

Managing Urban Expansion – a Case Study from Malawi

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SUMMARY

There is an ongoing effort to create the capacity in four cities of Malawi to accommodate its expected urban growth, being more than a doubling by 2050, in an effective manner, at scale, with climate change in mind, and with the goal of developing its cities in an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient manner. A secondary and not less important objective is to ensure that urban growth in Malawi takes place while respecting the land rights of farmers on the urban periphery, enabling them to convert their lands to urban use at scale, and vastly increasing access to affordable residential plots without creating informality. Supported by GIS three insights guide our understanding of the issues at hand in creating and sustaining the capacity to accommodate urban growth in the cities of Malawi at the present time: Capacity building as empowerment, making minimal preparations but making them at scale, and land subdivision as an antidote to informality. Most of the new construction on the periphery of cities in Sub-Saharan Africa is informal, where informality is characterized by rural land holders on the urban periphery dividing up their rural land holdings and selling them piece by piece to families who then build ‘starter houses’ on them. Basic amenities—such as roads, water supply, sewerage, drainage, public open spaces—are not provided, sales lack a proper land survey as well as official documentation, and houses do not conform to the municipal building code. Informality happens principally because rural land holders are not directly involved in the official conversion of lands from rural to urban use and are threatened by the prospect that their lands will be expropriated. In 2016 the Parliament of Malawi enacted a Customary Land Act (CLA). The CLA enables smallholder farmers to convert their customary land rights to private land rights with registered title; these land holdings are known as Customary Estates (CEs). This paper presents the ongoing efforts to provide them with the necessary GIS tools to make simple—yet ‘green’ and effective—expansion plans for three cities that will make it possible for them to keep ahead of both formal and informal developers, that will ensure that their peripheries are connected to the city with a grid of arterial roads carrying public transport and trunk

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infrastructure while protecting areas of high environmental risk from development, and that will enable the creation of land readjustment schemes, led by rural councils, that will act as an antidote to informality while greatly increasing the supply of affordable housing. Working with the Ministry of Lands and Housing and Ministry of Local Government, rural councils are using GIS to capture CEs, develop land use plans, conduct land consolidation, and issue lease titles.

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