Optimizing Public Housing Delivery in Malawi

Submitted By: Malawi Housing Corporation

Organization Profile

Organization Name: Malawi Housing Corporation

Organization Type: National government

Website: www.mhc.mw

Practice Details

Country(ies): Malawi

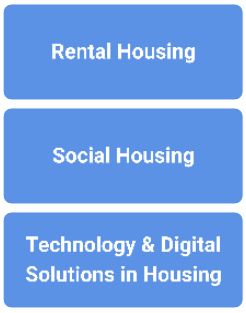
City(ies): Blantyre

Start Year: 2025 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:



Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Malawi faces a chronic shortage of affordable public housing, with Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) maintaining a long and growing client waiting list. Manual and paper-based allocation systems have caused delays, transparency concerns, and inequitable access. The absence of integrated digital housing systems, real-time data, and prioritization policies has significantly contributed to inefficiencies in allocation, limiting MHC's ability to respond to housing demand, especially for vulnerable groups in urban areas like Blantyre and Lilongwe.

Solution Developed

To address this, MHC developed a digital housing allocation platform that uses a priority-based algorithm to match applicants to available housing stock. Beneficiaries include low- and middle-income households waiting for public housing. The practice aimed to streamline allocations, reduce processing time, and improve transparency. Key objectives included digitizing applications, enabling real-time tracking via SMS, and publishing available housing dashboards. A unique innovation was the integration with Malawi's National ID database to ensure eligibility, combined with automated audit trails to prevent manipulation. The model fosters institutional transparency while empowering applicants with better visibility into the process.

Implementation

The initiative began with stakeholder consultations in early 2023, followed by platform design by MHC's IT department in collaboration with a local tech startup. Core actions included digitizing records, configuring matching algorithms, and deploying mobile-friendly user interfaces. Implementation started in Blantyre and Lilongwe between July 2023 and February 2024.

Key actors included:

- MHC (project lead)
- National Registration Bureau (ID integration)
- Community leaders (mobilization and testing)
- Private developers (tech partners)

The Ministry of Lands provided policy guidance. The pilot was funded through MHC's internal development fund and supported by in-kind contributions from local partners. Awareness campaigns used local radio and SMS alerts. Technical training for MHC staff and community representatives ensured capacity for rollout and feedback collection.

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Enablers & Obstacles

The biggest enablers included strong political will, MHC's internal commitment, and digital literacy among youth. Integration with the national ID system improved verification, while SMS functionality enabled inclusivity for those without smartphones.

Obstacles included resistance to change among staff accustomed to manual systems and initial data gaps from old paper records. These were addressed through change management workshops, data digitization exercises, and iterative software improvements. Limited internet access in rural areas remains a barrier, which MHC is addressing via decentralized service points.

Results & Impact

The digital system reduced average housing allocation wait times from 12 months to 5 months in pilot areas. Over 3,400 applicants have registered digitally, and the backlog in Blantyre has decreased by 30%. Complaints related to allocation fairness dropped by 40%.

Among these beneficiaries, over 55% were low-income households, with special priority given to female-headed households and people with disabilities.

Community confidence in MHC has increased, improving social cohesion and tenant engagement.

Longer-term, the data from the system supports evidence-based planning and budgeting. The system also reduced corruption risks by automating verification and matching. The platform sets the foundation for a digital transformation in public housing delivery across Malawi.

Replication & Scale Up

The model is highly replicable in regions with reliable national ID systems, basic ICT infrastructure, and high mobile penetration. Key factors for replication include political will, institutional coordination (especially with housing authorities and civil registries), and community involvement. Ensuring data protection and digital literacy support will also be critical for scaling in diverse contexts.

The platform can be scaled by integrating more districts, linking with mobile money for rent payment, and adding modules for lease renewals and maintenance requests. Partnerships with local councils and ICT ministries will support rollout. Open-source software development and cloud hosting allow easy customization for other municipalities with minimal cost.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice is a new or innovative practice that is not yet adequately or fully integrated into formal policy frameworks.

To embed this initiative into policy, Malawi should integrate digital housing allocation into national housing and urban development strategies. This includes formalizing digital eligibility criteria, mandating transparent allocation processes, and allocating budget lines for ICT infrastructure in housing agencies. A policy directive from the Ministry of Lands or a legal amendment to housing regulations would ensure institutional uptake and sustainability.

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Lessons & Takeaways

Initial implementation lacked baseline digital records, which delayed system rollout. In hindsight, more preparatory investment in digitizing legacy files and improving internet access at district offices would have streamlined launch. Future iterations will also enhance offline functionality and improve user feedback collection through mobile surveys.