

Sustainability Of Shelter Provision In Malawi's Urban Centers: The Case Of Blantyre City

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Introduction

Shelter provision is one of the challenges urban managers in Malawi currently face. The rapid population increase that has resulted in rapid urbanization, puts a lot of pressure on allocation of natural resources. This study examines both colonial and post-colonial policies that were used to curtail the shelter provision in Blantyre City. Preliminary evidence shows that although some of the policies were sound, they have failed because they were short-termed and relied on foreign funding. Based on the findings from this study, new policy options have been suggested.

Urbanization trends in Malawi.

Blantyre is the biggest city in Malawi with an area of 22,771 hectares and a population of 519,033 people (Table 1). In 1895, it was estimated that there were about 6,301 people in Blantyre and its immediate periphery. Non-Africans represented only two per cent. Since then, the population has increased dramatically. The rapid growth of population in Blantyre city was partly influenced by the introduction of the hut tax in the surrounding agricultural districts of Thyolo, Chiradzulu and Mulanje that forced a lot of the natives to move to Blantyre area where they could get work for paid wages. These are areas where the settlers acquired vast land using the Certificate of Claim. However, some of the influx of people into Blantyre was attributed to the immigration of the Lomwe people from Mozambique who first settled around Mpingwe Hill. The Lomwe migration was due to famine in Mozambique and also a desire to seek security from the British and to work on the estates.

The urbanization process in Blantyre City has resulted in complex interaction of market forces and public, private, and individual interventions for the use of physical space. Thus spatial administration requires the understanding of the supply and demand side of spatial dimension. Any human activity is a function of spatial dimension. Demand for land may be for individuals, community groups or organizations or even public organizations. However, spatial allocation of urban land may be constrained by land ownership system, its physical characteristics and regulations.

Table 1 : Population dynamics in Blantyre (1949-1999)

Year	Population	Area(ha)	Density(persons/ha)
1949	16404	3386	4.8
1954	23471	3386	6.9
1959	32500	3386	10.0
1960	58370	3386	17.2
1966	109461	20923	5.2 ^a
1971	172000	20923	8.2
1977	197461	22771	8.7 ^b
1980	230000	22771	10.1
1987	333120	22771	14.6
1998	478155	22771	21.0
1999	519033	22771	22.8
2010 ^c	705948	22771	31.0
2020 ^c	976732	22771	42.9

Source: Blantyre City Council Reports -various
Malawi Government Population Census, 1966,1977,1987,1998
Blantyre Structure Plan, Africon 1999

5.2^a - drop in gross population density in 1966 due to city boundary change.

8.7^b - In 1977 the boundary was also extended to include South Lunzu

2010^c - population estimate

Notes:

1949 to 1960 population increase was 12.2% per annum

1966 to 1971 population increase was 9.5 % per annum

1977 to 1987 population increase was 5.4 % per annum

1987 to 1998 population increase was 3.3 % per annum

The historical development of land administration institutions in Malawi

Land resources constitute the prime assets of the community and are the inevitable requirement for most, if not all of our human activities. In the urban setting, development and growth requires fair allocation of this important resource whose conservation is vital to survival of the human race. Malawi's land managers have faced daunting bottlenecks regarding administration of land due to different levels of institutional interests and hence resulting in uncoordinated spatial allocation procedures. Before 1949, land transactions in Malawi were done by the Department of Lands and Surveys and Registrar General. This was disbanded in 1950. In the same year, the Lands section was established to resolve the backlog of land applications that accumulated during the Second

World War. The outstanding applications were brought under control in 1957. However, there was a dramatic increase of development of land and demand for leases in the period 1957 to 1959. When the ministerial system of government was inaugurated in early 1961, the lands section became a separate department with responsibilities for land and mining matters. The original title of the Secretary for Lands and Mines was changed to Commissioner for Lands. This was now in the ministry of lands and surveys. In the urban areas, the department was responsible to the Ministry of Urban Development, which was established in the early 1950's for the purpose of controlling urban development. The Department of Lands dealt with the day-to-day activities of the Planning Committee in these townships where formal town planning schemes allocated specific uses to land such as industrial, residential or commercial. As the years progressed, several institutions sprung out. These institutions were formulated with the aim of solving the urban land problems that were emerging from the towns and general administration of the country as a whole. In 1965, the Ministry of Lands and Surveys once again changed its name to the Ministry of Development and Planning. At present, land management is under the Ministry of Physical Planning, Housing, Lands and Surveys. The functions of the department of lands originally included repairing many legal documents affecting land such as leases, tenancies, conveyances, licenses, certificates, easements and also maintenance of rent rolls, issue of rent notices, collection of revenue and keeping of records of every type of land transaction.

Central Government

Due to the historical nature of land administration, most of the management functions are centrally controlled. At the moment, the Ministry of Physical Planning, Housing, Lands and Surveys (PPHLS) is charged with estate management, physical planning and surveying of land on both customary and public land. The central government has transferred some of the public land to Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) and the Blantyre City Assembly (BCA) to enable these institutions to carry out their respective infrastructure development. The administration of the remaining public land in cities is done by several departments within the ministry of PPHLS. The following is a detailed breakdown of some of the departments that are mandated to deal with the administrative functions of the ministry:

- *Department of Physical Planning*: Deals with the physical planning of the whole country. The Town and Country Planning Ordinance (CAP 98), which was later replaced by the Town and Country Planning Act 1948 was primarily under the jurisdiction of the Lands Department. The town-planning function was later transferred to the Ministry of Development and Planning. At the moment, the Town and Country Planning Act is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Physical Planning. The department is responsible for the planning functions of development control and national land use. The department is supposed to be contacted for comments for any proposed change of use of land either in the rural or the urban setting. The functions of the department are very complex in the sense that for any development that is to take place, a map

is prepared by the surveys department and all the utility companies such as Blantyre Water Board, Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi and other parastatals have to comment on the plan before a final draft is made.

- *Department of Lands and Valuation:* This department is charged with the issue, renewal, and determination of all leases and other dispositions of public and customary land for the collection of rents arising from such leases. It is also charged with the acquisition of both freehold and customary land that is required for public purposes and for much of the estate management and control of land owned by the government. According to the Town and Country Planning Act, all land in the urban centers which is not private is classified as public land. This means that the central government is supposed to be the biggest custodian of urban land administration. The estate development involves the production of a layout plan on paper. This is done in coordination with the physical planning department. Once the plan has been approved, the demarcation of the plots takes place in coordination with the surveys department. The surveying is followed by the provision of services after which lease applications are invited from the general public and organizations. Once the applications are received, the plots are then allocated to the prospective developers. The cost of providing demarcated and serviced plots is usually passed on to the lessees in a form of development charges. This is paid as a premium before the allottee is allowed to develop the plot. The department is also responsible for coordination of projects implementation by collaborating with the Treasury and the Department of Economic Development and Planning, which authorizes funds for financing projects. The above procedures are performed by several divisions within the lands and valuation department, as follows:
 - *Estate management division:* deals with provision of serviced plots in urban centers, collection of ground rents, monitoring compliance of lease covenants and management of government property and estates.
 - *Lands division:* deals with allocation and acquisition of land. This is where the processing of leases is done in coordination with the survey, land records and the deeds and registry offices.
 - *Valuation division:* deals with valuations of property for assessment of rates, compensation, tax valuation, estate duty, stamp duty and acts as a national property advisory service.
- *Department of Housing:* The function of this department in the past has been to provide rural housing and Secondary Centers Development Programmes.
- *Department of surveys:* This plays an important function in the demarcating of land that is proposed for estate development. It works in collaboration with the physical planning and the lands department. Once lease application has been approved, the surveyors have to go on the ground to demarcate the boundaries of the plots using beacons. The following is a list of the sections or divisions within the department.

- Cadastral division: surveying of land for planning purposes and ownership.
- Mapping division: providing cartographic and reprographic services;
- Topographic division: provides and maintains survey control.
- Hydrographic division: charting of Lake Malawi.

Malawi Housing Corporation

Early days of urbanization in Blantyre city was associated with land tenure and employment policies that considered urban dwelling as temporal phenomenon. This was due to the fact that most of the employees left their families at their home villages. In the late 1950s, the colonial administration faced a challenge of ever increase in urban population. By 1966 about 67 percent of the Blantyre City residents were born outside the city boundary. This rapid population increase required urgent land allocation to the migrants. The establishment of *Temporary Settlements Areas* that were designed for the natives to build their traditional houses was seen as an attempt to overcome rapid urbanization. The first of such type of areas were established between 1954 and 1958 at Bangwe, Chilomoni, Ndirande, and Zingwangwa in Blantyre City. In these areas, plots were demarcated by government surveyors and were allocated to people without provision of any services. In 1960, *site and services* scheme was introduced as an upgrade to the Temporary Settlement Areas scheme. The site and services scheme provided infrastructure and the plots were partially serviced. This scheme was later called *Traditional Housing Areas* (THAs).

Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) was originally known as the *Soche Authority*. It was constituted in 1954 to develop what was called the Africa High Density Residential Area (Soche) in preparation for it to be incorporated into Blantyre City. It was reported in the Capital Development Plan of 1957-61 that an extensive African township was being developed in Soche area of Blantyre and Limbe towns. This township was considered in 1955 and represented the first permanent African township in Malawi. The Soche Authority was responsible for the development of the township. As such, Soche Authority was primarily instituted as a statutory body that was to provide capital works such as roads, administrative buildings, markets, street lighting, sanitary services, etc.

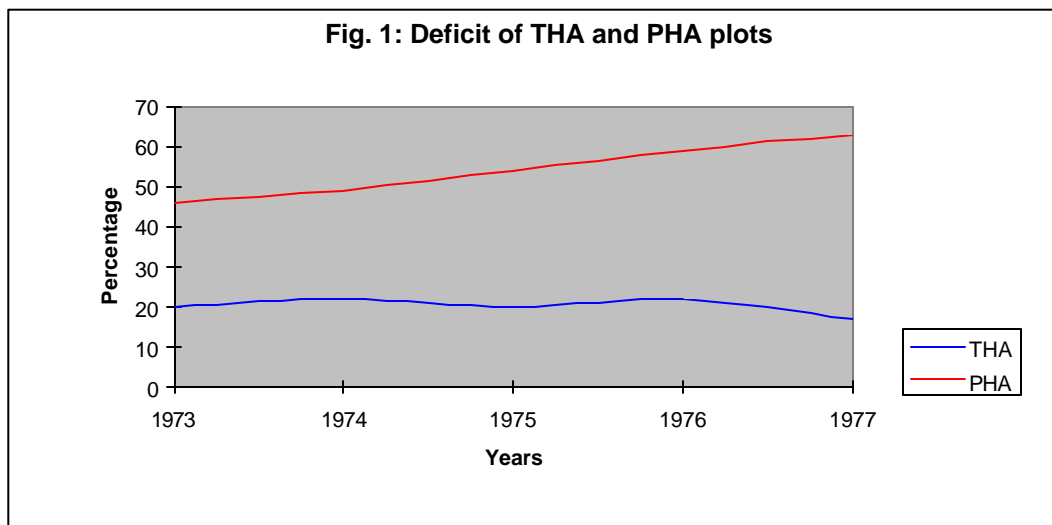
By 1963, Soche Authority changed its name to Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC). This was after a decision was made to transfer the Soche High Residential Area, the Zingwangwa Urban Housing Area, the Bangwe Urban Housing Area, the Ndirande High Density Residential Area, and the Mathenje High Density Area in freehold to MHC. The Ordinance No. 21 of August 1963 CAP 200 instituted MHC as a self-accounting corporate statutory body whose objective was to undertake the development, construction and management of housing estates throughout Malawi for all sections of population on viable commercial basis. The Soche Authority was then transferred to the Municipality of Blantyre and Limbe.

MHC was formed without capital and cash to run it. The Malawi government only gave it some properties and land. By 1968, only land and property in Blantyre City was officially conveyed to MHC as freehold land because of the failure to carry out acquisition surveys. By 1971, about 6,000

plots had been laid out of which 5,000 had been allocated. These plots were allocated in Chilomoni, Ndirande, Zingwangwa and Bangwe THAs. The aim of MHC was to discourage the increase in unplanned settlements within the city boundaries. However, the provision of plots failed to keep pace with the demand as indicated by high percentage of squatter and unplanned settlements in Blantyre city. In 1971, it was discovered that the demand for THA plots actually exceeded the supply. This deficit has been growing ever since (**Figure 1**). Hence some more plots were approved to be laid out in South Lunzu. This was the last time MHC under the direction of government provided site and service scheme.

Apart from the provision of plots in THAs, MHC has been involved in construction of low-, medium- and high-density permanent houses. By 1981, 5,274 units were built of which 45 per cent were in Blantyre city and 48 per cent in Lilongwe while the rest were in the other smaller towns and districts. The permanent houses built by MHC basically targeted civil servants. The government realized that civil servants do not get high salaries, and hence agreed to pay full economic rent for all houses occupied by civil servants. Government also agreed to be responsible for provision of THA plots. This implies that MHC was acting as the administrative arm of central government.

By 1977 only about 2.4 per cent of the land in Blantyre was allocated for PHA while 11 per cent was allocated to THA by MHC. This provides the explanation for the deficit of PHA housing to reach 63 per cent in 1977. However, there was only 17 per cent deficit for THA (**Figure 1**). This scenario is the cause of the short-term success story of THAs in Malawi as compared to other African countries



Source: MHC, Author 2001

Thus, the original housing policy when MHC was instituted was to provide permanent houses for those who could buy or pay an economic rent and also to provide site and service plots in THAs for those who could not afford permanent housing. The accelerated increase in squatter settlements required Malawi government to revise the housing policy in 1969. By this time, MHC was advised

to concentrate its resources on urban housing by allowing economic forces to resolve the problem of housing for the higher-income groups. The target now shifted to the provision of housing of an acceptable standard for the middle-income groups at the lowest prices compatible with economic viability of the corporation. The site and services scheme was considered as social housing for the lowest-income groups. Based on these changes in housing policy, the government of Malawi proposed the development of financial institutions that would foster home ownership to the wider segment of the population.

Table 2 : Traditional Housing Areas Plots in Blantyre (1970 and 1999)

Location	Number of plots(1970)	Number of plots(1999)
Bangwe	7,22	1,451
Chilomoni	1,467	1,733
Ndirande	713	770
Zingwangwa	1,815	1,890
Namiyango	-	519
Mpingwe	-	1,225
South Lunzu	-	9,643
Total	4,717	1,7231

Source: Several MHC Annual Reports,1970 and Blantyre City Assembly 2000

Notes: Blantyre City Assembly has allocated 1681 plots since taking over from MHC

- indicates no data available

Table 3: Summary of Malawi Housing Corporation Urban Land Ownership

City	Land acquired (ha)	Land to be acquired (ha)	Total land (ha)	% of total land acquired(ha)
Blantyre	2966.8921	92.2733	3058.1654	62
Lilongwe	1163.1341	0.5625	1163.6966	23
Mzuzu	135.4847	348.901	484.3860	10
Zomba	251.8063	41.6028	283.4097	5
Total	4517.3172	483.6028	4989.4097	100

Source: Malawi Housing Corporation, Author 2001

Blantyre City Assembly

The Blantyre City Assembly (BCA) is responsible for housing and settlement administration and control within the city boundaries. This is done under the Town Planning and Estates Management Section of the Assembly. The BCA took over the administration of all Traditional Housing Areas (THA) from MHC on April 1, 1992. During the takeover, BCA was mandated to upgrade unplanned

traditional housing areas under the Local Government Development Project with assistance from the World Bank. The fact that land is owned by different organizations and individuals has made it difficult for the BCA to exercise its administrative power efficiently. This is because some of the land is managed by the lands department, private individuals, MHC and even traditional leaders.

Site and Services scheme policies

The Malawi government after the political independence realized the need to provide shelter opportunity to the migrants to the city who could not afford to purchase or rent conventional houses. The site and services scheme started in 1954 on a pilot basis by the colonial government. The idea was to provide a planned framework within which migrants could be able to build their own houses according to their own tastes and financial standing. This was augmented by government policy that mandated MHC to improve the existing housing standards in the urban areas to the best extent possible within the limits set by what people could afford. The policy resulted in planned housing layouts. These settlements were being planned for communities where many of the residents would not be able to find regular employment. To achieve this, the approach adopted for the site and services housing schemes in Malawi was to facilitate the provision of as many houses as possible, as quickly as possible and as cheaply as possible (Norwood, 1973)

The first properly planned traditional housing areas on public land were Chilomoni, Bangwe and Zingwangwa. The plots in these areas were partially serviced and provided opportunity to urban workers who wanted to build their own traditional houses. By 1962, a total of 2,415 residential plots were demarcated and some had already been allocated to the middle-income residents. The building of houses in these Traditional Housing Areas (THAs) strictly followed the minimum building standards under the Public Health Ordinance (Government Notices No. 10 and 120) of 1960. The management of each THA was under the administrative officer who was attached to Blantyre Urban Office assisted by clerical officer on the ground.

The location of the first three THAs of Bangwe, Chilomoni and Zingwangwa reveal the social and spatial exclusion concepts of the colonial administrators. The belief was that it was possible to advance European life style in urban centers if THAs were located some several kilometers from the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of Limbe and Blantyre townships.

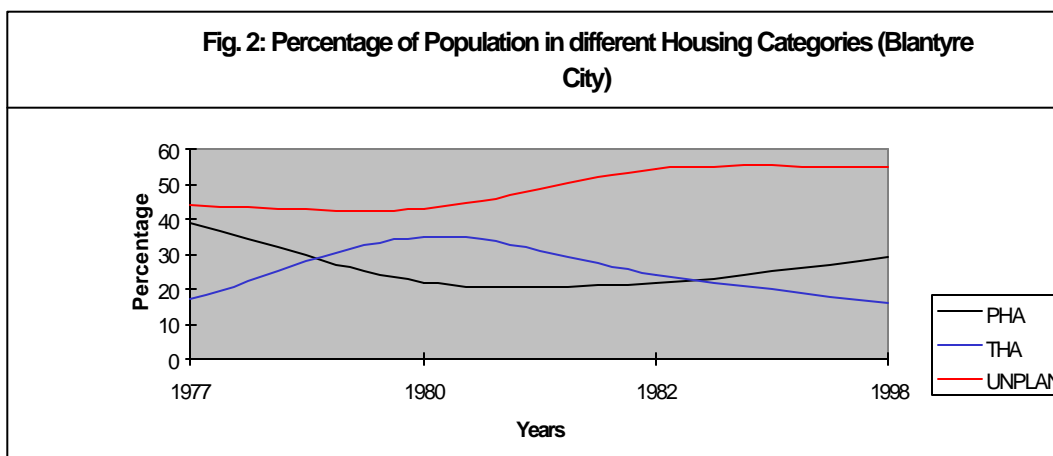
In Malawi, site and services schemes were locally called Traditional Housing Areas (THAs). After the pilot THAs of Bangwe, Chilomoni and Zingwangwa, other sites were identified that were properly planned and then subdivided into individual plots. The second phase of THAs implementation was facilitated by the World Bank loan that was first approved in 1972. Just like the pilot THAs, this scheme was aimed at restoring formal control over land subdivision and a process of house construction. The demarcated plots were designed to accommodate a reasonable standard house within the minimum standards set by Public Health by-laws. In order to make the scheme affordable to the allottees, the government through MHC provided beacons at each plot

corner, a pit latrine that was about 4.6 meters deep covered by a concrete slab, a water supply point within 30 meters radius, a market within 1.6 kilometers, shrubs for demarcating the boundary and a dirt gravel road. Most of the THAs were about 4.8 kilometers away from the nearest employment center. The plot holder was however supposed to build a hut around the pit latrine, build only one dwelling house, and plant hedges to demarcate the boundaries of his plot.

The layout of THA plots in Malawi is approximately 14 meters x 28 meters giving an approximate area of 400 square meters. This was chosen because it was believed to be the most economical. Before any area could be chosen as a suitable location for THAs, a preliminary investigation was carried out to find the impact of pit latrines on the environment. Test pits of about 5 meters deep were dug in order to find out whether there were any rocks and or the water table was high.

The system of providing only basic facilities in Malawi's THAs has been very successful as compared to Zimbabwe and other African countries where very high standards where extensive facilities were provided and plot holders were mandated to comply with design standards. In Malawi, most plot holders use materials that are locally found such as wooden window frames, sun-dried mud block made on site and doors and roof timbers which can easily be found on the local markets. It is only the corrugated iron sheets that are not locally made.

The success of the minimum requirements of Malawi's THAs scheme was evidenced in 1968 because about 6,000 plots were allocated. This set the direction of the future trend in the urbanization process of Blantyre city and other urban centers in Malawi. In the 1970's there was an increase in development and use of THA plots. Although this was the case, a housing survey that was carried out in 1971 revealed that about 43.2 per cent of the population lived in unplanned areas in and around the Blantyre Planning Area. This figure has continued to increase to reach 55 per cent in 2000 (Figure 2) In the THAs, there was considerable increase in densification of buildings on individual plots despite the increase in supply of plots and significant increase in conventional houses.



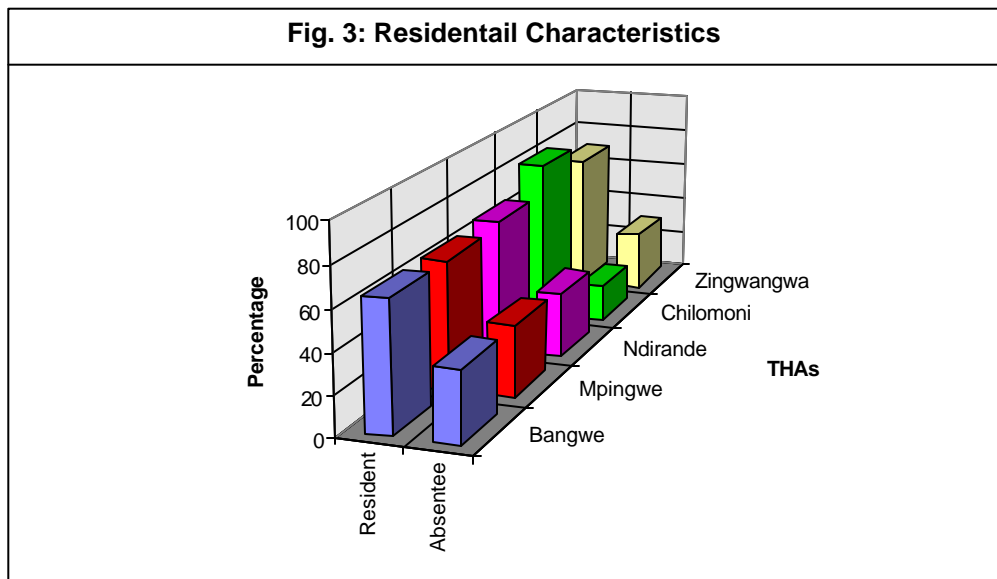
Source: Author 2001

It is interesting to note that the provision of planned THAs plots in the 1970's actually kept pace with the growth of the city's low-income people. This was achieved because the THAs standards were deliberately kept to a minimum so that the beneficiaries could build any type of house with a chance of improving it later. Because of the popularity of THAs schemes, it was observed that from July 1972 to December 1972, about 510 houses were constructed in THAs as compared to 299 conventional houses built in the whole year of 1972 in Blantyre city. Norwood (1973) argues that the biggest incentive to provision of good houses in Malawi's THAs has been the fact that man's priority is to be given a plot with water nearby, a market within 1.6 kilometers, and his place of employment within reasonable distance. The plot-holder is encouraged to build a good house if he knows that he may sell his house to a willing buyer, or that he may leave the house to his children.

In Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi, the solution to rapid urbanization was also tackled by the adoption of site and service scheme. Like Blantyre and unlike Harare, minimum standards in THAs were adopted. However, in terms of squatter settlement control, Lilongwe had similar approach to Harare because any informal settlements were dealt with. This resulted in similar situation as that of Harare whereby the urban poor resorted to overcrowding the existing THAs. Potts (1994) cites that between 1972 and 1980 the average number of people per plot in Lilongwe doubled to 12.5. The government's resistance to squatting resulted in some plots having more than twenty people. By 1982, the population of Lilongwe had reached 159,000 people. Of this 44 per cent were living in THAs.

The allocation process of the plots in THAs was on a first-come, first served basis. The aim of this methodology was to avoid any discriminations in the allocation process based on financial standing of individuals. The allocation procedure involved the completion of an application form which was then submitted to MHC. Once the form is submitted, the applicant's name was put on the waiting list. There was a clear requirement for one to be an indigenous Malawian before he could apply for a THA plot. Individuals were restricted to be allocated only one plot. Once a plot was allocated, the applicant entered into a month-to-month tenancy agreement and had to develop the plot within six months from the date of his acceptance. In a situation where the applicant failed to develop within the given period, the plot was withdrawn from him/her and allocated to another person on the waiting list. According to the agreement duly signed by the applicant, the plot is supposed to accommodate only three structures. However, the housing shortages in the city has forced the owners of these THA plots to ignore the above stipulations. Most plot holders have managed to be allocated more than one plot. Evidence in this study shows that most plots have more than one structure, resulting in being overdeveloped. This is a direct result of lack of control by the urban managers. The history of THAs has been riddled with conflict because the land where the plots were demarcated belonged to MHC while the implementation of planning by-laws was to be done by the Blantyre City Assembly. Control and administration of THAs was centrally organized at MHC without community involvement.

Apparently there has been a shift from the original anticipated achievement of the site and services scheme because most of the houses are now being for rent than owner occupied. The major reason for this is that it is impossible to reach equilibrium in the housing market as supply does not cope up with demand. Where demand is higher than supply, undesirable things happen. This can be seen from the fact that in 1981 there were 35,000 applicants on the waiting list while the rate of THA plot delivery was 600 plot per annum. The unmet demand overspilled into the existing THAs creating rental accommodation and an increase in speculative housing as landlords respond to demand. The plot holders make sure to maximize their profits by building more dwellings or extending the existing ones on the plot, thereby densifying the THAs. This unplanned densification on plots puts a lot of strain on the existing sanitary facilities. Overdevelopment may also lead to encroachment and hence result in boundary disputes. A survey carried out by MHC in 1979 revealed that about 3 to 10 families were living on individual plots as tenants. At the moment, most of the old THAs actually look like legalized squatter settlements in their character and appearance. **Figure 3** shows that by 1979 there was a significant amount of absentee landlordism.



Source: Malawi Housing Corporation Survey Report 1979

The increased demand in shelter in Blantyre City has resulted in speculative housing in THAs. Most low-income people are finding it difficult to pay ground rent to the City Assembly, let alone to repair their deteriorating houses. This has resulted in low-income people selling their plots to speculative rich people. Consequently, the urban poor are being pushed to the squatter areas where they do not have to pay city rates. A large percentage of people live in their own houses rent-free. This filtering process was never anticipated by policy makers. The current problem of densification on plots in the THAs can be solved if a graduated ground rent is proposed. This implies that the rent

will depend on the number of structures on the plot. The more the structure the more rent will be charged.

The site and services scheme in Malawi was introduced in an attempt to alleviate squatter and unplanned settlement problems. Although minimum standards were adopted for THAs in Malawi, the success of the scheme was short-lived as the government was not able to maintain provision of THA plots as the population was increasing in the urban centers. This study has proposed some policy issues that will foster efficient and equitable spatial allocation procedures. The deficit of shelter provision has been increasing at a fast rate (**Figure 1**). This is a very serious problem that needs urgent action. Every individual in the urban space should have a choice of location. By-laws and planning regulations should not be used as harassing instruments. Restrictive regulations have made good citizens a prey to unscrupulous and exploitative squatter and THA landlords. Urban managers need to shift their paradigm of planing within the local environment and using the sparse resources available to achieve maximum benefit for minimum cost (Norwood, 1973).

Sites without services policy

Site without services is the proposed scheme whereby the urban land managers identify all unconstrained developable spaces within the city boundary and provide planned plots that take into account the perceived and allowable population densities for the urban poor. No infrastructure is provided except drinking water. The other infrastructure and services can be provided incrementally when the residents are able to pay for them. Once the site is planned, plots may be allocated to individuals on demand. Just like THAs, there will be minimum health standards requirements in terms of refuse disposal and general hygiene. Once there are many households in an area, they may organize themselves to accumulate funds for the provision of required infrastructure. This is far much easier and cheaper than the present haphazard development process that is taking place in Blantyre city and its peripheries. This will enable urban poor to have access to urban space at the lowest possible costs. This incremental method should be backed by restrictions that encourage beneficiaries to actually live on their plots and to be part of community-money-saving groups for the provision of infrastructure. Experience from the urban space shows that if individuals are desperate about shelter, they can live on any land even with minimal services and infrastructure, provided the land is close to their work place.

Conclusion

The short-term success of site and services scheme in Malawi was due to several factors. Firstly, the minimum standards were an incentive to middle income people to acquire a plot and build their own shelter according to their affordability. Secondly, the funding of these projects was by international organizations whose participation in shelter provision was only temporal. This new millennium requires urban managers in Malawi to come up with adaptive and sustainable shelter

provision mechanisms in order to address the ever increases in shelter demand in Blantyre city. The proposed site without services scheme is an alternative option that may have long-term implications in solving the shelter problems in Malawi.

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