

# CITIES ALLIANCE IN ACTION



## Johannesburg-Lilongwe Partnership Leads to a Robust City Development Strategy

Malawi remains one of the least urbanised African countries, but its cities—especially the capital, Lilongwe—are growing very fast. Unfortunately, as in most developing countries, the provision of quality housing and services has not kept pace, and this rapid urbanisation has become synonymous with poverty and slum growth. In 2007 the Lilongwe City Assembly decided to develop a city development strategy (CDS) to guide its future development. But it had no experience with the strategic urban planning process and was confronted with political leadership, management, resource, and corruption issues. With support from both global and national associations (United Cities and Local Governments and the Malawi Local Government Association), Lilongwe therefore turned to the more experienced city of Johannesburg for guidance.

### A Structured but Flexible Process

First, a *Cities Alliance grant* paid for a consultant to assess the governing institution, development partner projects, and other data needed to understand the context and set the direction of the CDS. This also led to the development of numerous partnerships.

The assessment revealed a critical need to fix financial systems, fill vacant management positions, and upgrade equipment before moving on to the next phase. An administrative reform strategy was therefore developed and implemented, which led to the appointment of a CEO and Head of Planning and also addressed key equipment and resource issues.

This marked the end of Johannesburg's mentorship role. The CDS itself was developed by the Lilongwe City Assembly without any external financial support and launched in 2010. This led to full ownership of the strategy and the robust development of institutional knowledge. The CDS was organised around five key

**Project:** Preparatory Grant for Development of Lilongwe CDS and City Future Joint Work Programme with UCLG

**Partners:** Lilongwe City Assembly, City of Johannesburg, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Malawi Local Government Association (MALGA)

**Duration:** 2008 - 2012

**Financing:** USD 72,000

#### Key Results:

- Built local capacity to develop city strategy and implement a reform agenda
- Strengthened a regional relationship
- Led to millions of dollars' worth of external funding to implement the strategy
- Integrated slum upgrading and urban planning
- Integrated MDG targets into urban plans

areas of concern: Governance, shelter and land; infrastructure and environment; community development; and economic development. It included a five-year implementation plan with proposed iconic projects, and monitoring and evaluation guidelines. Incorporation of MDG targets ensured a pro-poor orientation.

Many organisations were consulted during the first two phases to ensure adequate input. The third phase, now underway, is focused on laying the groundwork for the implementation of the CDS. It includes, for example: Establishing a CDS unit in the office of the chief executive; finalising a business plan and departmental scorecards; and developing iconic projects. It is being driven and carried out solely by Lilongwe officials, with **funding from the Cities Alliance.**

## The Many Benefits of Mentorship

Johannesburg's mentorship, although it required plenty of time and resources, was critical; a guide pack would not have offered the same benefits. The mentorship ensured that the programme had the right tools, involved critical stakeholders, remained on target, and used the best possible information.

The Johannesburg team offered targeted support and guidance to the Lilongwe City Council. The mentors were involved as little or as much as was needed, and they led by example, carrying out many activities first and then explaining how to use their outputs.

This approach substantially improved the council's capacity to formulate and adopt strategies in economic management, shelter, land, and infrastructure. The council also computerised much of its accounting and billing system, leading to more transparency, accountability, and efficiency, as well as higher revenues. This enabled the council to raise staff salaries, based on the new performance management system. One significant service delivery improvement has been the absence of cholera cases in the past fiscal year.

These improvements have enabled the council to quickly leverage additional investments to implement some elements of the CDS. These funds are being used to: Create nearly 2,000 residential and commercial plots for the poor; improve water and sanitation in the settlements; strengthen the Community Savings and Loans Association; and improve dilapidated roads and install street lighting. Thanks to such achievements, the mentorship programme was one of five cities awarded the **2012 International Guangzhou Award** for Urban Innovation (co-hosted by UCLG, Metropolis, and the Guangzhou Municipal Government).

The mentorship also strengthened the relationship between the two countries. The benefits were far-reaching: Representatives from Malawi's other major cities—Blantyre, Zomba, and Mzuzu—participated in all of the CDS workshops in order to learn how to replicate the CDS process themselves. UCLG then facilitated a mentorship between Mzuzu and Durban/Ethekwini,

which has led to Mzuzu's first visioning process and strategic planning framework.

## Lessons Learned

Mentorships such as this are best provided by peer cities that have typically shared similar challenges and environments. Because the relationship was managed informally, the process was flexible and could more easily respond to changing capacity levels within the assembly and accommodate new requirements such as the stabilization strategy. The informality also allowed the relationship between the two cities to develop organically and laid a solid foundation for a more formal relationship to develop.

It was important that the mentorship request originated in Lilongwe and was clearly articulated. Mentoring will only yield meaningful long-term results if is accompanied by structured and extensive capacity building that improves the city's systems and develops the administration's strategic and management skills. Regular face-to-face contact is essential to maintain momentum. It is best if the mentor team possesses a wide range of high-level skills and experience, in order to provide value during different stages of the process.

This partnership also challenged the widely held belief that strategic planning and related technical outputs can only be produced with substantial donor funding and extensive reliance on consultants.



*One new development project has created better housing for public servants.*