



The Political Economy Analysis of Urban Governance and Management in Malawi¹

November 2015

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Tilitonse management for entrusting me to undertake the Political Economy Analysis (PEA) of contemporary urban governance and management under the auspices of the PEA Advisory Group. I further owe a debt of gratitude to all members of the PEA Advisory Group for the critical, analytical and reflective exchanges and debates during the conception phase of this exercise. These exchanges and debates were illuminating in the course of conducting fieldwork as well as during the writing of this document. This exercise would not have been completed without the participation of the key stakeholders in urban governance and management drawn from across all the major cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba. These were generous with their time often at short notice. In addition, they were engaged in the discussion about contemporary urban governance and management challenges. Their generosity is not taken for granted; it is sincerely appreciated. All errors of interpretation remain my sole responsibility.

Abbreviations

ACP	Africa, Caribbean and Pacific
CCODE	Centre for Community Organization and Development
CDC	Community Development Committee
EC	European Commission
HFH	Habitat for Humanity
MDC	Malawi Development Corporation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MHC	Malawi Housing Corporation
MHPF	Malawi Homeless People's Federation
MPICO	Malawi Property Investment Company
MPs	Members of Parliament
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OZP	Outline Zoning Planning
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PSUP	Participatory Slum Upgrading
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes

Executive Summary

This paper examined urban governance and management in Malawi with respect to two areas: 1) the state of development control, planning and infrastructure development; and 2) the state of community level governance structures in urban areas with particular emphasis on modalities for social organization and capacity for collective action efforts. The analysis was carried out using the World Bank's Problem Driven Governance and Political Economy Analysis Framework. The framework was preferred because of its ability to shed light on how to shape strategies for operations in ways that range from adjusting them to existing space for change to developing proactive strategies for expanding space for change. This is in line with the underlying objective of any PEA exercise which is to situate development issues or challenges within an understanding of prevailing political and economic processes in society specifically the incentives, relationships, distribution and contestation of power between different groups and individuals.

The assignment was carried out in the four major cities across the country: Blantyre and Zomba in the South; Lilongwe in the Centre; and Mzuzu in the North. Two main methods of data collection were used. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with several stakeholders who, *inter alia*, included ward counselors, block leaders, chiefs, city council officials and officials from relevant government ministries and departments such as Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and the Department of Lands, Physical Planning and Surveys. The semi-structured interviews were guided by a checklist that highlighted issues of particular interest to the PEA exercise. The interviews were further complemented by an extensive literature review that focused on a wide range of published and non-published materials that offered useful insights into framing the urban governance and management challenge in Malawi as well as the interpretation of fieldwork findings.

This exercise has established that cities in Malawi face considerable challenges in as far as the two areas that were examined are concerned. They are unable to exercise the development control, planning and infrastructure development function effectively due to a number of constraints while the structures for community level social organization and collective action efforts are in a state of flux. The combined effect of these challenges is that cities in the country are unable to plan for, provide and maintain infrastructure and services and are rarely in a fit state organizationally and financially to ensure provision of services and maintenance of a wide range of facilities. Yet urban governance and management, especially in the context of a developing country like Malawi, is concerned with city building with its insatiable need for infrastructure and institution building with its seemingly endless need for increased capacity to perform.

McGill (1998) argues that a robust city should be able to develop guidelines for integration of spatial, sectoral, economic, financial and institutional planning so as to better achieve urban development goals. This implies that good urban governance and management depends on the power to coordinate the activities of a variety of agencies at national and local levels. According to Sharma (1989) urban governance and management can be described as the set of activities that together shape and guide the social, physical and economic development of urban areas. This is further amplified by Rakodi (1991) who characterizes the overarching objective of urban governance and management as to ensure that the components of the system are managed so that they make possible the daily functioning of a city which should both facilitate and encourage economic activity of all kinds and enable residents to meet their basic needs for shelter, access to utilities and services and income generating opportunities. This

underlies the fact that urban governance and management deals with power relations, the nature of cities and their social and economic structure.

The ideals of urban governance and management are far from being realized in the context of Malawian cities. While the legislative framework generally exists and is reasonably tuned, cities in Malawi find it extremely difficult to exercise the development control, planning and infrastructure development function as stipulated in the statutes. Despite the fact that the Town and Country Planning Act and the Local Government Act are not harmonized and the Local Government Act does not provide for an elaborate institutional framework for the development activities in urban areas, the cities should have at least been able to carry out this particular function to some level of efficacy. In this regard, the PEA revealed that city councils are constrained by several factors which, inter alia, include excessive political interference in urban governance that has reportedly worsened following the transition to democracy in May 1994; limited financial capacity mainly because of their failure to mobilize resources due to the reluctance of the central government to allow them to collect the whole range of revenues that they are entitled to as well as high default on city rates among the residents; and the existence of multiple and competing jurisdictions of authority particularly the urban chiefs who allocate land in urban areas even though the Chiefs Act proscribes them from doing so. It is particularly difficult for city councils to enforce payment of city rates in these parts of cities.

The community level governance structures are in a state of flux due to lack of strategic guidance on what they should be, how they should be constituted, and how they should function. The situation has been compounded by the prolonged periods during which Malawi has had no elected local governments. There were no elected local governments between 1994 and 2000 and between 2005 and 2014. The vacuum created by the absence of these provided an opportunity for urban chiefs to entrench themselves becoming the *de facto* focal point for social, economic and political organization in urban areas. The reintroduction of elected local governments in 2014 and the attempts by the central government to end urban chiefs has created leadership paralysis that makes it almost impossible for urban communities in most areas to meaningfully get involved in collective action efforts. There is currently jostling for power, authority and influence amongst urban chiefs, counselors and block leaders. As long as the government does not effectively intervene to provide strategic guidance on the way forward the leadership paralysis is bound to persist. The main reason is that urban chiefs play a key role in social functions in their respective communities particularly in relation to funerals. The attempts to end urban chiefs may not be successful because neither the counselor nor the block leader can perform culture-related functions, such as funeral rites. This is compounded by the fact that city councils only have control over very few cemeteries. Most of them are controlled by the urban chiefs simply because most of the areas were brought under the jurisdiction of cities without fully compensating their original inhabitants who occupied the land under customary tenure arrangements. Until the residents are fully compensated, urban chiefs have a legitimate basis for exercising jurisdiction over these areas.

The PEA exercise further revealed the extent to which formal and informal institutions interface to create both positive and negative outcomes. There is no doubt that in the absence of elected local governments, urban chiefs played a key role as an intermediary institution between urban communities and city councils. Even in the aftermath of elected local governments, urban chiefs have proven to be very useful in the social organization of urban communities. They perform a key function in relation to funerals and even mobilization of their respective communities for collective action initiatives. City council officials still turn to urban chiefs for community mobilization even when their legitimacy is under serious scrutiny since the Local Government Act and the Chiefs Act do not recognize the existence of traditional leaders in urban areas. The most interesting development is that in some areas, particularly in Mzuzu city, the urban

chiefs are mutating into block leaders. It is further worth noting the apparent resilience of block leaders. The PEA established that each successive regime has installed its own block leaders but instead of displacing each other, these regime affiliated block leaders simply accommodate each other. The consequence of all this is that there is a structured hierarchy of these block leaders modeled upon the hierarchy of traditional chieftaincy. This hierarchy comprises block leaders, group block leaders and senior block leaders.

Informality is compounded by what could be elements of *illegality*. For example, the Town Planning Act does not recognize chiefs and unplanned settlements and structures in urban areas once such areas are designated as planning areas. In a way, therefore, the law creates a dual system of formal and informal areas, authorities, settlements, and processes. These exist side by side, with mutual benefits to each other, and, sometimes, elements of tension and conflict among them.

The political transition to democracy has also fostered the dominance of informality in city councils' transactions especially relating to land management and mobilization of revenue. Politicians have exploited their powers to undermine city councils' capacity to stick to guidelines for allocating plots and enforcement of building standards and codes. The PEA revealed that political interference has also created a favourable atmosphere for corruption to flourish in councils on the part of the technocrats. The consequences have, *inter alia*, included the explosion of unplanned constructions and almost total abandonment of city zoning plans. City residents are developing their plots as they see fit without regard at all to city planning and building regulations. This is further exacerbated by the incomplete processes of urban development that allow for the existence of multiple jurisdictions over land within city boundaries. This incompleteness as intimated elsewhere in this report allows chiefs to exercise jurisdiction over land even if it is within city boundaries. Political rhetoric backing illegal developments further makes it very difficult for city councils to function effectively. There are well documented incidents whereby politicians have rather carelessly told city residents to undermine authority of cities. This kind of attitude has also manifested itself when it comes to revenue mobilization. In many cases, politicians are in the fore front of evading city rates which makes the majority of urban residents to follow suit. Strikingly, senior level politicians are intent on influencing who sits on committees such as Community Development Committees (CDCs) for purposes of advancing their own selfish political goals.

The combination of these challenges makes it difficult for city councils in the country to embrace all critical players in the city building processes and respond to opportunities that present themselves. This is particularly the case because for cities to achieve their goals there is need for a more dynamic process in which priorities have to be continually assessed and re-assessed in the light of available resources. Malawian cities cannot simply engage in these dynamic processes because of the myriad challenges they confront. The challenges are exacerbated by the dominance of informality in the transaction of city councils' businesses with almost always destructive outcomes.

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings of the PEA exercise:

- Harmonize the Town and Country Planning Act with the Local Government Act to ensure unity of purpose and direction in matters of planning in urban areas.
- Develop an elaborate urban development planning system patterned on the district development planning system that can meaningfully respond to specific urban development challenges.

- Clarify institutional framework for local social organization and collective action efforts in urban areas spelling out the roles of key stakeholders.
- Widen the space for urban citizen participation through the establishment of urban fora that widen the civic space for an active urban citizenry.
- Facilitate the completion of urban development processes to deal with the question of multiple jurisdictions of authority.
- Decide once and for all the fate of urban chiefs to ensure clarity of modes of social organization in urban areas.
- Resolve the issues of *informality* that give rise to *illegality*.
- Facilitate insulation of city councils' operations from undue political interference as well as ratcheting up the ethos professionalism among their employees.
- Reform the urban land markets in line with the existing legislative instruments and empower city councils to work with relevant stakeholders to manage land transactions accordingly.

1. Context

This report presents findings of the exercise to assess the state of urban governance in Malawi. The assessment focused on: 1) the state of development control, planning and infrastructure development; and 2) the state of community level governance structures in urban areas with particular emphasis on modalities for social organization and capacity for collective action efforts. The exercise was motivated by the fact that urban areas are widely acknowledged as levers for accelerated socio-economic transformation and development if the associated processes are properly managed. It used a political economy analysis (PEA) approach by exploring the links between structural context of an issue, the stakeholders affected and the influence of institutions in stakeholders' opportunities for and barriers of action (Adam & Dercon, 2009; Chinsinga, 2015).

The PEA was carried out using the World Bank's Problem Driven Governance and Political Economy Analysis framework. The main strength of this framework is that it throws light on how to shape strategies for operations in ways that range from adjusting them to existing space for change to developing proactive strategies for expanding space for change. According to Leftwich (2007), this framework is becoming increasingly popular because it can be applied both at the problem and sector levels in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of what drives political behavior, how this shapes particular policies and programmes, who are the winners and losers, and what the implications are for different development strategies and programmes. Thus PEA investigates how political, economic and social processes interact in a given society, and support or impede the ability to deal with development problems that require collective action. This helps to identify and understand the political, economic and social processes that either promote or block pro-poor change as well as the role of institutions, power and the underlying context for policy processes. Overall, PEA underscores the fact that politics understood as the contestation and bargaining between interest groups with competing claims over rights and resources is critical in shaping development outcomes.

Following this introduction, Section II of this document outlines the methodological framework that was used to carry out the PEA exercise. Section III puts urban governance and management into perspective. The concept of urban governance and management is defined and its evolution assessed against the backdrop of the twist and turns in policies at the global level. The section further examines the experiences of Malawi with urban governance and management from the colonial to the contemporary era and zeroes in on articulating the underlying contemporary challenges of urban governance and management that necessitated this PEA. Section IV presents the findings of the PEA exercise divided into two main focal areas: 1) those relating to issues about development control, planning and infrastructure; and 2) those relating to the state of community governance structures in urban areas. Section V discusses initiatives that have been implemented before or ongoing to deal with the challenges identified in this PEA as well as puts forward proposals for possible interventions that can be implemented to deal with these challenges. Section VI makes concluding reflections and offers some policy recommendations.

2. Methodological Framework

The methods used for data collection for this exercise included:

- Determining the specific governance issues related to the two strands of urban governance outlined above.

- Carrying out a problem analysis of the issues identified including paying particular attention to the previous efforts taken to deal with these challenges or issues.
- Determining the specific institutional changes, that is, changes in the formal and informal rules and practices required to address the problems identified.
- Assessing the feasibility of implementing a project intervention on the issue by carrying out a detailed stakeholder analysis to clearly identify which stakeholders would be for reforms and which ones may be opposed to proposed reforms.
- Suggesting ideas that could be carried out through a project to achieve change and in line with Tilitonse’s expected results and impact areas.
- Producing a summarized report that can be used as part of the application guidelines.

The data collection methods were further inspired by the fact that the underlying purpose of any PEA exercise is to situate development issues or challenges within an understanding of prevailing political and economic processes in society, specifically the incentives, relationships, distribution and contestation of power between different groups and individuals. The ultimate goal is to facilitate development processes differently in order to achieve qualitatively different outcomes with significant positive impact. The World Bank Problem Driven Governance and Political Economy Analysis framework that was used to carry out the urban governance PEA in Malawi emphasizes on the following: 1) defining what the key development challenges are; 2) examining the existing governance and institutional arrangements; and 3) examining the underlying political economy drivers. This kind of diagnosis helps to shape strategies or operations in ways that range from adjusting them to the existing space for change to developing proactive strategies for expanding the space for change. In undertaking the PEA four key areas were looked at as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: PEA Framework for Urban Governance in Malawi

Issue or Problem	Diagnosis of the Issue or Problem
What are the key challenges in development control, planning and infrastructure development as well as community governance structures including the propensity for collective action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the evidence that shows that there are poor outcomes to which PEA issues appear to contribute?
What are the existing institutional arrangements in these issue areas, namely: development control, planning and infrastructural development as well as structures for community governance within the framework of collective action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key existing institutional or governance arrangements? • Are the existing institutional or governance arrangements capable, effective and efficient?
What are the key political economy drivers that explain or underpin the status quo?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are things the way they are in contemporary urban governance? • Why are policies or institutional arrangements not being improved?
What is it that can be done in order to improve the situation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What actions can be proposed in order to change the current situation? • Are the proposed changes or interventions going to work within the existing reform space or should there be attempts to expand it?

In addition, this framework served as a guide in the review of the relevant literature in the sphere of urban governance particularly in relation to development control, planning and infrastructure development and community organization structures including the capacity or incapacity for collective

action. The review focused on a wide range of materials that included published and non-published materials which offered very useful insights especially in framing the urban governance challenge in Malawi as well as the interpretation of fieldwork findings. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with several stakeholders who, *inter alia*, included ward councillors, block leaders, chiefs, city council officials and officials from relevant government ministries and departments such as Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and the Department of Lands, Physical Planning and Surveys. The semi-structured interviews were guided by a checklist that highlighted issues of particular interest in this PEA as further outlined below. The checklist was administered in a conversational manner which allowed for critical issues that were not initially anticipated to become an integral part of the analysis. The following questions were posed to these key informants:

- Who are the key stakeholders in each of these areas, namely: development control, planning and infrastructure development and community organization structure? What motivates or drives each of these stakeholders? Are they supportive or obstructive of developments in these areas?
- What do stakeholders think are the key issues or challenges in these areas? What are the main causes of these challenges? Are these challenges getting worse or getting better? What initiatives have been taken to deal with these challenges before? What have been the outcomes of these initiatives?
- Do formal institutional frameworks to regulate these activities to ensure that these challenges do not prevail exist? Are these formal institutional frameworks capable, effective and efficient? If they are, why is it that they are ignored?
- What is the role of traditional authority structures (urban chiefs) in the day to day social organization of urban communities? How do these structures co-exist with the elected local governments? Are there specific challenges that arise as a result of the co-existence between the traditional and democratic governance challenges? Do traditional leadership structures promote or hamper collective action initiatives in urban areas? Are there distinct development challenges across the four major cities across the country?
- What is it that can be done in each of these areas to improve the situation for the better? What would you foresee as potential challenges? How can these challenges be dealt with?

3. Urban Governance in Broader Perspective

Concerns for urban governance are principally triggered by processes of urbanization. According to Breeze (1966:62), urbanization is a “process of becoming urban, moving to cities, changing from agriculture to other pursuits that are common to cities and corresponding changes of behaviour patterns”. This definition emphasizes changes in population size, population densities, economic functions, political behaviour and socialization. The understanding is that urbanisation provides a good environment for structural and institutional changes that favours social and political development.

3.1 Theoretical Perspectives of Urbanization

The modernization school of thought focuses on the structural and institutional processes of transition from traditional methods of production to modern methods of production and life (Ozden and Enwere, 2012). The underlying argument is that there is net positive gain in the process of urbanization and the major consequence of urbanization is the erosion of mechanical solidarity and a sense of common identity which is superseded by organic solidarity (Ozden and Enwere, 2012). Organic solidarity is a community bonding based on specialization and interdependence of urban players rather than on closeness and blood relations. This implies that urbanisation offers impersonal ties essential for the

building of values required for social, economic and political development. The main concern, however, is that by presenting a unidirectional, progressive and gradual process of urbanization, modernization school of thought justifies rural-urban migration that is responsible for a number of vices in urban areas. The modernization school of thought is particularly criticized for being responsible for the production of formal and informal urban sectors and neglecting the informal sectors especially when it comes to service provision. In Malawi, for example, service provision in urban areas such as water, service roads, sewerage systems and electricity is heavily biased towards the formal planned areas. The paradox is that even though the informal settlements are marginalized, they house over 65% of the total urban population.

The main preoccupation of the urban bias school of thought is with the roles of politicians and policy makers' interest and motives in the process of urbanization. Its underlying argument is that some urban centres are created and pushed to grow because of the expected political benefits among the political elite. Consequently, the growth of urban areas is perceived as a result of unequal resource allocation in favour of urban areas. Ironically, it is this unequal resource allocation that triggers rural-urban migration and shocks the supply-demand balance of services in urban areas (Ozden and Enwere, 2012). The implication of this bias is that government is less prepared to tackle the problems that result from urbanisation. More importantly, different interests and motives encourage the pursuit of corrupt practices especially in relation to allocation of land and enforcement of planning regulations, building standards and codes.

3.2 Changing Paradigms in Urban Governance and Management

The track record of urban governance and management suggests it is an evolving concept. According to Wekwete (1997: 528), urban governance and management refers to the "political and administrative structures of cities and the major challenges they face to provide both social and physical infrastructure services". The aim of urban governance and management is to promote economic development and well-being through the provision of essential services (Sharma 1989). Originally, urban governance and management was mainly the ambit of government and largely involved production of master plans by technocrats to guide development (Buehler, 2003).

The current understanding of urban management is broadened to include governance characterized by smaller role of central government, involvement of more actors and a rejection of master plans (Wekwete 1997). According to Rakodi (1997), urban development is currently concerned with political arrangements that ensure that the civil society has a say in resource allocation, decision-making is transparent, political agencies are accountable, and many different actors, formal or informal, are included in decision making. It is no longer restricted to the objective of economic growth but regulation of the market processes and coordination of urban actors to achieve economic development and poverty reduction. Thus urban planning and management is currently strongly linked to the concept of democratic governance which is broadly construed as the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions.

The main implication of this perspective of urban governance and management is that the configuration of the public machinery has a critical bearing on the responsiveness of service delivery, decision-making processes and subsequently economic growth and development. Democratic governance comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences (Sharman, 2007; Waheduzzaman, 2010). In democratic governance, citizen participation is quite central and is understood

as the ability of citizens to exercise their right to express their opinion in the process of decision making concerning public interest (Sharma, 2007; Waheduzzaman, 2010; Griddle, 2004).

With regard to urban planning and management, democratic urban governance focuses on achieving inclusive development through structured and systematic deliberations among different urban stakeholders. It is, however, worth noting that the concept of democratic urban governance and management remains a controversial concept. Its dominant conception is global originating from the international donor community and mainly aims to expedite neoliberal policy discourse and orientation. The second conception of democratic urban governance and management emphasizes on strong society and democracy as the fulcrum of sustainable transformation (Lange, 2009). These different orientations notwithstanding, urban governance and management emphasizes on citizen participation as central in reconciling different interests among different urban stakeholders that result in asymmetrical gains from planning decisions (Buehler, 2003).

The foregoing discussion highlights the idea that urban governance and management has shifted from being solely a government responsibility to partnership among different stakeholders. In fact, the paradigmatic shift in urban governance and management has been driven by different interests among both local and international players (Kedogo, et al., 2010; Buehler, 2003). For instance, key international players in urban governance and management such as United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat); World Bank and Cities Alliance have different perspectives on addressing urban challenges. While all players are principally guided by similar principles such as the Agenda 21, Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and MGDs, their specific operations are shaped by different ideological frameworks and interests (Kedogo, et al., 2010).

Ultimately, however, the scope of urban governance and management extends beyond systems control to include sets of behavioural relationships as well as processes through which the myriad activities of the inhabitants interact with each other and with the governance of cities (Churchill, 1985). The implication of this shift is that the principle of urban governance and management is holistic aiming at strengthening the capacity of government and NGOs to identify policy and programme alternatives and to implement them with optimal results. In line with this shift, there are three tests of success for urban governance and management. These are: 1) ability of council officials to implement a declared spatial strategy; 2) ability to deliver basic urban services and trunk infrastructure to rapidly growing urban populations; and 3) ability to undertake operations and maintenance. These successes greatly depend on the ability of councils to ensure that their institutional complexity matches the urban complexity which is inevitable.

3.3 Contextualizing Urban Governance and Management in Malawi

3.3.1 A Brief Historical and Contemporary Synopsis

Malawi's history of urban governance and management is a mirror image of the twist and turns of developments that have taken place at the global level. This implies that urban governance and management in Malawi has been shaped and re-shaped by the country's development policy and interaction with key international urban players over the country's three periods of political development namely: 1) colonial era (1948-1964); 2) post-colonial era (1964-1993), and 3) post one party era (1993 to present).

During the colonial era, formal urban governance and management started with the proclamation of the Town and Country Planning Ordinance (Ordinance 30 of 1948), later replaced by the Town and Country Planning Act, 1988 (Act. 26 of 1988). The introduction of physical planning during this era was modeled

on the western experience with urban growth. In the western countries, urban growth was largely a product of increase in economic activity and structural changes in the economy and urbanization was controlled by policies that restricted rural-urban migration (Kedogo, et al., 2010). During this period, urban governance and management failed to establish a clear structure of citizen participation besides being technocratic and inflexible. According to Ozden and Enwere (2012), the institutionalization of the colonial economy in the context urbanization brought with it negative effects on pre-existing social formations and patterns of urbanization. This was inevitable because urban governance and management was designed to advance the objectives and values as dictated by colonial master's economic, social and political systems (Kruse and Manda, 2005)

The post-colonial approach to urban management continued with the western view of physical planning characterized by production of master plans and strict enforcement of the plans. For instance, the 1948 Town and Country Planning Act was wholesomely adopted from the British colonial masters. Like in many other developing countries, the Government of Malawi took the role of a planner with less contribution from the common person (Kedogo, et al., 2010). Urban planning and management was top down and largely aimed at modernizing the urban landscape and activities resulting in biasness of service provision toward planned areas. The overarching argument is that urban governance and management during pre and post-independence period was largely a technocratic exercise that neglected the participation of citizens and the community (Buehler, 2003). It is within this context that Blantyre and Lilongwe Urban Structure Master Plans were formulated. However, high urban growth as a result of high rural-urban migration and natural increase and high poverty levels, resulted in rapid growth of informal settlements such as Mbayani, Ndirande in Blantyre; Chinsapo in Lilongwe and Salisbury in Mzuzu.

Notable in this legal framework is the way it creates notions of *formality* and *informality*, where the latter also has elements of *illegality*. Once an area is designated as a planning area it becomes a formal area where traditional structures, authorities and settlements are not recognized. Under the scheme of the law, unplanned settlements and structures, and traditional authorities would therefore be considered illegal if they continued to exist in a legally designated planning area. This creates a challenge for service delivery and the widening of the civic space in the urban areas as these cannot be extended to areas that are informal within the framework of the law.

The post-colonial era was also characterized with policy reversals in urban management. From 1964 to 1980s, the state was actively involved in development planning, investment, control and organization in line with its interventionist policy. For instance, from 1960s to 1980s, the Government of Malawi largely owned, invested, controlled and occupied the real estate space. In particular, the government through the Malawi Development Corporation (MDC) established Malawi Property Investment Company (MPICO), which dominated the office sector (Stambuli, 2002). Thus, development planning and control during this period was aimed at serving the interests of the state and few rich elites. However, state intervention into the economy was at a public cost as efficiency goals were sacrificed to satisfy self-interests of a few politicians (Booth et al, 2006). The global economic crisis in the 1980s forced government to adopt neoliberal economic policies characterized by private sector investment, free market operations, privatization, trade liberalization and deregulation. In particular, adoption of World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) required reduction in public sector expenditure and increased involvement of the local government, private sector and civil society in economic activities. During 1980s and 2000s, the state privatized a number of its state owned enterprises (Chirwa, 2000). However, the private sector did not readily emerge to take up the vacuum created by the retreating state resulting in total neglect and eventual collapse of the public facilities such as public toilets, bus stations, solid waste management and other urban infrastructure. Equally important, privatization of the property sector and

laxity in the application of urban planning rules resulted in decline in the quality of real estate property products being produced. Thus, the experience from this period questions the ability of the market to provide public services efficiently, effectively and equitably.

The post one-party approach to urban governance and management has been somewhat mixed. The privatization agenda of the 1980s has shown that economic growth alone is inadequate in addressing urban challenges, especially for the poor and marginalized. While recognizing the role of participatory planning to effective urban development planning and organization, the post one-party era lacks a clear policy direction in urban governance and management. Consequently, the period has witnessed rapid encroachment into public, private and protected lands, poor provision of public services growing insecurity, unemployment and poor waste management. This situation has been aggravated by dwindling resources for urban management, misunderstanding of democratic rights, lack of observation of rule of law and high corruption levels within the public service. Institutionally, failure to harmonize the provisions of the 1988 Town and Country Planning Act and the 1998 Local Government Act makes it difficult for local authorities to properly carry out urban governance and management functions. Technically, the District Development Planning System developed to guide local governance and development management did not properly fit into the urban environments. This was not accidental, but a deliberate policy that was highly skewed towards rural development (Kruse and Manda, 2005).

3.3.2 Contextualizing Contemporary Urban Governance and Management Challenges

Urban governance and management is considered as a critical yet an often neglected area in as far as development efforts in developing countries are concerned. In Malawi, the apparent neglect of urban governance has led to a situation whereby urbanization, estimated at 6.3% per annum, has outstripped the government's capacity to provide services and strategically guide urban growth (Mkula, 2014a; Nkhoma & Jameson, 2014). Yet when properly managed, versatile urban governance and management facilitates sustained economic growth and promotes broad based social welfare gains since urban areas are engines of social and economic development.

There is some consensus that urban governance in Malawi is in a state of disarray (Kawonga, 1999; Mkula, 2014b). Scholars and practitioners observe that Malawian cities are grappling with an explosion of unplanned development and settlements which are making it difficult for the cities to realize their full potential for socio-economic prosperity. Consequently, Malawian cities are predominantly characterized by structures that are only accessible by footpaths; structures without viable drainage systems; widespread use of pit latrines; water access through communal standpipes or even boreholes which is contrary to the statutory stipulations; most of the open spaces and road reserves are encroached for low income housing and small-scale industries; vendors encroaching road reserves, open spaces, shop fronts and parking spaces; and alternation of buildings without planning permission. These would be regarded as illegal structures if the Town Planning and Country Planning Act were to be strictly applied.

It is for these reasons that Malawian cities are generally characterized by inadequate and deteriorating infrastructure which is exposing urban residents to myriad types of disasters. Most of these disasters include illegal storage and sale of liquid fuel; frequent collapse of buildings; and fires often arising from faulty electrical installations. Examples include fire at ESCOM, Farmers' Organization Warehouse; Blantyre Flea Market, Lilongwe Flea Market, Bakers Pride, Ori Cooking Oil Refinery, Keza Building, Ekwendeni Market, Mzuzu Main Market and Area 18 Market. According to Mkula (2014a), some of the common causes of building collapse can be traced to bad design, use of sub-standard materials and equipment, faulty construction, foundation failure, use of unqualified contractors and poor project monitoring, lack of enforcement of building codes and economic pressures.

The paradox is that these developments are happening when the country has a fairly strong legislative framework to guide the cities' planning processes and infrastructure development. According to Chimwanza (2010), Malawi's cities have an appropriate development control and planning framework defined as a system of issuing permits for land use development with the purpose of ensuring efficient and effective land use in the public interest. The planning process in the cities is guided by the Town and Country Planning Act 1988. Broadly speaking, the Town and Country Planning Act 1988 sets up the office of the Commissioner of Town and Country Planning and lower level planning authorities such as the Town and Country Planning Board and Local Planning Authorities. This thus provides a very elaborate legislative framework for planning and development control as well as an opportunity for prompt decision making regarding development and other applications. According to Kawonga (1999), the powers accorded by the Act are regarded as adequate to enable planning committees and the City Councils to control and guide development in their respective areas. Moreover, cities have Outline Zoning Plans (OZP) prepared to direct development in the cities through allocating land to specific land uses and as a monitoring tool for development in the cities.

The failure of the legislative framework to deliver the desired results in as far as the development of Malawian cities is concerned is mainly attributed to the widespread prevalence of unethical behavior. This unethical behavior takes many forms such as officials responsible for preparing the Town Planning Committee agenda making certain applications jump the queue; advising planning committees to approve a development proposal that shouldn't have been approved if certain critical information was made available; and town planning committees are subjected to undue political pressure to make decisions that favour certain people at the expense of bonafide applicants. These practices have ultimately compromised urban construction standards due to the failure to enforce design standards of development proposals submitted and approved by the cities due to lack of professional construction supervision. Overall, ad hoc planning, corruption and allocation of land through political dictates has watered down the country's professional integrity.

The situation is further compounded by the existence of parallel streams of authority, including informal and illegal ones, in urban areas which has some significant implications for the success of collective action initiatives (Cammack, et al., 2012). There is co-existence of traditional and urban sources of authority in Malawi's urban areas which has a significant bearing on the day to day organization of social life in urban areas as well as access to land and enforcement of building standards. According to the Chiefs Act (Act 39 of 1981), traditional leaders are proscribed from exercising jurisdiction over land within a city, municipality or township and other related civic duties. These are duties and responsibilities of elected urban governments. However, the reality on the ground is entirely different. Chiefs in urban areas are deeply entrenched and are exercising authority over a wide range of social, political and economic issues. The chiefs' prominence has been reinforced by the absence of elected urban governments between 2005 and 2014 to the extent that even attempts to neutralize their roles have been not very successful. A proclamation by the former Minister of Local Government and Rural Development to disband urban chiefs in July 2015 was reversed by the President. The continued involvement of chiefs in land allocation in urban areas has ultimately created dysfunctional land and housing markets resulting in ineffective development control and an explosion of unplanned developments. Chome and Mc Call (2003) describe this system as neo-customary land practice which has invariably accelerated the sale of land and the growth of unplanned settlements in cities.

The reintroduction of elected local urban governments has further created a serious leadership challenge at the community level in urban areas that has greatly destabilized the social fabric with far reaching implications. There is widespread contestation among various leadership structures, namely: chiefs, block

leaders and councillors for power, authority and legitimacy especially following government's pronouncement to disband urban chieftaincies which is in line with the Local Government Act 1998. This is yet to be sorted out but it has reportedly undermined collective action in most urban areas. Yet collective action is at the heart of development since it essentially deals with the production of public goods ranging from the basic provision of water and electricity to the release of information about the way the government raise taxes and allocate resources to their spending commitments. The main concern arising out of this paralysis is that issues such as economic growth and development are public goods which mean that pro-development policy reforms or initiatives require concerted action and the coordination of many different actors. The current atmosphere underpinned by the enduring leadership struggles does not create a supportive environment for collective action.

The expectation therefore was that a comprehensive PEA on: 1) state of development control, planning and infrastructure development; and 2) comparative status of community governance structures across the major cities in the country with particular focus on their capacity or incapacity for collective action would help shed light on the underlying dynamics of the challenges that are undermining growth, development and prosperity of Malawian cities. The main concern is that up to 75% of the urban dwellers in Malawi live in slums or informal settlements where living conditions remain appalling yet estimates, already glaringly, point to the doubling of the urban population by 2030. In Blantyre, for instance, the population living in unplanned settlements increased from 44% in 1971 to 67% in 1999 while those living in permanent housing areas declined from 39% to 17% over the same period (Manda, 2009). This trend is against a harsh reality that Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC), a vehicle entrusted with the responsibility of providing rent-controlled housing, has been in operation for over fifty years. During this period, the MHC has managed a housing stock that serves less than 20% of the people living in the country's four major cities. The projection is that the country will need about 254, 500 new dwellings by 2020 to meet the current demand for housing. This translates to an average of 21, 000 new houses to be built each year (UN Habitat, 2010). However, despite this grim reality Malawi has neither a policy nor an action plan that is geared toward creating space for the 6.3% of the people that annually leave villages for urban areas (Nkhoma and Jameson, 2014). There is thus currently a lack of solidly instituted structures that allow for urban development, especially issues that address urban poverty.

4. Key Findings of Urban Governance PEA

4.1 Key Stakeholders

The PEA revealed that there are several key stakeholders in these distinct but complementary realms of urban governance. As further demonstrated below, these stakeholders often have competing and conflicting (but at times also mutual) interests that make it very difficult to ensure unity of purpose and direction. A detailed examination of the stakeholders' interests, pattern of interaction and engagement provides a platform for identifying and understanding the political, economic and social processes that shape the underlying dynamics of development control, planning and infrastructure on one hand and the state of community level governance structures on the other in urban areas.

4.1.1 Stakeholders in Development Control, Planning and Infrastructure Development

The stakeholders in this area can be distinguished into several categories as follows: city council officials (political and administrative); politicians (national and local); community leaders (urban chiefs, block leaders, and councillors); members of community level development structures (Ward Committees and Community Development Committees); government departments and ministries (Department of Lands, Physical Planning and Surveys, Malawi Housing Cooperation (MHC) and Ministry of Local Government and

Rural Development); donors (World Bank, UN Habitat for Humanity and European Union; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Malawi Homeless People’s Federation, Centre for Community Organization and Development and Slum Dwellers International); and Community Members. The interests of these stakeholders are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Stakeholders in Development Control, Planning and Infrastructure Development

Stakeholder	Area of Focus and Interest
City council officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some are interested in the professional application of rules and regulations whereas others see it as an opportunity to get land for themselves, friends, relatives or even to profit from it for their selfish interests. • Some are preoccupied with eliminating informal urban settlements which are basically viewed as illegal.
Town planning committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some members are interested in doing their work professionally while others are not. • Cases of unethical behavior from these committees have been widely reported in the media.
Community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most are interested in having jurisdiction over land in their respective areas including giving it out or even selling it. • Most leaders, especially chiefs, argue that the land belongs to them; it was theirs before the cities were proclaimed.
Members of local level structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some are interested in controlling access to land especially for development purposes without being bogged down with bureaucratic processes especially when urban chiefs are involved.
Government departments and ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interested to exercise control over land that fall under their respective jurisdiction for national development. • Some officials are interested in abusing their authority over land for personal gains.
Donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interested in supporting improvements in urban planning processes especially under the aegis of some global initiatives. • Interested in improving the status of unplanned informal settlements including their formal recognition.
NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly interested in improving the welfare of people living in slums. • Often advocate for local councils to legitimize informal urban settlements and provide them with relevant services.
Community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interested in owning land in urban areas through whatever means hence creating considerable pressure on the available land resources.

4.1.2 Key Stakeholders in Community Level Urban Governance

The key stakeholders in this realm include: community members; community leaders (block leaders, chiefs and councillors); members of local level development structures (CDCs and Wards); city council

officials; Non-Governmental Organizations; and (NGOs) and donors. The interests of these stakeholders are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Stakeholders in Community Level Governance

Stakeholder	Area of Focus and Interest
Community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in getting relevant services both tangible and intangible especially from their leaders and local government. Demonstrate varying preference for leadership structures (chiefs versus block leaders).
Community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jostling for recognition for power, authority and legitimacy. Jostling for control over resources especially external resources including land.
Members of local level structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating local level development initiatives. Capturing rents for personal gains associated with local level collective action initiatives.
City council officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting to work with local communities to achieve their goals. Getting to work with communities to satisfy their own personal goals.
NGOs and donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working to support disadvantaged communities especially in unplanned informal settlements. Working to promote their professional goals and sometimes even their own selfish interests.

4.2 Key Issues in Development Control, Planning and Infrastructure Development

There are several issues that have emerged from this PEA exercise that shed light on why things are the way they are in the realm of development control, planning and infrastructure development. Most of the emerging issues are interrelated as it shall be demonstrated in the rest of this section.

4.2.1 Legislative Framework

It is apparent from both the literature and interviews that Malawi has a long history of development control, planning and infrastructure development dating back to the colonial era. During this period, the legislative framework has undergone some alterations and modifications in an attempt to align it with the changing political dispensation but also the emerging development needs. However, the major addition to the legislative portfolio for development control, planning and development has been the introduction of the Local Government Act, 1998. The main distinguishing feature of this Act is that it declares all land in Malawi as planning areas and gives local councils the mandate to promote infrastructural and economic development through the formulation, approval and execution of district development plans as provided for in Section 61c. The Local Government Act also sets out governance structures that should be involved in the areas of development planning, control and infrastructure development.

There is some consensus, however, that even prior to the introduction of the Local Government Act 1998, the legislative framework for development control, planning and infrastructure development was deemed quite adequate. It is actually argued that during the one party regime the legislative framework was properly used as a tool of progressive development that enabled the government to implement its policies and objectives related to settlement planning, land use management and infrastructural development. In fact, Mkula (2014a) argues that the initial high quality infrastructure development of

Lilongwe was made possible because it was heavily guarded politically since any construction required presidential consent.

The major criticism raised against this framework, however, is that it simply inherited almost wholesale physical planning modalities patterned on the western experience whereby urban growth was largely conceived as a product of increase in economic activity and structural changes in the economy (Ozden and Enwere, 2012). The resultant urban planning and management was essentially top-down and largely aimed at modernizing the urban landscape and activities. Consequently, the provision of urban services and facilities was biased in favour of planned areas. The framework is further criticized for entrenching inequalities because it pioneered housing zoning defined on the basis of income levels: low density zones are for the rich and medium density zones are for middle income people, while high level density zones are for low income groups.

Some stakeholders pointed out that the legislative framework in its current form suffers from lack of unity of purpose and direction because it is yet to be harmonized with the Local Government Act. This means that Malawi is governed by two legislative pieces on planning which, however, have substantially different practical implications. This, to a very great extent, underlies the chaos that has characterized urban governance especially since after the transition to democracy in May 1994. The main argument in this regard is that since the transition urban governance and management has not been characterized by a clear vision resulting in it being captured by some selfish interest groups. These Acts have thus failed to provide a coherent framework for managing urban development but on the contrary two frameworks have supported the structured development of urban areas into informal and formal areas.

The Local Government Act is deemed ill-suited for development control, planning and infrastructure development in urban areas because it is biased towards rural districts. The structures articulated in the Local Government Act are actually out of sync with the demands of urban planning and governance. In particular, the argument is that the district development planning system does not properly fit into the urban settings. This therefore leaves a structural void that has made it extremely difficult to effectively facilitate urban level development processes (Kruse and Manda, 2005). This concern was consistently echoed by stakeholders interviewed for this PEA as outlined below:

The Local Government Act is biased towards rural areas; it is not suitable at all for governing urban areas. The Local Government Act was formulated with the rural areas in mind as a result it does not suit very well the structure and needs of city councils (Interview with an official of Blantyre City Council, 23rd September 2015).

The structure of urban governance as provided for by the Local Government Act is irrelevant. The Local Government Act looks at City Councils in the same as District Councils. It always speaks of the District Commissioner shall hence it becomes difficult to apply to the situation in city councils. The problem with the Local Government Act is that it is biased towards District Councils (Interview with an official of Lilongwe City Council, 5th October 2015).

The Local Government Act is silent on how communities should be organized in urban areas but it is quite explicit when it comes to District Councils. The problem is that the Local Government Act was formulated with the bias of serving rural areas (Interview with an official of Zomba District Council, 2nd October 2015).

The irrelevance of the Local Government Act as a legislative framework for guiding urban governance has been further exacerbated by the way in which the decentralization policy reforms have been implemented. The decentralization policy reforms have not been consistently implemented. Malawi was without elected local governments between 2005 and 2014 which undermined the potential development of democratic culture particularly participatory planning. This is the case because the ability of a community to pursue transparent and accountable goals largely depends on the extent to which local governance structures such as Community Development Committees are actually institutionalized and engaged in decision making processes (Rodriguez-Pose and Tijmstra, 2005). The passiveness of local governance structures in development processes is a threat to achieving ethos of democratic community organization. The message is that the democratic culture and tradition cannot be legislated in abstract. Moreover, while rural districts are allocated millions of kwachas for development projects, the cities and towns tend to get meager allocations not commensurate with the increasing urban growth.

4.2.2 Political Interference in Urban Governance

The popular view is that the transition to democracy in May 1994 was mismanaged to the extent that it opened up the development control, planning and infrastructure function to undue political interference. To put this particular challenge into perspective, one of the stakeholders interviewed argued that “the mismanagement of the political transition paved the way for excessive political interference into development planning, control and community organization especially those relating to implementation of development plans and control in informal political settlements”. Consequently, excessive political interference in this realm has had two main consequences with far reaching implications for development control, planning and infrastructure development. The tendency for politicians to override the decisions of technocrats has undermined the culture and respect of rule of law as well as promoted corrupt tendencies on the part of the technocrats that are entrusted with these responsibilities. One of the stakeholders argued that ultimately, the excessive political interference has forced the majority of well-meaning city council officials to quietly disengage from discharging their duties creating more or less a culture of anarchy. In the words of one of the official interviewed at Zomba City Council “there is lack of respect for the rule of law by both government and the people hence we cannot expect council plans to be respected by the people as there is a deliberate disregard for the rule of law often sanctioned by high level politicians”. Often, the disregard for the urban laws is because those that are disregarding the laws benefit directly from the informalities and illegalities that are created. Such benefits occur at various levels of the urban societal structures from the poor to the rich, the powerless to the powerful.

The experiences of one of the city council officials interviewed in Lilongwe as presented in Box 1 below captures very well how excessive political interference has undermined the development control, planning and infrastructure development function. This narrative demonstrates unequivocally the vital role of political will to creating order, predictability and consistency.

Box 1: Dynamics and Consequences of Excessive Political Interference in Urban Governance

It is not a secret that now people in Area 18 and Gulliver build without plans. I once authorized that such people stop construction and even went to the extent of seizing their equipment. Following this, these people came to my office and after a discussion we agreed that they submit their building plans to the city for approval. However, what was disturbing was that the following morning, we were invited to Capital Hill and we were told to return all the building equipment that we seized from the developers in Area 18 and Gulliver. I tried to explain to them that we had amicably agreed with the people that they submit

building plans but I was asked a political question: how can you say you have amicably agreed when you have seized someone equipment? This is how the people build in Area 18 and Gulliver. However, the more interesting case is that of Dubai where we tried to enforce adherence to city planning to the letter but this was undermined by politicians. When former President Muluzi went there to address a meeting, some politicians were bold enough to openly advise the people to stone city officials should they dare come to enforce city planning standards. There was nothing that the city council could do after this and unfortunately, it spelt out the end of planning enforcement in this area.

Source: Fieldwork, September 2015

The unethical behavior resulting from political interference has led to a situation in which Malawians has a decreased sense of obligation to formally apply for and get planning permits, and to apply for proper land titles and building permits (Kawonga, 1999; Mkula, 2014b). Broadly speaking, therefore, a d hoc planning, corruption and allocation of land through corrupt means has watered down the planning profession's integrity. There are several consequences of the entrenched unethical behavior in the country's planning processes of urban areas. It has invariably led to the explosion of unplanned settlements whereby people have invaded road reserves, stream reserves, streets for vending, and open spaces claiming they needed land for housing. According to Mkula (2014a), this suggests that the planning system has not been very helpful to the poor and weak and that the planning system and plot acquisition process was expensive and that the poor were not benefiting from the delay and corruption in the system even when land was available. Consequently, the corrupt tendencies have added the costs to national development as well as hurting the poor who cannot afford the high costs associated with the acts and practices of corruption, bribery, influence peddling, fraud and extortion by physical planners and their connivers (Chimwanza, 2010; Nkhoma and Jameson, 2014).

A further consequence of the entrenchment of unethical behavior in the planning processes is the apparent failure to implement design standards of development proposals submitted and approved by city councils due to lack of professional construction supervision. This has led to the construction of buildings that are sub-standard and which are a huge public safety risk. There have been several cases in which public buildings have collapsed resulting in loss of life. An example that is often cited is that of KIPS restaurant situated in the heart of Blantyre where four people were killed and twenty were severely injured. Some of the common causes of building collapse include bad design, use of sub-standard materials and equipment, faulty construction, foundation failure, use of unqualified contractors and poor project monitoring coupled with lack of enforcement of building coded and economic pressures.

4.2.3 Limited Financial Capacity of City Councils

The failure of city councils to effectively discharge their responsibility in the realm of development control, planning and infrastructure development was also partly attributed to their characteristically weak financial bases. While the Local Government Act outlines a wide range of financial sources for councils, the central government has generally been reluctant to allow them to exercise full jurisdiction of most of these (Chinsinga, 2005; Chiweza, 2007). This, therefore, makes it extremely difficult for the local governments to broaden and deepen their financial bases. The city councils do complement their financial resources with central government fiscal transfers but these have routinely been irregular and highly variable which makes it very difficult for the city councils to discharge their functions effectively. Yet effective and sustainable decentralised governance of urban areas is premised on the assumption that local authorities will generate adequate resources to provide social services.

From the interviews with various city council officials, it is very clear that their weak financial bases have greatly undermined their capacity to effectively carry out the development control, planning and infrastructure development function. It, however, appears that the problem of weak financial bases for city councils is not a straight forward one. The UN Habitat (2011), for instance, attributes it to high default rates on payment of various forms of city rates, inadequate capacity, lack of transparency and corruption, an inadequate property database, and a billing system that depends on unreliable software. It is also a manifestation of the negative impact of excessive political interference in the city councils' planning activities. It is almost impossible to expect city councils to collect city rates in areas where people are constructing illegally with support of high level politicians. In some areas, the difficulties for city councils to raise revenues to which they are entitled, is largely a consequence of incomplete development processes. For city councils to have complete or uncontested authority over land designated as an integral part of the city there is need for the people living in these areas to be properly compensated.

The major finding of this exercise in this regard is that the areas are often brought under the cities' jurisdictions without first completing all the requisite formalities. This does not, therefore, completely transfer the land into uncontested cities' ownership. As long as this state of affairs prevails, the ability of city councils to enforce the payment of city rates and related revenues remains limited so too its authority to administer the land according to the laid down rules and regulations. According to one of the city council officials interviewed, there is conflict between urban chiefs and city councils especially in unplanned areas. For instance, it was observed that in Mzuzu city council "local chiefs lead the people in blocking assessments of property for determination of city rates arguing that they are not supposed to pay city rates because they own the land as they are yet to be compensated as well as the failure by the city to provide them with essential social services". This, therefore, gives rise to competing parallel authorities of land allocation between city council officials and urban chiefs. The following sentiments of city council officials across the country indicate the extent to which financial constraints contribute to their inability to exercise full authority over the development control, planning and infrastructure development function.

The main objective of development planning and control is orderly development and creation of well-planned settlements. This can only be possible if development control rangers move around and report about illegal developments but we are constrained by the fact that the city council is not collecting enough revenue as most of the people are not paying city rates, especially in informal settlements (Interview with an official of Mzuzu City Council, 5th October 2015).

As a council, we face serious problems with financial and human resources to implement policies such as development control and infrastructure development. The point is that we do not often have adequate resources to monitor illegal developments. With this particular problem, we cannot frequently conduct patrols to detect and deal with illegal developments appropriately (Interview with an official of Blantyre City Council, 23rd September, 2015).

Let me tell you, effective implementation of development control, planning and infrastructure development requires a great deal of resources which we do not have. For instance, smooth implementation of plans requires that individuals living on customary land be compensated before it can be put to alternative uses. The council is failing to compensate individuals living on acquired customary land coupled with the fact that the council does not have financial and human resources to police illegal developments and effect strict

compliance with its development plans (Interview with an official of Zomba City Council, 3rd October 2015).

We face serious shortages of resources for us to implement the development control, planning and infrastructure development function. For example, we only have one functioning vehicle which we cannot use for policing illegal developments on a regular basis. The council has plans for the city but implementation is a problem. We have plans for a number of areas but the people in those areas have not been compensated. In Area 23 and 25, for example, the city allocated land to people but this was overridden by the chiefs because they still regard it as their land in the absence of compensation (Interview with an official of Lilongwe City Council, 5th October 2015).

There is, however, some positive evidence to suggest that city councils have huge potential to preside over a dramatic turnaround in their revenue mobilization and collection efforts to enable them operate effectively and sustainably. This would be possible if there is a spring well of political will to support city councils to strengthen their management processes and insulate them from undue political influence. The Mzuzu City Council, for instance, with support of its Mayor implemented the Revenue Mobilization Programme that enabled it to increase its financial base within a very short period of time, the collection of revenue improving from MK 150 to MK 220 million within a period of six months. The political figures led the way in paying what they owed the city which inspired many others to do the same. The argument is that the cities revenue mobilization and collection drives do not often succeed because significant political figures are often in the forefront evading these payments. This, therefore, incentivizes a large majority of the city residents to also default on their obligation to honour a wide range of payments to their respective cities.

4.2.3 Multiple and Competing Jurisdictions of Authority

The efforts of city councils to preside over the development control, planning and infrastructure development function is greatly undermined by the existence of multiple jurisdictions of authority over land. This is over and above the fact that the Town and Country Planning Act and the Local Government Act are not yet harmonized to provide unity of purpose and direction. As a result, the administration of land in urban areas in the country is subjected to legal pluralism that presents considerable challenges for city councils to carry out this particular function effectively.

The PEA has established that the main source of competing authority to city councils over land is traditional leaders who still exist in urban areas, albeit without legal backing. Although the Chief's Act proscribes traditional leaders from exercising any authority over land in cities, this practice persists mainly due to the incompleteness of urban development processes. The Town and Planning Act also does not recognize traditional authorities in designated planning areas. The issue, as intimated earlier, is that traditional leaders still exercise some residual authority over land because they are yet to be compensated even though their areas have been officially designated as part and parcel of cities. This is why in an interview, a Mzuzu City Council official observed that "people are still buying land from chiefs in Dunduzu though the land has been acquired by the council". According to Kanyongolo (2015), the paradox is that the country's courts have strengthened traditional leaders' grip on authority vis a vis urban land in some of the judgments that have been made which clearly goes against the spirit of section 3(5) of the Chief's Act which prohibits Chiefs from exercising jurisdiction within cities, municipalities or towns without the written approval of the appropriate council established under the Local Government (Urban Areas) Act and section 6 of the Local Government Act vests jurisdiction of areas within a district, or township to a Local Council designated under the Act. These rulings effectively endorsed the purported

power of traditional authorities to administer land in urban areas despite the fact that statute law vests such powers in a number of formal authorities, including the central and local government authorities.

The major consequence of the incompleteness of the urban development processes has been the emergence of what is referred to the neo-customary land practice (Chome and Mc Call, 2003). This has been particularly reinforced by the increasing demand for land for housing especially in the city boundaries. Majawa (2004) argues that the neo-customary land practice has greatly accelerated the sale of land especially in the city boundaries and the explosion of unplanned settlements within city limits. The point is that high poverty levels and high prices of serviced land is driving a lot of people into the neo-customary land market and informal settlements. The main concern is that the neo-customary land practice is getting institutionalized and entrenched with far reaching consequences for development control, planning and infrastructure development for cities. An interesting discovery in the evolution of customary land practices according to Durand (2003) is that customary land has been effectively turned into a market commodity which was not the case in typical traditions and modern land transfer system. While chiefs may not be directly involved in the land transactions in urban areas, they are nonetheless quite pivotal to the exchange process as they do legitimize it. The argument is that although informal registration does not carry the equivalent legal weight to formal registration, the perception of tenure security in the non-titled settlement is as strong possibly approaching the potency of the principle of legitimacy found in good governance, a belief that a group social institution will defend claims to land (Majawa, 2004).

The existence of these parallel sources of authority makes it difficult for planning committees to oversee the observance of building codes and standards within the city boundaries leading to the uncontrollable explosion of unplanned settlements. This becomes inevitable because in the absence of concerted efforts for city authorities to enforce building codes and standards, developers' carryout projects as they please since land is treated as private. The challenge in this setting is that although chiefs have *de facto* authority to oversee land transactions in the settlements, they have very insignificant control over resulting developments. According to Majawa (2004), most such land is initially bought for residential uses. However, overtime, other commercial activities such as shops, garages, workshops, salons etc spring up in a haphazard manner and not in accordance with development plans. In this context, development control is almost impossible since the developers do not recognize the bonafide authority of the city councils.

The situation is further complicated by some stakeholders owning vast tracts of land within city boundaries which makes urban planning difficult. This challenge is aptly exemplified by the case of Blantyre City Council where 40% of the land is freehold belonging to companies such as Lonhro, Malawi Railways, Mandala and some absentee land lords. It is estimated that about 39% of land in the city has been subjected to illegal occupation or encroachment while 21% is owned by Malawi Housing Corporation (Chirwa, 2005). The processes of sanitizing the urban planning processes are challenged by competing philosophies between the city councils and their partners such as the UN-Habitat for Humanity and CCODE. They both work with both formal and informal settlements in slum upgrading programmes yet our cities do not recognize urban informal settlements (Kedogo et al., 2010). The main concern is that CCODE, as a key non-state player in urban planning and development, prefers working with traditional leaders which the cities demonizes as contributing to, and worsening the challenges that they are facing in as far as the development control, planning and infrastructure function is concerned. The sentiments of a CCODE official are quite revealing in this regard: "in our work, chiefs are our primary stakeholders; we have learnt it a hard way, if you do not work with chiefs, they can sabotage development and the project cannot be effectively implemented". She further pointed out that "the problem with elected leaders

(MPs, Councillors) is that they serve their own interests and you cannot depend on them especially since they are only there for a short period yet our interventions require established authorities such as chiefs”.

4.3 Structures for Social Organization and Community Development in Urban Areas

4.3.1 A Brief Overview and Status

The question of structures for social organization and community development in urban areas is not a straight forward matter. The PEA revealed that it is quite complex given the changes that have been taking place since the attainment of independence in July 1964. These changes have created some kind of instability in the governance structures that are meant to facilitate social life in urban areas on a day to day basis as well as community level development efforts. There have been two prolonged periods during which Malawi has had no elected local governments since the transition to democracy in May 1994. Elected local governments did not exist between 1994 and 2000 and 2005 and 2014. The vacuum created by the absence of elected local governments created a favourable atmosphere for traditional leaders to entrench themselves as a principal locus of social organization and community development in urban areas (Kayuni and Tambulasi, 2007). This was, of course, against the backdrop that the Chiefs’ Act does not recognize the existence of traditional leaders in urban areas. The vacuum created by the absence of elected urban local governments allowed traditional leaders to consolidate their power, influence and authority reinforced by the incompleteness of urban development processes that do not allow city councils to exercise unfettered authority over all areas under their respective jurisdictions when former claimants to the land under customary tenure of ownership have not been fully compensated. These incomplete processes have resulted in the creation of villages within Malawian cities where residents are subjected to parallel and competing forms of authority (Englund, 2002).

4.3.2 Structures of Social and Community Organization

The discussion about the structures of social and community organization in urban areas elicits different answers from different stakeholders. Nonetheless, out of these differing answers, some consensus does emerge not in terms of what the structures are but rather in terms of what they ought to be. This caveat was consistently made among all city council officials interviewed across the four cities in the country.

The consensus is that when city councils are constituted, urban communities are supposed to be governed by city governments anchored at the community level through a structure that would involve block leaders, councillors, community development committees (CDCs) and ward committees. In this set up, communities are divided into blocks, each with an elected leader to serve as such for two years; each councillor would constitute a ward committee; and ward committees would, in turn, constitute CDCs under the chairmanship of an elected community member. While councillors would interface with communities in their respective areas through ward committees, the CDCs would bring together ward committees in a constituency and serve as a mechanism for interfacing with city councils for service delivery and civic engagement. The councillors are, therefore, an integral part of this set up.

The accuracy of this account is, of course, doubtful especially since it has been pieced together on the basis of insights drawn from a wide range of stakeholders, each with their own interests. This should, however, not be surprising especially on the basis of concerns raised by most city council officials interviewed across the country. They argued that the Local Government Act in its current shape is highly biased in favour of facilitating social organization and community development in rural areas. The urban areas do not have an equivalent of the district development planning system that elaborates how collective action initiatives would be carried out. The impression arising out of this PEA exercise is that community development efforts in urban areas are highly on a trial and error basis. The district

development planning system is quite elaborate in terms of how development efforts are facilitated in rural areas which provides a sense of unity purpose and direction among the myriad stakeholders engaged in rural development processes.

The absence of formally articulated and sanctioned development planning framework in urban areas is creating challenges that have been worsened by the attempts to annul the existence of traditional leaders in urban areas following the reconstitution of elected urban local governments after the May 2014 elections. Some of the key challenges include the absence of guidance on the boundaries of blocks; terms of reference of block leaders; boundaries of CDCs as well as their terms of reference; and the roles of councillors in this particular set-up. To put these challenges in perspective, one of the city council officials interviewed observed that “we are supposed to have block leaders but we have not yet agreed on the units or boundaries of the blocks which simply reinforces the fact that the structure of urban governance is not clear”. There is even a more profound problem relating to the election of block leaders. Block leaders have existed since the days of the one party state and the challenge is that the incumbents have appropriated these positions with a sense of permanence. The key obstacle is that these positions are highly politicized to the extent that each successive government has installed their own block leaders. The complexity comes in because according to several city council officials interviewed “the block leaders do not effectively displace each other; they simply accommodate each other resulting in the creation of a hierarchy comprising block leaders, group block leaders and senior block leaders, a hierarchy modeled upon the structure of chieftaincy in rural Malawi”.

4.3.3 Urban Chiefs, Social and Community Organization

The role of urban chiefs was specifically highlighted in relation to the proclamation of the former Minister for Local Government and Rural Development to bring to an end their reign which is in line with the provisions of the Local Government Act. This proclamation triggered a wave of protests by the urban chiefs which included some of them taking the matter to court. These chiefs were granted an injunction pending judicial review of the ministerial proclamation, but perhaps more importantly, the President distanced himself from this decision. This saga, therefore, effectively calls into question the supremacy of the rule of law especially since the Local Government Act is quite unequivocal in stating that chiefs should not be recognized in as far as social life and community organization are concerned in urban areas.

The PEA revealed that there is a love-hate relationship with urban chiefs so much that their total disappearance would not auger well with certain sections of urban communities. Moreover, the incumbents themselves would not readily accept their dissolution. These positions provide the incumbents with various streams of rents and benefits that enable them to earn a livelihood (Chinsinga, 2006). Most of the urban chiefs interviewed including several city council officials argued that ending urban chieftaincies would be very ungrateful on the part of the political establishment because in the absence of elected urban local governments, the urban chiefs performed various critical functions that kept the urban governance machinery or apparatus going. In fact, one of the officials interviewed at Mzuzu City Council contended that “the announcement by the government that chiefs do not have authority to operate in urban areas was wrong because chiefs play a key role especially in informal settlements”.

The main critical functions that urban chiefs play relate to social and cultural aspects of existence, particularly funerals. The argument is that without urban chiefs there would be total chaos in most areas since most of the cemeteries in urban areas are controlled by traditional leaders due to the incomplete processes of urban development. For this reason, most of the chiefs as well as city council officials felt that the decision to ban urban chiefs was premature. In their view, it did not take into account the critical

social and cultural roles that the traditional leaders play that have been at the heart of order, stability and social harmony that have prevailed in these urban areas. The other critical social and cultural functions that these urban chiefs play include: 1) organizing community members to carry out collective community work, a task that was consistently described as challenging for councillors; and 2) resolving a wide range of conflicts relating to land boundaries, family problems and various forms of social disputes in their respective neighbourhoods. In fact, one of the urban chiefs interviewed described themselves as “organizers of community peace because we live with the people and know how they behave”.

Observations made by some of the chiefs in relation to the government’s proclamation that chiefs should be banned in urban areas are quite interesting. While sympathizing with the government’s decision, these chiefs argued that the remedy was not to issue a blanket ban but they should have rather taken some time to study the social and cultural significance of the institution of chieftaincy in urban settings. The underlying argument is that the ban should have, according to Chief Misesa of Blantyre, spelt out “what roles urban chiefs can play and which ones they cannot play”. This observation was made in the context of the roles that chiefs consider as sacrosanct and cannot therefore be delegated to somebody else as reflected in the following sentiments:

When you talk about culture particularly funeral rites that is our privileged domain! We are the only ones who can sanction the opening of graveyards. It is impossible for an ordinary person to preside over this function. It is culturally forbidden and even democracy cannot prevail over this (Interview with Chief Masasa, Blantyre, 9th October 2015).

The responsibility or should I say roles of councillors and chiefs are totally different. Councillors are expected to assume a leading role in developmental activities whereas chiefs’ roles are to maintain social harmony in a community, helping people and settling disputes. The role of chiefs is even more significant during funerals. Nobody has powers to preside over funeral ceremonies if not sanctioned by a chief. Nobody can sanction the opening of a graveyard but a chief. In short, the role of a chief is to hold a community together (Interview with Chief Chikanda, Zomba, 2nd October 2015).

By wanting to end urban chieftaincies, the government has demonstrated its ignorance about the role chiefs play in social organization in urban areas. Without chiefs, there is no social harmony. We should have understood if their goal was to distribute responsibilities in a more definitive way among various leadership structures at the local level. This is why, as chiefs, we decided to seek court intervention as we have always been an integral part of social organization in urban areas since the days of the one party regime (Chief Kazembe, Zomba, 2nd October 2015).

An interesting development reported especially in interviews with Mzuzu City Council officials is that some of the urban chiefs are mutating into block leaders which is the preferred leadership structure to replace chiefs in urban areas. The picture emerging from the PEA exercise is that the decision to annul urban chieftaincies has delayed the elections for block leaders across the board although in some areas they were elected before the ministerial proclamation was formally challenged in court. In an interview, one of the Mzuzu City Council officials observed that “those who were elected as block leaders were essentially the very same people who have been serving as urban chiefs”. The conclusion by some city council officials is that block leaders are as good as urban chiefs; there is nothing that has changed in terms of their substantive functions except for the name. The paradox is that even in those areas where city councils have successfully installed block leaders; the council officials are still turning to chiefs to assist them with community mobilization. One of the former urban chiefs actually observed that

“although they have deposed us they are still turning to us for help to enable them (city council officials) to undertake their work”.

4.3.4 Leadership Paralysis and Collective Action in Urban Areas

The PEA exercise revealed that the ministerial proclamation to do away with urban chiefs has triggered an unending leadership battle between alternative leadership structures at the community level in urban areas. The resultant paralysis has created a less favourable atmosphere for collective action initiatives at the community level to thrive in the country’s urban localities. Councillors, chiefs and block leaders are reportedly jostling for recognition, power, influence and authority which has brought community development activities to a virtual standstill.

The consequences of the leadership paralysis are manifested in several different ways. In most areas, CDCs are yet to be constituted. A councillor interviewed in Lilongwe, for instance, indicated that “elections for CDCs were postponed waiting for a letter from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development following the dispute between chiefs and block leaders”. Block leaders are yet to be elected in several areas and where they have been elected communities are engulfed in tension since there are sharp divisions between those who support the transition to block leaders and those who support the retention of the status quo. The situation is complicated further because councillors are also trying hard to insert themselves in an already tense political landscape in their widely cherished role as primary drivers of local level development.

The interview with Chief Chikanda in Zomba perhaps puts these matters into proper perspective. Her sentiments were re-echoed by almost all the urban chiefs that were interviewed for this PEA exercise. She argued that the prevailing dispensation was not favourable at all to successful collective action efforts as reflected in the following sentiments:

People are not working together here. This does not happen (sic). I just hear about development; this is not happening here. There is simply chaos here. The chaos is simply too much for people to work together. We are too divided to work together. The chief is working with her Indunas; the block leader is working with CDC; and the councillor is working with her ward committee.

These developments have sharply divided the people in various urban communities across the country so much that it is almost impossible to facilitate collective action initiatives. In Lilongwe, for instance, supporters for urban chiefs and block leaders engaged in running battles that resulted in several people getting injured. This basically means that it is impossible for communities to come together and deal with collective action initiatives that would lead to the production of public goods that are critical to spearheading sustainable socio-economic advances in urban areas. The sentiments of councillors across the country are quite illustrative of the challenges that the ongoing leadership paralysis poses for collective action efforts.

People here are heavily divided. Some are for chiefs, some are for block leaders. This division has created big challenges for us councillors to mobilize the people for civic engagement and development activities. It is extremely difficult for these two factions to come together for meaningful engagement in relation to collective development pursuits. The most demoralizing thing is that the city council officials are yet to intervene. As such, we are simply looking up to the government to provide a lasting solution (Interview with Chinsapo Ward Councillor, 5th October 2015).

It is important that the government must end the tension that it has created in the local level urban governance structures. As of now, we councillors do not know who we should work with; block leaders or chiefs. There is total mess at the moment because everyone is doing what they want. There are serious leadership problems. It appears that there are disagreements between the city councils and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development on how exactly to end this paralysis (Interview with a Kazembe Ward Councillor, 2nd October 2015).

There is simply a gridlock. This is making us councillors to appear as if we are failures because we cannot simply discharge our duties effectively in the context of this paralysis. What is really important is for the city council to advise us with a sense of certainty on the way forward. We, councillors, cannot choose on our own to work either with the chiefs or the block leaders (Interview with Zolozolo Ward Councillor, 23rd September 2015).

There is actually great deal of bitterness among the various leaders at the local level in rural areas that substantially undermines the prospects for viable collective action initiatives as long as this paralysis remains unresolved. It is almost impossible to accurately characterize the nature of the bitterness that pervades the local level leadership structures in urban areas. The following sentiments from councillors and chiefs interviewed for this PEA exercise at least put into proper perspective this bitterness that has the potential to ruin altogether the possibility of viable collective action initiatives in urban areas.

The problem is that government wants to end urban chiefs but what they are forgetting is that the city found us here. If they want to install block leaders, they should do that in their villages and not here. What they are doing is deliberately provoking xenophobia. Does the Queen of England reign in the city or the village? This shows that even advanced countries do respect their chiefs (Interview with Chief Masasa, Blantyre, 9th October 2015).

People here like me very much but the problem is the chiefs. They think that I am the one who instigated the government to issue the proclamation ending urban chiefs. This cannot be true. People who are paying city rates cannot be governed by chiefs (Interview with Chinsapo Ward Councillor, 5th October 2015).

The councillors are the ones who are leading assisted by their ward committees. The councillors are supposed to work closely with block leaders but these block leaders do not have the clout that we, the rejected stones, have. We are therefore not surprised that when councillors and block leaders call for meetings, people do not come. They are used to getting instructions from us chiefs. Consequently, there is no any development work that is taking place in this area. It is a very big mistake; it is a very big mistake I repeat to play with chiefs (Interview with Chief Kazembe, Zomba, 2nd October 2015).

The government's proclamation to end urban chiefs was well received here. I was not surprised that this proclamation was well received because chiefs are a very big problem. Most of the chiefs indulge in extortionary practices charging exorbitantly for almost every service that they render. Imagine, they charge MK3000 to sanction access to the graveyard. In fact, every service they render attracts some kind of payment. Moreover, most of them are engaged in the illegal sale of land which creates unnecessary conflict (Interview with Zolozolo Ward Councilor, 23rd September 2015).

The PEA further established that the local level structures in urban areas are almost always subjected to a great deal of politicization. This, therefore, implies that there are always some challenges associated with collective action initiatives at the local level in urban areas. The main challenge, as further illustrated in the sentiments below, is that the party at the helm of government would want to gain control of these structures for their own political gains. There is a belief that controlling these structures provides parties with a solid platform for either maintaining or wrestling power. The degree to which a party dominates these local level structures is widely regarded as the barometer of its popularity.

Initially, I thought the election of CDCs is a simple thing. I was totally wrong. High level politicians were involved in the simple exercise of electing CDCs. Councillors also elected their own people. In most cases, CDC elections were postponed and people chased away. In this context, it is very difficult for a technician like me to do the right thing...you risk losing your job. You can go to court but they would rather pay you damages than bring you back to work (Interview with an official of Lilongwe City Council, 5th October 2015).

Here, we do not know where our councillor is. The councillor is working on his own with his CDC. When he was elected, the councillor disbanded the then CDC electing his own that is dominated almost exclusively by well-known DPP loyalists. I, therefore, doubt very much whether practices of this nature would facilitate a supportive environment for collective action initiatives (Interview with Chief Chikanda, 2nd October 2015).

The prevailing tense situation in urban communities aggravated by the government's proclamation to end urban chieftaincies has created a less favourable environment for viable collective action initiatives. It is almost impossible to organize community level meetings in most areas; there are reportedly signs of lawlessness in some areas due to leadership vacuum in most areas; and local level development initiatives that were well under way have almost grinded to a halt. Most stakeholders argue that the key to dealing with the current leadership paralysis at the local level in urban areas lies with the government. Thus as long as the government does not step in with some decisive action, the current situation is bound to continue.

One of the city council officials interviewed actually argued that "the challenge is that the government started off a problem but it is not willing to address it in order to provide some proper direction...the government has created some mess but it does not want to mop up the mess". In the long-term, however, several city council officials argued that there is need to clearly spell out the structures for social organization and community development in urban areas properly backed up with the force of the law. There is thus need to develop the urban development planning system patterned along the lines of the district development planning system. However, for these changes to stick, there would be need for political will coupled with extensive civic education about these changes in urban areas. It would, nonetheless, be worth pointing out that at the time of the fieldwork for this PEA exercise, Zomba City Council was dealing with a proposal about a new look development coordinating structure that brings together chiefs, block leaders and councillors. They had, however, not yet worked out its operational modalities.

Extremely weak in relation to aggregation and articulation of civic voices are townhall meetings and other civic fora in the urban areas. Partly as a result of the dominance of the informal structures and institutions, and partly also due to the general weaknesses in the formal structures, the civic space for active citizenry in the urban areas in Malawi is also weak. Townhall meetings and other public fora operate more of ad hoc informal processes than as formal fora. This limits citizen participation in urban affairs. Such a development undermines accountability and transparency in the ways urban authorities

and government officials handle urban matters. It also contributes to, or reflects, the “powerlessness” of the urban citizenry.

Equally absent, in most cases, are the formal rules governing the relationship and interaction between the corporate world (private sector) and the urban citizenry in Malawi. For example, most social services deliverers in Malawi have no signed Citizen Charters with the urban residents and their representative bodies. Similarly, there are very few cases of formal social corporate responsibility memoranda of understanding or charters between private sector companies and the urban citizenry. These issues, critical to urban governance, are generally regarded to be less important to both sides. It may reflect the limited understanding of the importance of these issues on the part of both the urban citizens and the services providers or the private sector.

5. Past, Present and Future Interventions

This section examines the initiatives that have either been completed or are ongoing designed to deal with challenges in urban governance related to development control, planning and infrastructure development as well as community level governance structures for collective action in urban areas. It also puts forward some proposals for initiatives that can be considered for implementation to address various aspects of these challenges. It is, however, important to note that in most cases stakeholders interviewed indicated that interventions by city planners for upgrading informal settlements have been met by open hostility from traditional leaders, residents and often with some backing from top level politicians.

5.1 Completed or Ongoing Interventions

The review of the state of urban governance and management revealed that there are not many initiatives that have been carried out to deal with these challenges. In fact, there is no initiative that was specifically designed to deal with community level governance structures for collective action in urban areas. All the initiatives that were identified relate to efforts to deal with the development control, planning and infrastructure development challenge. The initiatives that were identified included the following.

5.1.1 The World Bank Urban Project

The World Bank Urban Project was implemented in Kameza and Chimwankhunda in 1987. Its main purpose was to reorient future housing development toward a market-based system by almost tripling the availability of mortgage finance, introducing a new affordable standard of permanent housing, and restructuring key institutions to play a more dynamic role in land and housing development. It was implemented by the Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) on a full cost-recovery approach. However, the project failed to achieve its objectives as it was unaffordable to the target group and lacked political will. The World Bank also collaborated with Blantyre City Council in 1994 to upgrade the access roads in Ndirande-Malabada in Blantyre but this project likewise did not register much success because of limited political support. The political cadres were reluctant to support the implementation of the project the way it had been designed for fear of political repercussions as it required that some of the property developed without following the planning regulations should be destroyed and without any compensation. Senior politicians were reluctant to sanction this because Ndirande-Malabada is considered to be politically volatile hence any activity that appears to antagonize it is deemed threatening to the political establishment.

5.1.2 The UN-Habitat Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme

Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) is a joint effort of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states, the European Commission (EC) and UN-Habitat, which aims at addressing the challenge of slums through identifying adequate funding to carry out upgrading activities. PSUP strengthens the capacity of local, central and regional institutions and key stakeholders in slum improvement through use of good governance and management approaches, pilot projects and policy development. PSUP is also involved in the implementation of institutional, legislative, financial and normative framework.

PSUP is based on the recognition that slum upgrading is an important strategy for improving living conditions of the urban poor and contributing to the social, economic and environmental sustainability. It seeks to encourage an inclusive environment and empowerment of communities of slum dwellers based on the following principles: 1) inclusive and rights based policies; 2) participatory approach to slum upgrading; 3) no unlawful, forced evictions of slum dwellers; 4) targeted funding to community-led development interventions; 5) implementation of programmes based on good governance principles of transparency, accountability and decentralization; 6) mobilization of local, national and international resources for slum upgrading; and 7) national budget allocations and co-financing of PSUP pilot projects.

The overriding objective of the PSUP is to improve the lives of slum dwellers by addressing the five deprivations that characterize a slum, namely: inadequate water, sanitation, durability of housing, overcrowding, and tenure insecurity. PSUP is implemented under three phases namely: (1) participatory urban profiling; 2) participatory action planning and programme formulation; 3) Participatory pilot project implementation. The first phase has been completed leading to the production of city profiles for Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba. The concern, however, is whether given the challenges outlined above, the relevant authorities would be in a position to ensure that the aspirations embodied in these profiles are implemented accordingly.

5.1.3 Community-Based Savings and Credit Schemes

Community-based savings and credit schemes started operating in the urban areas to fill the gap of scarcity of housing finance from the mid-1990s. It was mainly championed by the NGOs such as Habitat for Humanity (HFH) and Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE), which is in alliance with Malawi Homeless People's Federation (MHPF).

CCODE through the Malawi Homeless People's Federation supports slum and informal communities across Malawi to improve their housing, water, sanitation and infrastructure needs and rights. MHPF has supported the creation of savings schemes throughout Malawi's slum communities such as Kanjedza in Blantyre, Area 49 in Lilongwe, Kasungu and Mzuzu. The initial source of fund capital was the Mchenga Fund, a community saving scheme for the members. Members of MFPF get a building material loan from the fund at 12% interest rate payable up to 8 years.

Since its establishment, CCODE has built more than 600 houses in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Mzuzu (Thompson, 2009). MFPF gets its land from the city councils and land tenure is held by Federation instead of the individuals. The land is serviced by CCODE. Habitat for Humanity Malawi has built 3,027 low cost housing in 461 communities in Malawi such as South Lunzu in Blantyre and Area 49 sector 6 in Lilongwe. HFH operates as a community housing revolving fund for its members. Members get a full house material loan amounting to USD 3690.00 payable in 8 years (UN Habitat, 2010).

5.2 Proposed Interventions

There are several interventions or projects that could be developed on the basis of the findings of the PEA to deal with the twin challenges arising out of the contemporary state of urban governance. Proposed areas include:

- Legislative overhaul of the development control, planning and infrastructure development function by harmonizing the existing legislative instruments. There is need to harmonize the Town and Country Planning Act 1988 and Local Government Act 1998. These Acts have to be harmonized in order to ensure unity of purpose and direction in as far as development control, planning and infrastructure development is concerned. A key issue to be addressed is the absence of an elaborate institutional framework for facilitating urban development processes. While the Local Government is quite elaborate in terms of providing strategic guidance for development processes in rural areas, it is virtually silent about the same in urban areas. The clarity with respect to rural development processes is underlined by the existence of an elaborate institutional framework for development activities at the local level that is referred to as the district development planning system. This is not the case for urban local governments which makes it extremely difficult for them to exercise their authority with respect to development control, planning and infrastructure development especially in a changing political context. A project could, therefore, be developed that could lobby for the harmonization of the Town and Country Planning Act and the development of an elaborate development planning system just as is the case with district councils.
- The community level structures for collective action in urban areas are in a complete state of flux. Interventions could be developed that could address this particular challenge especially in the current context of leadership paralysis. There is need to work out an appropriate institutional framework for community level governance in urban areas. Several issues lack clarity which creates a high degree of fluidity leading to lack of unity of purpose and direction. Some of the key issues lack clarity include: 1) the roles of key stakeholders in community level governance such as councillors, chiefs and block leaders; 2) the roles of ward committees and Community Development Committees (CDCs); 3) the boundaries of blocks as a basic unit of urban governance as well as the boundaries of CDCs; 4) the tenure of office and the election modalities of block leaders; and 5) it is not yet settled whether to abolish or maintain urban chiefs. The PEA reveals a fundamental dilemma in relation to urban chiefs particularly in the context of unfinished urban development processes. The issue here is that certain areas are declared urban areas without the former occupants under the customary land tenure arrangements being fully compensated. This confers powers on the chiefs to continue exercising their authority in these so called urban areas. The main issue, however, is that there are certain socio-cultural functions in these areas which only the urban chiefs can legitimately perform. This makes interventions looking at the institutional framework for community level governance in urban areas imperative. There is need to develop an institutional framework that identifies key stakeholders and their roles including how they can effectively work together to ensure unity of purpose and direction in community level collective action initiatives in urban areas.
- There is need for interventions that would focus on how to improve the land markets in urban areas while reforming land management practices in line with the existing statutes. Such a project would, inter alia, involve strengthening the capacity of local councils in land management and adoption of participatory urban planning especially in the context of incomplete urban development processes. The ultimate goal would be to create some kind of a hybrid system of land management in urban areas in which city councils and traditional leaders work together to

ensure effective development control, planning and infrastructure development. This particular project proposal is motivated by the realization that while traditional leaders are engaged in the distribution of land to people in urban areas they are not involved in overseeing the development of the land in line with the cities' aspirations and planning and development protocols.

- Interventions that widen civic engagement through the expansion of the civic spaces such as townhall meetings and other fora are an absolute necessity. The capacity of the urban citizenry to constructively engage with their authorities and government officials needs to be enhanced so as to in turn enhance accountability and transparency.
- Equally important are interventions aimed at resolving the issues related to informalities and illegalities. The current situation is that these create grey areas that are sometimes utilized by urban authorities and citizens alike when such situations best benefit them, and tensions and conflicts when the situations do not offer benefits. Informality also undermines citizen voice, and creates elements of powerlessness. On the negative side, aiding or supporting informality might imply aiding and facilitating illegality. Trade-offs are therefore necessary.

6. Concluding Reflections and Policy Recommendations

6.1 Concluding Reflections

This PEA exercise has established that cities in Malawi face considerable challenges in as far as the two areas that were examined are concerned. The cities are unable to exercise the development control, planning and infrastructure development function effectively due to a number of constraints while the structures for community level social organization and collective action efforts are in a state of flux. The combined effect of these challenges is that cities in the country are unable to plan for, provide and maintain infrastructure and services and are rarely in a fit state organizationally and financially to ensure provision of services and maintenance of a wide range of facilities. Yet urban governance and management, especially in the context of a developing country like Malawi, is concerned with city building with its insatiable need for infrastructure and institution building with its seemingly endless need for increased capacity to perform.

Consequently, McGill (1998) argues that a robust city should be able to develop guidelines for integration of spatial, sectoral, economic, financial and institutional planning so as to better achieve urban development goals. This implies that good urban governance and management depends on the power to coordinate the activities of a variety of agencies at national and local levels. According to Sharma (1989) urban governance and management can therefore be described as the set of activities which together shape and guide the social, physical and economic development of urban areas. This is further amplified by Rakodi (1991) who characterize the overarching objective of urban governance and management as to ensure that the components of the system are managed so that they make possible the daily functioning of a city which should both facilitate and encourage economic activity of all kinds and enable residents to meet their basic needs for shelter, access to utilities and services and income generating opportunities. This underlies the fact that urban governance and management deals with power relations, the nature of cities and their social and economic structure.

PEA exercise revealed that this ideal of urban governance and management is far from being realized in the context of Malawian cities. While the legislative framework generally exists and is reasonably tuned, cities in Malawi find it extremely difficult to exercise the development control, planning and infrastructure development function as stipulated in the statutes. Despite the fact that the Town and Country Planning Act and the Local Government Act are not harmonized and the Local Government Act

does not provide for an elaborate institutional framework for the development activities in urban areas, the cities should have at least been able to carry out this particular function to some level of efficacy. In this regard, the PEA revealed that city councils are constrained by several factors which, inter alia, include excessive political interference in urban governance that has reportedly worsened following the transition to democracy in May 1994; limited financial capacity mainly because of their failure to mobilize resources due to the reluctance of the central government to allow them to collect the whole range of revenues that they are entitled to as well as high default on city rates among the residents; and the existence of multiple and competing jurisdictions of authority particularly the urban chiefs who allocates land in urban areas even though the Chiefs Act proscribes them from doing so. It is particularly difficult for city councils to enforce payment of city rates in these parts of cities.

The community level governance structures are in a complete state of flux. This is mainly a consequence of lack of strategic guidance on what these structures should be and let alone how exactly they should be constituted. The situation has been especially compounded by the prolonged periods during which Malawi has had no elected local governments. There were no elected local governments between 1994 and 2000 and between 2005 and 2014. The vacuum created by the absence of elected local governments provided an opportunity for urban chiefs to entrench themselves becoming the *de facto* focal point for social, economic and political organization in urban areas. The reintroduction of elected local governments in 2014 and the attempts by the government to end urban chiefs has created leadership paralysis that makes it almost impossible for urban communities in most areas to meaningfully get involved in collective action efforts. There is currently jostling for power, authority and influence amongst urban chiefs, counselors and block leaders. As long as the government does not effectively intervene to provide strategic guidance on the way forward the leadership paralysis is bound to persist. The main reason is that urban chiefs play a key role in social functions in their respective communities particularly in relation to funerals. The attempts to end urban chiefs may not be successful because neither the counselor nor the block leader can perform funeral related social functions. This is compounded by the fact that city councils only have control over very few cemeteries. Most of them are controlled by the urban chiefs simply because most of the areas were brought under the jurisdiction of cities without fully compensating their original inhabitants who occupied the land under customary tenure arrangements. Until the residents are fully compensated, urban chiefs have a legitimate basis for exercising jurisdiction over these areas.

The PEA exercise further revealed the extent to which formal and informal institutions interface to create both positive and negative outcomes. There is no doubt that in the absence of elected local governments, urban chiefs played a key role as an intermediary institution between urban communities and city councils. Even in the aftermath of elected local governments, urban chiefs have proven to be very useful in the social organization of urban communities. They perform a key function in relation to funerals and even mobilization of their respective communities for collective action initiatives. City council officials still turn to urban chiefs for community mobilization even when their legitimacy is under serious scrutiny since the Local Government Act and the Chiefs Act do not recognize the existence of traditional leaders in urban areas. The most interesting development is that in some areas, particularly in Mzuzu city, the urban chiefs are mutating into block leaders. It is further worth noting the apparent resilience of block leaders. The PEA established that each successive regime has installed its own block leaders but instead of displacing each other, these regime affiliated block leaders simply accommodate each other. The consequence of all this is that there is a structured hierarchy of these block leaders modeled upon the hierarchy of traditional chieftaincy. This hierarchy comprises block leaders, group block leaders and senior block leaders.

The political transition to democracy has also fostered the dominance of informality in city councils' transactions especially relating to land management and mobilization of revenue. Politicians have exploited their powers to undermine city councils' capacity to stick to guidelines for allocating plots and enforcement of building standards and codes. The PEA revealed that political interference has also created a favourable atmosphere for corruption to flourish in councils on the part of the technocrats. The consequences have, *inter alia*, included the explosion of unplanned constructions and almost total abandonment of city zoning plans. City residents are developing their plots as they see fit without regard at all to city planning and building regulations. This is further exacerbated by the incomplete processes of urban development that allow for the existence of multiple jurisdictions over land within city boundaries. This incompleteness as intimated elsewhere in this report allows chiefs to exercise jurisdiction over land even if it is within city boundaries. Political rhetoric backing illegal developments further makes it very difficult for city councils to function effectively. There are well documented incidents whereby politicians have rather carelessly told city residents to undermine authority of cities. This kind of attitude has also manifested itself when it comes to revenue mobilization. In many cases, politicians are in the fore front of evading city rates which makes the majority of urban residents to follow suit. Strikingly, senior level politicians are intent on influencing who sits on committees such as Community Development Committees (CDCs) for purposes of advancing their own selfish political goals.

The combination of these challenges makes it very difficult for city councils in the country to embrace all critical players in the city building processes and respond to opportunities that present themselves. This is particularly the case because for cities to achieve their goals there is need for a more dynamic process in which priorities have to be continually assessed and re-assessed in the light of available resources. Malawian cities cannot simply engage in these dynamic processes because of the myriad challenges they confront. These challenges are particularly exacerbated by the dominance of informality in the transaction of city councils' businesses with almost always destructive outcomes.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings of the PEA exercise:

- Harmonize the Town and Country Planning Act with the Local Government Act to ensure unity of purpose and direction in matters of planning in urban areas.
- Develop an elaborate urban development planning system patterned on the district development planning system that can meaningfully respond to specific urban development challenges.
- Clarify institutional framework for local social organization and collective action efforts in urban areas spelling out the roles of key stakeholders.
- Facilitate the completion of urban development processes to deal with the question of multiple jurisdictions of authority.
- Decide once and for all the fate of urban chiefs to ensure clarity of modes of social organization in urban areas.
- Facilitate insulation of city councils' operations from undue political interference as well as ratcheting up the ethos professionalism among their employees.

- Reform the urban land markets in line with the existing legislative instruments and empower city councils to work with relevant stakeholders to manage land transactions accordingly.

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