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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Urbanisation, Urban Poverty Reduction and Non-Governmental Development Organisations' (NGDOs) Intervention Mechanisms in Malawi

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Abstract
Urbanisation and urban poverty reduction have lately entered centred stage of development discourse with new revelations that half of the world's population now lives in urban areas. In Malawi, urbanisation is growing at a pace incomparable to any African country. This article demonstrates that the growing rural-urban trend calls for a concerted effort including the participation of Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs) whose potential to contribute to poverty reduction can be enhanced if there is greater awareness of the challenges of urban poverty. The article, therefore, contributes to the ongoing debate about the role NGDOs play in responding to urban poverty in societies affected by increasing rural-urban migration, by reviewing some of the key debates and proposes some practical measures that may strengthen both local and international NGDOs capacities to support their beneficiaries in urban settings.

Introduction
The trend of rural-urban migration[1] indicates that more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas of the world. Many of them are poor and this raises the question about how the non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) respond to urban vulnerability and poverty. Urban vulnerability has become one of the major challenges in this context and, governments, donor agencies, multilateral organisations and NGDOs are currently busy devising ways and means of responding to the challenge. To date, however, some parts of the world have very little understanding of the role of the NGDO sector in mitigating urban poverty. Nick Devas[2] observes two major trends in urban research in developing countries which, on the one hand, tends to focus on formal

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[1] UN-Habitat, *Harmonious cities –World Habitat Day 2008– Luanda, Angola*, 2008a http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/5894_17093_WHD%20Background%20Paper.pdf (accessed 23 December 2008)
[2] Nick Devas, Who runs cities?: The relationship between urban governance, service delivery and poverty, (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1999).

systems of urban governments and management and their improvements, while on the other, the focus is largely on urban poverty, survival and livelihood strategies and how civil society organisations (which includes NGDOs) address these issues.

Devas provides a valuable critique of the tension that exists among different development players claiming to ameliorate urban poverty. Commenting on this aspect he notes that "studies of the urban poor and of NGOs/CBOs[3] tend to see the state as either irrelevant and [sic] oppressive." He further observes that "there has been relatively very little research which explores … interactions between the various actors and interests involved.[4] Almost ten years down the line, the role the NGDO sector plays in urban poverty has gathered pace. New texts that capture their role have recently increased on the markets, in the academy and, indeed, the sector itself. For example books and articles such as *"Can NGOs Make a Difference,"[5] "Urban Futures,"[6] "Reclaiming Development: NGOs and the Challenge of Alternatives,"[7] "Development Dilemmas,"[8]* and *Cities and Development,[9]* are among a plethora of texts that highlight the challenges of urban poverty and the extent to which the NGDO sector participates in poverty reduction in urban settings.

This article highlights some of the critical discourses on the role of NGDOs in urban poverty in Malawi. It seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate about the role NGDOs play in responding to urban poverty in societies affected by increasing rural-urban migration that ultimately results in urban poverty and, propose practical measures that may strengthen both local and international NGDOs' capacities to support their beneficiaries in the urban settings. The article will highlight urbanisation issues and urban poverty both from a global and local (Malawi) context. The first section briefly reviews some concerns about

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[3] CBOs – Community-Based Organisations

[4] Devas, 3.

[5] Anthony Bebbington, Sam S. Hickey, and Diana Mitlin, eds., *Can NGOs make a difference? The challenge of development alternatives*, (London: Zed Books, 2008).

[6] Nabeel Hamdi and Michael Majale, *Partnerships in urban planning: A guide for municipalities*, (London: Practical Action Publications, n.d.).

[7] Diana Mitlin, Sam Hickey and Anthony Bebbington, "Reclaiming Development? NGOs and the challenge of alternatives," *World Development* 35:10 (2007): 1699-1720.

[8] Ellen Written, "Conceptualising urban poverty", *Environment and Urbanization* 7:1 (1995): 11-33.

[9] Jo Beall and Sean Fox, *Cities and Development,* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009).

global urbanisation and its implications on poverty within the urban context. The section further problematises poverty in order to elucidate the complexity of the concept and locates it within the parameters where NGDOs play a crucial role. The second section focuses on the NGDO sector and its role in urban poverty reduction in Malawi. Within this section I provide a snapshot of NGDO distribution by sector and place of activity; a statistical analysis of population distribution and its implications on poverty; a review of studies and projects that have been undertaken to understand the dynamics of poverty in the urban setting and reasons for success and/or failure. The article concludes by looking at the implications of the critical issues raised on current urbanisation and urban development, and the way in which these issues may influence policy in Malawi and enhance donor agencies' understanding of the same and how aid can effectively be targeted to reduce urban poverty.

Urbanisation and Urban Poverty in Global Context
Over the past decade, there has been an increased recognition that the rapid growth of urban populations is a major culprit in the worsening absolute and relative poverty in urban areas. Commentators now observe that the earth has actually urbanised faster than initially predicted. For example, Davis[10] notes that the increase in the number of cities from 86 in 1950 to 400 in 2004, and to 550 by 2015, is irrefutable evidence of the impending challenge that the world faces in the 21st century.

The United Nations Centre for Human Settlement confirms that indeed half of the world's population now lives in cities.[11] In fact, according to The State of the Worlds Cities Report 2006/7, the world will see the number of people living in slums cross the one billion mark with little or no basic services.[12] Growing at the rate of 5%, Hamdi and Majale[13] observe that three quarters of the global population increase is happening in the developing world and, significant population increases in the south have been, and will be, absorbed by the rural areas (83 per cent in 2000 –

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[10] Mike Davis, "Planet of Slums: Urban Innovation and the Informal Proletariat," *New Left Review*, 26 (2004), 5-34.
[11] UN-Habitat, *2007 Annual Report – For a Better Future*, 2007, http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/getpage.asp?page=download&alt=1&publicationID=2561 (accessed 23 December 2008); UN-Habitat, 2008a.
[12] Eduardo Lopez and Rasna Warah, *Urban and slum trends in the 21st century*, http://www.un.org/Pubs/Chronicle/2006/issue2/0206p24.htm 2006 (accessed 21 October 2008).
[13] Hamdi and Majale, n.d.

2010 and 93.4 per cent in 2010 – 2020).[14] At the same time, contemporary rural-urban movement in Africa is believed to take place in an environment of far higher absolute population growth, lower income levels, and significantly less institutional capacity. For example, while observers[15] have argued against the doubling of the world population, there is, however, constant agreement that the population of Sub-Sahara Africa will triple. In their recent report, Lisa Schlein, Joe de Capua and Sven Krugermake a succinct summary of the current trend:

> While the world's urban population grew rapidly (from 200 million to 2.8 billion) over the 21st century, the next few decades will see an unprecedented scale of urban growth in the developing world. This will be particularly noticeable in Africa and Asia where urban population will double between 2000 and 2030.[16]

These concerns are also highlighted by Mabogunje who further observes that although Africa is viewed as the least urbanised continent, it is, however, one of the regions where urbanisation is posing one of the greatest challenges of our time.[17] For example The UN-Habitat[18] estimates that the population of Johannesburg's 2.2 million (in 1995) will surge to around 3.916 million by 2020. Similarly, Addis Ababa, with a population of 2.2 million (in 1995) will see a significant rise to 5.083 million by 2020. This trend is not only challenging to cities and municipal authorities but equally so to national governments, civil society organisations and donors. The ultimate reality of this trend, as observed by Mitlin and Satterthwaite,[19] is that different aspects of urban poverty have emerged, common among them being inadequate income and unstable or risky asset base; inadequate shelter and provision of basic

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[14] Caroline Sahley and Brian Pratt, *NGO Responses to Urban Poverty: Service Providers or Partners in Planning?* (Oxford: INTRAC, 2003), 18.

[15] Wolfgang Lutz, Warren Sandeson and Sergei Scherbov, "Doubling of world population unlikely," *Nature,* 387:19 (1997): 803-805.

[16] Lisa Schlein, Joe Capua and Sven Kruger, "For humanity's sake: developing world must prepare for soaring urbanisation", *Citymayors Society,* (2008). http://wwwcitymayors.com/society/urban-population.html (accessed 5 August 2008).

[17] Akin L. Mabogunje, "Access to basic services in African local governments: Understanding the challenges and starting action," Paper presented at Africities Summit, Younde, Camoroon, 2-6 December, 2003.

[18] UN-Habitat, *The State of African Cities 2008: A Framework for Addressing Urban Challenges in Africa*, (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2008b), http://www.unhabitat.org (accessed 20 May 2009).

[19] Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite eds., Empowering Squatter Citizens: Local Government, Civil Society and Urban Poverty Reduction, (London: Earthscan, 2004).

services; limited or no safety nets; inadequate protection of poorer groups' rights through the operation of the law; and increased powerlessness and voicelessness. The scale of urbanisation and the enormous pressure exerted on the urban infrastructure has the potential to result in unnecessary conflict as people scramble for scarce resources. In view of these developments there has been an increased interest and response by NGDOs and other stakeholders in various parts of urban areas in the developing world, who are actively attempting to respond to the challenges of rapid urbanisation and urban poverty.

Urban Poverty and Vulnerability

Defining urban poverty is as problematic as defining poverty itself. Even more problematic is poverty measurement. Very often poverty has been defined as a 'lack' or 'deficiency' of the necessities required for human survival or welfare.[20] The UNDP's *World Development Report 2000/2001-Attacking Poverty: Opportunity, Empowerment, and Security*, and *2009-Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development*[21] both provide a comprehensive definition of poverty. According to these reports, poor people lack fundamental freedoms, food, shelter, education and health. The poor are heavily deprived of fundamental rights and their vulnerability results in ill-health, economic dislocation and powerlessness. Other commentators[22] often associate poverty with lack of participation in the decision-making process largely due to powerlessness. Definitions based on income or consumption, absolute and relative; or those based on social indicators, are equally problematic because poverty of any magnitude is context-specific. Most studies[23] attempting to describe or define urban poverty have focused on analysing the characteristics common to urban poverty – very often by comparing the rural- urban dynamics. The point of contention however, is whether or not there is any difference between rural and urban poverty. While the focus

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[20] Written, 1995.

[21] United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *World Development Report 2000/2001- Attacking Poverty: Opportunity, Empowerment, and Security,* (New York: UNDP, 2000); UNDP, *World Development Report 2009-Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development* (New York: UNDP, 2009).

[22] See for example: Deborah Ajulu, *Holism in Development: An African Perspective on Empowering Communities* (California: MARC, 2001); Jayakumar Christian, *Powerless of the Poor: Towards an alternative Kingdom of God Based Paradigm of Response*, PhD Thesis (Pasadena: Fuller Theology Seminary, 1994); Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (London: Routledge, 1983).

[23] See David Satterthwaite, "The underestimation and misrepresentation of urban poverty", *Environment and Urbanization,* 7:1 (1995): 3-10; Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite, 2004; Diana Mitlin, Sam Hickey and Anthony Bebbington, 2007.

of this article is the role of the NGDOs in urban poverty reduction, it is worth pointing out that studies in urban poverty can be grouped into three broad categories: how urban poverty manifests itself; the nature of urban poverty; and characteristics of urban poverty.[24] Beall and Fox[25] sum up some of the major characteristics of urban poverty and vulnerability as:

- Reliance on a monetised economy
- Reliance on employment in the informal economy
- Poor quality housing
- Insecurity of tenure (for both owners and tenants)
- Lack of access to basic infrastructure and affordable services
- Susceptibility to diseases and accidents
- Environmental hazards, including the impacts of natural and man-made disasters
- Social fragmentation
- Exposure to violence and crime and fear of violent crime
- Increasing exposure to warfare and terrorist attacks.

Despite their highly acclaimed comparative advantages, that is, being responsive to poor peoples' needs; reaching the poor of the poorest; being effective and efficient in service delivery,[26] NGDOs' approaches to urban poverty reduction strategies are usually influenced by their analysis of the root causes of poverty and social vulnerability.[27] However, given their thin resource base and other mitigating factors, their capacity to respond to urban poverty can also be dictated by their orientation to urban poverty reduction initiatives.[28] Sahley and Pratt[29] identify three approaches NGDOs use in urban poverty – basic service delivery through direct provision of goods and services, social development and community empowerment, and institutional development to address the structural causes of poverty. Malawi is among many countries in the Southern Africa region whose NGDO sector is increasingly attempting, albeit with limited capacity, to respond to such challenges.

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[24] Reena Bhasin, *Urban Poverty and Urbanisation,* (New Delhi: Deep Publications, 2001)

[25] Beall and Fox, 114.

[26] Terje Tvedt, *Angels of Mercy or Development Diplomats?: NGOs and Foreign Aid,* (Trenton: African World Press, 1998).

[27] Allan Fowler, *Striking a Balance: A Guide to Enhancing the Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organizations in the International Development,* (London: Earthscan Publication, 1997).

[28] Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite, 2004.

[29] Caroline Sahley and Brian Pratt.

Non-governmental Development Organisations and (Urban) Poverty in Malawi.

The role non-governmental development organisations play in development and advocacy in Malawi is reasonably well documented.[30] However, their growth has been influenced by the advent of multi-party politics in 1994 when Malawians voted overwhelmingly for change from a dictatorial regime of Dr Hasting Banda to political pluralism. This wind of change ushered in a new impetus for donor support. Since 1994, Malawi has witnessed an increase in the number of NGDOs (both local and international) engaged in various forms of development initiatives, particularly in the rural areas (although many of these NGDOs have their offices in the urban areas). Despite these efforts, the NGDO sector remains mired in a conflicting debate with respect to its effectiveness in poverty reduction. Like the broader literature that analyses the 'comparative advantage theory' which the NGDO sector is renown for,[31] the current debate regarding their role in Malawi gravitates around issues of legitimacy, accountability, transparency and the state-NGO partnerships. The point of contention, in this case, has been NGDO's use of their resource base as an instrument to influence the values and behaviour of their constituency. Despite these conflicting images of roles and responsibilities, the NGDO sector in Malawi has mushroomed over the past decade and half. Their level of engagement and the sectoral focus depict an historical metamorphosis which to date, has not been fully explored.

Table 1 below depicts a selected number of NGOs (both International and National/Local), the sectors in which they are active, and the locations where they undertake their activities. A number of issues emerge from this table. Of particular relevance to the theme of the article is the locus

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[30] See Jonathan J. Makuwira, *Non-governmental Organisations, Participation and Partnership Building in Basic Education in Malawi*, Unpublished Thesis, (Armidale: University of New England, 2003); Rick James and Chiku Malunga, "Organisational challenges facing civil society networks in Malawi," *KM4D Journal*, 2:2 (2006): 48-63; David Mkwambisisi, "NGOs and poverty reduction in Malawi," *Nyasatimes*, (2007), http://www.nyasatimes.com/index.php?news=279 (accessed 21 February 2007); Maxton G. Tsoka, "Poverty in Malawi and efforts to reduce it", Paper presented at the *CRADALL Seminar on African Perspectives*, Glasgow, 15 May 2006; Edgar Bwalya, Lise Rakner, Lars Svasand, Arne Tostensen and Maxton Tsoka, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Processes in Malawi and Zambia*, (2004) http://wwwcmi.no/pdf/?file=/publications/2004%5Crep%5Cr2004-8.pdf (accessed 21 November 2007).

[31] Tvedt, 1998; Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin, 2008.

Table 1: NGO Distribution by sector and location of activity

International NGOs				National/Local NGOs			
Name	**Sector**	**Location of activity**		**Name**	**Program Activity**	**Location of activity**	
		Urban	**Rural**			**Urban**	**Rural**
Action Aid	Food security; SME		✓	African Evangelistic Mission	Sanitation		✓
Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)	Sanitation; Agriculture	✓	✓	ADRA	Sanitation; Agriculture	✓	✓
Concern Universal	Water & Sanitation; Agriculture		✓	Anglican Diocese of Lake Malawi	Education; Health		✓
Africare	Food security; Agriculture		✓	Association for Rural Community Development	Agriculture		✓
Action Against Hunger	Food security; Health		✓	CADECOM	Food & Nutrition; Health		✓
International Eye Foundation	Health		✓	Christian Health Association of Malawi	Health	✓	✓
Self Help Development International	Food security, SME		✓	Christian Service Committee	Agriculture; Food security; SME		✓
World Vision	Food security; Health		✓	CCAP - Blantyre Mission	Education; Agriculture; Orphanage	✓	✓
Oxfam	Food security; Agriculture		✓	Project Hope	Health		✓
Plan International	Education; Health		✓	St David Foundation for Rural development	Food security; Water & Sanitation		✓
Save The Children - USA	Education; Health	✓	✓	Evangelical Lutheran Development	Agriculture; Environment		✓
Save The Children UK & I	Water & Sanitation; Health;		✓	Environmental Concerned Youth Association	Health; Agriculture; Environment	✓	

Source: CONGOMA, Directory of NGOs, 1999 & 2004 (3rd Edition)

of activity. First, the majority of these NGOs, while having their head offices in the city, conduct their programs in the rural areas of the country. This reflects, of course, demographic trends where, statistically, 85% of Malawi's population lives in the rural area.[1] Also significant to the theme of the article is the program or development activities in which many of these NGDOs are engaged.

To a larger extent the scope of NGDO engagement is a reflection of the loosening of the socio-political situation after a long period of dictatorial regime. In other words, the 'enabling environment' that has emerged in the post-Banda era has allowed NGDOs to 'scale up'. Hence, as the number of the NGDO establishment increases, so too is the nature of their activities and constituencies.

One other feature about the NGDO sector in Malawi which has not received much attention and, has up until now, not been fully studied, is the impact of 'faith-based NGDOs' in development. While this issue is tangential to the current theme of the article, it is however critical to note that Malawi is predominantly a Christian country and that currently the church plays a critical role not only in social development but in such areas as advocacy and counselling. A snapshot of the NGDOs in Table 1 depicts this claim – that faith-based development actors are a dominant force. However, their effectiveness in facilitating people-centred development remains elusive and is an area of further enquiry.

Demographic Trends and Implications for Urban Poverty in Malawi.
Malawi's national population has grown quite rapidly over the past three decades. According to the National Statistical Office[2] the population has grown from 5.5 million in 1977 to 7.9 million in 1987 and 9.9 million in 1998, to 13.0 million in 2008,[3] at an average rate of 3.0 per cent (see Table 2). Currently sitting at 13.6 million people and at an average annual growth rate of 3.3 per cent[4] (some literature seems to revise this number down to 2.2 per cent) (NSO, 2008), the intercensal percentage

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[1] National Statistical Office, *Second Malawi Integrated Household Survey*. (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 2005).
[2] National Statistical Office, *1998 Malawi Population Housing Census* (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 2000).
[3] National Statistical Office, *2008 Malawi Population Housing Census* (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 2008a).
[4] The 3.3 average annual growth rate is based on the intercensal period which, in Malawi, is conducted every ten years.

increase in urban growth calls for immediate attention.[5] As shown by Table 2, within a period of 39 years the proportion of the national population living in urban areas has witnessed an increase from 6 per cent in 1966 to 20 per cent in 2005, representing an average urban growth rate of 5.9 per cent, with very minimal expansion of urban infrastructure development to support this trend.[6] With a projected increase of 7.7 million in the total number of people in the next 12 years, the urban growth rate is likely to soar.

Table 2: Malawi Population Growth, 1966 – 2020

Malawi Population Growth, 1966 – 2020			
Year	Population	Annual Growth rate (%)	% Urban Growth Rate
1966	4039583	3.3	6
1977	5547460	2.9	8
1987	7988507	3.7	11
1998	9933868	2.0	14.5
2000	10475257	3.2	15
2005	12341170	3.3	20
2008	13066320	2.8	n/a
2015	17101849	3.2	n/a
2020	20119830	3.3	n/a
Source: National Statistical Office, 2000, 2008a; Zeleza Manda, 2007.			

Within the same period of 42 years (1966 – 2008) the cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe Mzuzu and Zomba have witnessed average annual growth rates of 12.0%, 79.6%, 33.6% and 8.2% respectively. While Blantyre has been the largest urban centre in Malawi, the past decade has witnessed some changes in the demographic trends. Since 2004 Malawi has witnessed a centralisation of public offices such as ministry headquarters, private companies and the manufacturing industry being moved from Blantyre to

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[5] National Statistical Office, 2008a. This is the urban population increase as a percentage of the total population.
[6] Mtafu A. Zeleza Manda, *Water and Sanitation in Urban Malawi: Can the Millennium Development Goals be Met? A Study of Informal Settlements in Three Cities*. (Blantyre: Alma Consulting, 2009), http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdfs/10569II ED.pdf (Accessed 22 December 2009).

Lilongwe. In fact since the capital was moved from Zomba to Lilongwe in 1971, Lilongwe city has grown rapidly, culminating in outgrowing Blantyre city by 79,159 persons over the past decade. In addition, the central region being agriculturally productive and, with increased business activities, the demographic trends in Table 3 below come as no surprise. While this is the case, there are other reasons for this increase. According to the NSO[7] natural growth in population also accounts quite largely for this trend, followed by rural-urban migration and, the tendency to extend urban boundaries to bring in peri-urban areas within the purview of rentable areas.[8]

Table 3: Malawi Urban population growth by City, 1966 – 2008

Urban Centre	1966	1977	1987	1998	2008	Pop. Incre-ase(%) 1966-2008	Av. Annual Growth Rate (%)
Blantyre	109,461	219,011	333,120	502,053	661,444	504.4	12.0
Lilongwe	19,421	98,718	223,318	440,471	669,021	3344.8	79.6
Mzuzu	8,490	16,108	44,217	86,980	128,432	1412.7	33.6
Zomba	19,666	24,234	43,250	65,915	87,366	347.4	8.2
Malawi	**260,000**	**539,000**	**853,390**	**1,435,436**	**1,546,263**	**5,609.3**	

Source: NSO Reports, 1977, 1987, 1998, 2008; Population Projections Report 1999-2023, NSO, Zomba.

Malawi has also recorded an increase in the total fertility rate of 4.2 per cent for urban women between 15 and 49 years.[9] Mzuzu's remarkable annual average growth, in particular, is of interest too. It is the major commercial city in the northern region of the country.[10] Chilinde[11]

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[7] National Statistical Office, 2008a.

[8] ALMA Consulting, *Situation analysis of informal settlement in Blantyre City: Final Report* (Blantyre: ALMA Consulting, 2006). Aside from people moving from the rural to urban centres, the middle to upper income urban earners tend to seek private land at the periphery of the city boundaries where they live and commute into the city. Very often these are landholders with properties they rent out while at the same time live in a relatively cheap place on the fringes of the city. This is how the city boundary expands.

[9] John Chome, *Malawi is Going to Town: Implications for Attaining the MDGs* (UN-HABITAT: Lilongwe) 27 June 2007, http://www.unmalawi.org/reports/urbanisation_malawi27jun07.ppt (accessed 12 February, 2010).

[10] Malawi is administratively divided into three regions, each with a commercial capital. While the central and southern regions have large town centres, the north is limited in these town centres, hence does not have good alternative capacity to absorb the rural-urban migration.

[11] Gilbert Chilinde, Pierson Ntata and Lucy Chipeta, "Participation in community driven development among the urban poor: The case of Lilongwe city," in

observes that Mzuzu's linkages with the rural hinterlands in terms of access to higher order goods, information and services like education and health facilities makes it a centre of attraction.[12] In addition, cross-border commercial activities between Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania and Malawi's commercial cities has seen Mzuzu being the first point of business attention. Also the demise of rural growth centres,[13] five of which were in the northern region as compared to three in the centre and two in the south, has had a significant impact on the growth of Mzuzu city. Likewise the diffusion of people from these centres to the urban areas in the central and southern commercial cities of Lilongwe and Blantyre respectively is also a factor that cannot be ignored. Overall, population control in the late 1960s and 1970s has been problematic due to entrenched cultural practices.[14] This is why in the late 1980s and 1990s, there was a rigorous campaign of family planning methods by a British-based NGO, Marie Stope International which, in Malawi, was known as Banja La Mtsogolo (Future-Forward Looking Family), to try and curb this situation. But there is also another important factor that explains the growth of these urban areas particularly in relation to Blantyre and Lilongwe. The civil war in Mozambique in the early to late 1980s saw Malawi harbouring approximately one million refugees in some parts of the central and southern region districts.[15] Although these were repatriated, they added a significant portion to the demographic trends in Malawi.

Studies that have been undertaken to understand the role of the NGDO sector in poverty reduction in Malawi have not been as comprehensive in their documentation of, nor in paying particular attention to, the dynamics of poverty in urban areas. Neither has there been any comprehensive study to critically examine and/or evaluate their impact.[16] A few studies[17]

Christopher Kamlongera, ed., *Challenges in Promoting Community-Driven Development: Some Lessons from Malawi Social Action Fund*, (JHango: Lilongwe, 2008).

[12] The opening of Mzuzu university, for example, has contributed significantly to the population growth in urban Mzuzu.

[13] Ezekiel Kalipeni, "Contained Urban Growth in Post-Independence Malawi," *East African Geographical Review,* 19:2 (1997): 49-66. These centres were established across the country in the late 1980s to improve living and economic conditions of the rural people; reduce rural-urban migration and promote decentralised development for administrative services.

[14] These are based on the belief that children are an investment.

[15] Robert Hauffman, "Repatriation of Refugees from Malawi to Mozambique," *Africa Today,* 39:1/2 (1992): 114-122.

[16] Mkwambisisi, 2007; Frank Ellis, Milton Kutengule and Alfred Nyasulu, "Livelihood and Rural Poverty Reduction in Malawi," *World Development*, 31:9

have focused on specific NGOs and broad participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Some[18] have focused on a particular sector of development rather than understanding their operationalisation of poverty reduction development initiatives in the urban areas of Malawi or the 'qualitative' impact of such development interventions, either by donor agencies or NGDOs themselves. More importantly, there is scanty empirical evidence of the motivational factors, strategies and challenges these NGDOs face. There is also a lack of proper documentation of the interactive mechanisms these NDGOs employ in engaging with their beneficiaries and other development actors, and how they contribute to policy related activities aimed at alleviating urban poverty. A number of factors account for this situation. First, Malawi's one party system viewed NGOs as agents of opposition.[19] Even today, this legacy is being perpetuated by the current regime which view some NGDOs through a sceptical lens. Structurally, and even where NGDO networks existed, they are fraught with identity challenges.[20] Carbone sums up the challenges faced by civil society organisations in Malawi:

> Overall, civil society in Malawi is weak…. Some political leaders still perceive civil society organisations as a threat to their power …people are not inclined to be involved in controversial political and economic issues. Some CSOs lack solid constituency as they are not rooted in Malawi's society. …The majority of these CSOs lack organisational skills, do not use reliable information, are staffed with not well qualified people… (and) have weak financial base, thus are too often dependent on donor funding and agendas.[21]

Despite the lack of comprehensive documentation of what is going on the NGDO sector, especially in relation to urban poverty reduction mechanisms, there are a few notable studies that have been documented,

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(2003): 1495-1510; Malawi National Economic Council, *Profile of Poverty in Malawi, 1998: Poverty Analysis of the Malawi Integrated Household Survey 1997/98*, (Lilongwe: MEC, 2000); Malawi National Economic Council, *Profile of Poverty in Malawi, 2005: Poverty Analysis of the Malawi Integrated Household Survey 2005*, (Lilongwe: MEC, 2005).

[17] James and Malunga, 2006; Bwalya, Rakner, Svasand and Tsoka, 2006; Makuwira, 2003.

[18] Chilinde, Ntata and Chipeta, 2008.

[19] James and Malunga, 2006.

[20] James and Malunga, 2006.

[21] Carbone, M., "Malawi-Civil society: Balancing political and economic issues," *Courier ACP-EU* 201 (2003): 59

albeit with limited scope of analysis. In 1995 the Christian Service Committee (CSC) with the assistance of the German Technical Cooperation for Development (GTZ) initiated the 'Urban Poverty Alleviation Project' in Lilongwe and Mzuzu. This was in response to the 'Fight Urban Poverty' programme of the City Assemblies of Malawi.[22] Overall, the program focused on building capacity of the poor urban communities to assess their own needs and create projects and local structures for self-determined physical and economic development in the urban squatter areas. Essentially the program was grounded in facilitating the spirit of social capital. In its conclusive analysis it draws attention to two critical issues that require more scrutiny – lack of capacity to implement large-scale projects and, the heterogeneity of the urban population which is not predisposed to the spirit of self-help.

Three other studies conducted by the UK's Department for International Development –DfID, UN-HABITAT, and Zeleza Manda have further unravelled the nature and magnitude of urban poverty albeit with limited emphasis or analysis of the role of the NGDO sector in urban poverty reduction. The findings for the first two studies, as reported by Frank Phiri in the *Mail and Guardian* of 27 June 2004, under the title *Malawi Faces Urban Explosion*[23] highlight some of the critical issues which the NGDO sector ought to tackle with utmost sincerity and speed. Aside from highlighting increased road accidents as a result of growing traffic population, the studies underscore the following as critical:

- An increase in the total national urban population from 260,000 in 1966 to 3 million in 2004. This has, understandably, exerted pressure on the already inadequate urban infrastructure,
- Increased land and housing shortages,
- Congestion, squatter settlements, crime, HIV/AIDs infection and unemployment.

These challenges are further be exacerbated by the increase in the number of orphans which, according to the studies, results in "most of the

[22] Ruth Butao Ayoade, "Urban vulnerability and service delivery – Lilongwe and Mzuzu city – Malawi," in Christina Nando and Erika Coetzee, eds., *Urban Vulnerability: Perspectives from Southern Africa*, (Periperi Publications: Cape Town, 2002), 97-104.

[23] Frank Phiri, "Malawi faces urban explosion," *Mail and Guardian* Online, (27 July 2004a), http://www.mg.co.za/printformat/single/2004-07-27-malawi-faces-urban-poverty-explosion (accessed 10 August 2008).

orphans ending up on the streets as beggars and grow up into thugs."[24] The study undertaken by Zeleza Manda in 2008 sheds more light on the nature of poverty in the urban areas in Malawi.[25] Although focusing on water and sanitation, the findings largely support the earlier studies. Access to water remains a big problem in urban areas with 53 per cent of the respondents citing access to water through water kiosks while 26 per cent has individual water connections and 13 per cent bought water from neighbouring plots. Sanitation in the urban areas is equally inaccessible, with only 10 per cent of Blantyre's total population and 8 per cent of Lilongwe's population living in homes connected to the sewer. Strikingly, the study also revealed that 94 per cent of the population in the urban areas rely heavily on pit latrines whose conditions, in some instances, are substandard. Of the household studied, 42 per cent disposed their wastes in pits within residential proximities while 21 per cent threw waste on the road side.

While over the past five years urban poverty has been declining from 25 per cent (for those considered poor) and 8 per cent (for ultra-poor) in 2004 to 11 per cent (for the poor) and 2 per cent (ultra-poor) in 2007,[26] the latest report on Welfare Monitoring Survey 2008[27] shows that the trend has shifted. The Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) now indicates that urban poverty has increased from 11 per cent (for the poor) in 2007 to 13 per cent in 2008. Similarly, there has been an increase from 2 per cent in 2007 to 3 per cent in 2008 for the ultra-poor. While Table 4 indicates that there are more poor and ultra poor people in the rural areas and that the number of poor and ultra poor in the urban areas has been decreasing significantly over the past five years, the recent trend, between 2007 and 2008, in the increase in the number of poor and ultra poor in the urban centre, is a development of major concern, whose implications I discuss below.

Implications for urban development and poverty reduction.
With the national population growing at the rate of 3.3 per cent and estimated to continue to do so until 2020, the need to be visionary in planning urban development cannot be overemphasised. If indeed

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[24] Frank Phiri, "Rapid urbanisation looks irreversible," *Inter-Press Service News Agency*, (27 July 2004b), http://ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=24810 (accessed 10 August 2008)

[25] Mtafu A. Zeleza Manda, 2009.

[26] National Statistical Office, *Welfare Monitoring Survey 2008* (Zomba: National Statistical Office 2008b.

[27] National Statistical Office, 2008b.

**Table 4: Proportion of Poor and Ultra-Poor
Main Indicators 2004-2008**

Poverty Status		IHS2 2004	WMS 2005	WMS 2006	WMS 2007	WMS 2008
Proportion Poor						
Malawi		52	50	45	40	40
	Urban	25	24	25	11	**13***
	Rural	…	53	47	44	…
Proportion Ultra-Poor						
Malawi		22	21	17	15	15
	Urban	8	8	6	2	**3***
	Rural	…	23	19	17	…

Sources: National Statistical Office, 2008: Welfare Monitoring Survey 2008b.

Malawi's population will soar from the current estimation of 13.6 million to 20 million by 2020 and, given the increased rural-urban migration rate, currently at 5.2 per cent,[28] the challenge for NGDOs as alternative avenues for social services can only be described as immense. Job opportunities in the rural areas in Malawi are scarce. Basic social services for average households are equally scarce. While people may perceive the city as an alternative solution to their problems, it is not common to easily find employment, thus their poverty is further exacerbated. The NGDOs, for their part, can only do so much as they are equally limited in capacity and resources. But there are factors that need to be seriously considered if the NGDO sector is to make a significant contribution to the cause.

First, rural-urban migration has to be understood in broader context, that is by understanding why people leave rural areas for cities. While the NGDO sector in Malawi focuses on the rural areas in their service provision, there should be an effort to analyse their interventions in the light of the critical needs of communities. It is one thing to provide a service, and, it is equally another, to develop sustainable mechanisms which provide confidence and security to the vulnerable. This is where 'holism in development'[29] comes in. Understanding people's needs is not guess-work, rather it is a cumulative undertaking that involves a lengthy

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[28] Mtafu A. Zeleza Manda, "Mchenga: Urban Poor Housing Fund in Malawi," *Environment and Urbanization,* 19:2 (2007): 337-359.

[29] Ajulu, 2001. This is an integrated approach that includes the 'spiritual' and 'cultural' aspects of humanity.

analysis and critique of one's practice and its impact on people's lives. Over and above that, it requires reflective learning which draws lessons from the field and analysing and applying them within the context of the changing community needs. For the NGDOs whose offices are in the urban areas but whose projects are in the rural areas, they portray a false but seemingly real life opportunity in terms of employment prospects. The falsification of the nature of their undertakings are, by any means, enticing to the many school-leaver and young men and women whose hopes have been shattered, and look to the city as the only place where employment opportunities are. Unless unemployment in the rural areas is addressed by creating jobs, either emerging from the NGO activities or 'self-employment' programs, the rural-urban migration will continue to escalate and put a huge strain on the thin urban infrastructure.

Another important question relates to the manner in which the limited resources are used both in the rural and urban areas. This, in actual fact, is about 'humans' as a development resource versus other 'natural' resources. My focus, first, is about 'human resource'. During three decades of Dr Hastings Banda's rule (1964 -1994), the emphasis was 'working hard in the fields'. The discourse of 'hard work' is not new in Malawi politics. However, the advent of multi-party politics in 1994 changed this development discourse into 'we will give you development'. As a result, and, as alluded to earlier in the article, what has happened is an increased feeling of dependency rather than community (social capital). This is a reflection of a lack, or a misunderstanding of what development is all about, by many sectors of society (government officials, community leaders, NGOs, politicians etc). The erosion of this community spirit has reconfigured the way poverty is also understood and alleviated. My argument is that these practices have far-reaching implications not only on the urban development landscape but also how people perceive themselves. This can be seen either in the context of 'resource' or 'burden'. The latter, in my view, is pure helplessness or powerlessness[30] which is one of the characteristics of poverty itself. Seeing one in that context affirms Butao-Ayoade's argument of lack of 'self-help' spirit,[31] that is, city environments are sometimes restrictive in the manner in which people can engage in voluntary work, hence, decreasing human potential for self-help.

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[30] Chambers, 1983.
[31] Ayoade, 2002

There is very little documentation on how district and city assemblies collaborate on issues of urban poverty. But, as a third point in my analysis of the implications of rural-urban migration, this is another point that requires further understanding. In what ways can these two entities work collaboratively to enhance their understanding of the rural-urban movement? Considering that the NGDO sector currently seems to focus on the rural areas, it is equally fair to assume that the District Assemblies would understand the NGDOs working in their district so that this understanding would be utilised by their city counterparts, if urban poverty reduction is to be meaningful at all. In other words, urban poverty has to be understood by both rural and urban public institutions.

While there is undeniable evidence of the role of the NGDO sector in contributing to poverty reduction in the rural areas of Malawi, one major concern is the dearth of literature of what is essentially happening. Information is power. One of the contentious issues or criticism the NGDO sector faces is their unwillingness to release information into the public domain.[32] This practice is widespread and does not help to further enhance our understanding of the sector's contribution, let alone its weaknesses in order to build a profile of lessons that can be used as a resource in further contributing to urban poverty reduction issues. Malawi is no exception to practices of secrecy.[33]

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that urban poverty in Malawi is a complex problem that requires a concerted effort from different development players. Demographic trends attest to the fact that urbanisation is on the increase and, given the speed with which this trend is taking place, our understanding of the rural-urban dynamics needs to be enhanced in order to develop comprehensive measures that tackle the root causes of urban poverty from a holistic angle rather than piecemeal and *ad hoc*. While the rural-urban migration trend continues to escalate, with many poverty alleviation interventions programs focusing on the rural areas (see Table 1), there should be an effort to understand poverty from the various ethnic groups within cities which may ultimately shed light on their conceptions of the problem so that interventions are devised in light of these varied understandings. As Sahley and Pratt hint,[34] traditional

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[32] Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin, 2008

[33] Jonathan Makuwira, "Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Participatory Development in Basic Education in Malawi," *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 6:2 (2004): 113-124.

[34] Sahley and Pratt, 2003.

conceptions of urban development, which is largely focused on government provision of capital intensive services, have lately come under heavy scrutiny and criticism. This criticism poses an enormous challenge not only to NGDOs but to governments and donors alike because their understanding of broader issues affecting urban dwellers is critical to the success of urban development. In other words, this situation not only calls for NGDO participation but also a thorough analysis and understanding of the current NGDO structures, operations and practice and mapping out how poverty is perceived by those who live it and, where possible, development initiatives should be devised not based on welfare model but initiated from people themselves.

From the literature review it is apparent that not much data is utilised to shape policy discourse particularly in relation to urban poverty reduction mechanisms. The silence on urban poverty reduction in the major policy document, such as the Malawi Growth Development Strategy (MGDS), affirms this concern. Unless such data are really available and, are used to shape policy debate, development will continue to be reactionary rather than strategically aligned to empirically and nationally-informed development agenda.

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