

# **CITIES AND GOOD URBAN LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICE AS A CATALYST FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: CASE OF BLANTYRE CITY, MALAWI**



**By**

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## ***Abstract***

Cities occupy a unique position in that they are crucibles of political and governance innovations that enables them play major roles in climate change interventions. Through better policy responses and practices such as land use planning and building codes, cities can keep their ecological footprints to the minimum and ensure their residents especially the poor are protected as best as possible against climate change disasters which includes drought, floods and other calamities. However, cities are challenged in terms of capacity to take full advantage of the unique position they occupy to address climate change.

The growing urbanisation trend in Africa makes the search for policy solutions very urgent. Climate change and accelerating urbanisation demand urgent formulation and implementation of adaptation strategies supported by good governance, urban planning and management. UN-Habitat as a United Nations agency with the mandate for sustainable urban development is well placed to apply knowledge and mobilise partnerships for implementing ‘urban dimension’ in the climate change debate. It makes available to governments its global policy setting role, technical expertise, country presence and networks.

This paper looks at the unique position of Cities and good urban land management in developing countries as a catalyst for climate change adaptation. It further discusses at current global and regional initiatives being undertaken to implement this ‘urban dimension’ to climate change.

## **Introduction**

Cities have a unique position in the climate change debate. On the one hand, globally over 80% of the global Green House Gas (GHG) emissions come from cities (Dodman, 2009). This is as a result of their prolific use of fossil fuels for transport, manufacturing and electricity generation. On the other hand, cities contribute disproportionately to the national economies. In Malawi for example cities contribute 65% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) although occupying less than 1% of the land area and accounting for less than 20% of the national population.

Cities also occupy a unique position in that they are vessels of political and governance originations. They play major roles in climate change interventions described as ‘urban local authority dividend’ at local level. The multiple role of local authorities as regulators, administrators, urban developers, consumers as well as providers of a vast array of goods and services makes them exceptionally well positioned to lead and influence climate change interventions. The local authority dividend enables urban practitioners to support and stimulate behaviour change among stakeholders, business and citizens alike.

Local authorities are in a position to support and stimulate energy efficient and ‘green’ industries. They have the closest continuous link with the population, enabling them to foster local participatory and pro-poor climate change response strategies and global environmental change in general.

## **Critical Role of Urban Planning and Management**

Spatial planning is one of the major mandates vested in local authorities. However past and current planning practices have promoted highly dispersed cities with long commuting distances with housing for low income located on the urban peripheries and beyond. This is in light of poor public transport system and a lean towards high private transport use.

Urban planning is fundamental to climate change mitigation and adaptation in cities. Local authorities can lead and influence reduction of urban dependence on oil and carbon footprints in a number of ways. City authorities can plan, enforce/implement city neighbourhood and building designs that promote energy efficiency, shorter commuting distances between homes and workplaces, shops or schools. They can promote walkways, cycling and public transport options over private transport.

In a study carried out in Blantyre City, Malawi in 2018, up to 70% of the population travel on foot or on bicycles and only 20% travel in private cars or public transport (mini-buses) (Blantyre City Council, 2018). Despite this there are few infrastructures for pedestrians or cyclists in the City. Much of the city infrastructure budget is spent on building and maintaining roads that are used by only 20% of the population. City authorities can increase urban development density on the broad basis of mixed land use strategies. Higher density can reduce per capita energy use, create economies of scale, contribute to more efficient distribution and use of natural resources, foster more effective access to services and minimise pressure on surrounding land ecosystems.

Local authorities can implement environmental-economic legislation and actions, including renewable energy technologies in industry, public and residential buildings and generally integrating 'green' policies in municipal bylaws. For instance incentives or requirement for buildings to meet green building standards such as prohibiting the use of burnt bricks in

construction and promoting climate friendly technologies such as stabilised soil blocks.

Local authorities are well placed in promoting eco-efficiency strategies including waste recycling to achieve fundamental changes in the metabolism of cities as well as the promoting energy efficient cooking stoves common among the urban poor. Cities need to design and implement effective approaches to develop '*cities without slums*' at large scale, focussing on addressing the challenges of the urban poor accessing good water and sanitation facilities. In short urban planning can serve as a valuable tool for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into urban development processes as follows:

- a) Developing building codes that ensure safety standards in components of the built environment – ensuring that construction meets a minimum standard of disaster resilience.
- b) Protecting critical infrastructure and services such as electricity, water and sanitation, communications and transport systems.

Despite decentralisation policy implementation in many African countries, cities remain weak and lack in capacities for knowledge and data on climate change and skills to design and implement urban development and management strategies that effectively address climate change issues. Cities need support to build their capacities if they are to drive their role in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

### **UN-Habitat support to Cities and Climate Change**

The Habitat Agenda which is the framework for all activities of the UN Habitat Agency addresses among others issues related to the increasing resilience of cities to the impacts of climate change. The UN-Habitat adopted a resolution on cities and climate change to increase recognition of the relationship

between urbanisation and climate change. The objective of the Cities and Climate Change Initiative (CCCI) is to enhance climate change mitigation and preparedness of developing country cities through advocacy, tool development, capacity building and pilot initiatives. It also recognises that proper adaptation and mitigation actions taken at local levels and being integrated into national policies will be of importance in tackling the global challenge of climate change. To operationalise this, UN-Habitat is implementing a number of global and regional programmes to support countries and cities to effectively address climate change issues. Some of its important activities include Sustainable Urban Development Network (SUD-Net), a worldwide interdisciplinary link which assists cities to mobilise partners and networks; building partnerships, implementing innovative pro-poor projects; stimulating the acquisition and sharing of knowledge and disseminating good practices. The network provides access to up-to-date information (tools and guidelines, resource packages, documents) as well as feedback on ongoing debates, initiatives and activities at the global, regional, national and local levels. Over the past years links have been established with local urban knowledge networks, city councils, universities and the World Bank.

### **Regional Centre for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation**

With the facilitation of UN-Habitat, the Governments of Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar and the Comoros are setting up a Technical Centre for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation for Southern Africa in Maputo. The Centre is meant to provide technical assistance and promote capacity development in a range of sectors of the targeted countries. In the initial phase, a particular niche has been identified on reducing risk in urban settlements, where population and assets density increases vulnerability to natural disasters.

## **Conclusion**

Cities and local authorities have the potential to influence both the causes and impacts of climate change. They can also contribute to national and international strategies to prevent unacceptable climate change impacts. However, in much of Africa, cities need further support relating to capacity building, information acquisition and exchange, technology transfer, technical support and establishing an enabling environment if they are to utilise their urban local authority dividend and lead and influence climate change interventions in their cities.

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