute to urban risks;
- v. Promoting urban disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in schools, including through construction of evacuation centres to reduce class disturbance in the event of displacement resulting from disasters;
- vi. Youth empowerment to champion resilient practices in urban areas, particularly in informal settlements;
- vii. Designing and strengthening urban early warning systems;
- viii. Support towards enforcement of urban legislation and planning;
- ix. Strengthen urban disaster preparedness: contingency planning, stockpiling and pre-positioning of relief supplies and simulation exercises and drills;
- x. Strengthening shock-sensitive social protection for urban areas;
- xi. Setting up data/information management systems for urban areas for resilience building, assessment, monitoring and reporting;
- xii. Risk mapping (multi-hazard, vulnerability and capacity assessments);
- xiii. Public awareness on building urban resilience.



UN-Habitat Building Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor in south-east Africa

As the impacts of climate change are increasingly felt across south-east Africa, an integrated approach is critical to strengthen climate action, improve urban environments and resilient settlements for the urban poor. This is a key component of UN-Habitat's Flagship Programme: RISE UP; a global initiative which privileges the role resilience and the socio-economic prosperity of urban poor communities in the Global South, by reducing climate change related disruptions to livelihoods and improving basic service provision.

Recently, three countries were selected to pilot nature-based solutions (NbS) in the context of informal settlements: Morondava, Madagascar; Lilongwe City, Malawi; and Honiara, Solomon Islands.

In the past month, UN-Habitat launched the pilot in Malawi, introducing a Vegetative Cover Restoration Campaign designed as part of the wider Lilongwe Ecological Corridor initiative.

The project, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SiDA), is implemented by the Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE) to support those living in the nation's capital.

Lilongwe has expanded rapidly over the last 30 years, leading to a loss of vegetation – particularly on the edge of riverbanks – and infringements on natural lands, which has left many acutely exposed.

Risks accompanying the now recurrent storms in the rainy season are exacerbated by anthropogenic factors such as an unregulated urban sprawl, a solid waste management crisis and excessive constructions on previously natural land. In this context, need for a shift towards restoration is clear.

Three-hundred hectares of land are expected to be vegetated throughout the city, restoring vegetative cover and strengthening the city's connection nature.

“This project... address the aspirations of Lilongwe City as it speaks directly to the Strategic Plan for the City, as well as the Lilongwe Ecological Corridor Initiative; this project does not belong to the City Council. It is yours [communities] and you ought to take ownership and lead in implementation” Gift Katsamira, Lilongwe City Council's Chief Executive Officer, said.

In response, CCODE, in partnership with Lilongwe City Council, are engaging communities, developing local governance structures on an array of issues such as disaster risk management, mobilization and sanitation, and raising citywide awareness engaging schools, block leaders and the private sector on the importance of NbS for community resilience.

In the future, the council aims to expand the role of residents beyond the rainy season, encouraging them to take initiative and to assist in the preservation and maintenance of planted trees. This aligns with Lilongwe's longer-term intention: to inspire citizens take ownership of their natural environment.

The pilot intervention, alongside initiatives such as the Lilongwe Ecological Corridor initiative, promise an alternative and greener vision for Lilongwe. Malawi continues to build on the progress made in Africa, pioneering nature-based solutions alongside ecosystem-based adaptation measures, to serve as an example both across the region and the globe.

The project's universal message is that interventions which integrate climate change adaptation, biodiversity and resilience go hand in hand. More must be done to shift the balance of programmes from one of shock-response to disaster risk management.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Malawi will host UN Habitat's Executive Director in October 2023, which will coincide with the National Urban Forum.

Cooperation with Government, UN and other stakeholders

UN Habitat is hosted by the Government of Malawi who have provided office space for its personnel. UN Habitat has collaborated and works closely with the Ministry of Local Government, Department of Disaster Management Affairs, Department of Urban Development, National Planning Commission, Ministry of Lands, the Department of Environmental Affairs and all urban councils in Malawi.

It also collaborates with the academia (Malawi University of Science and Technology and the University of Malawi), NGOs (e.g. Oxfam, Habitat for Humanity, Centre for Community Organization and Development and LEAD).

It is implementing a joint programme with UNDP and has ongoing discussions for collaboration with the IOM, WFP and the World Bank, among others.

Donors and Partners



Government of Malawi



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