Case Study 2: Zomba - Chikanda

Building representation and partnerships

Zomba – Chikanda settlement

APRIL 2014
This case study is the second in a series of short case studies conducted in 2013/2014 as part of a research collaboration between the Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE), the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), the Urban Research Institute (URI), and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). The objective of the series is to document and analyze some existing practices on participatory urban planning and informal settlement upgrading in Malawi. The studies emphasize lessons learned and aims to explore planning in a wider governance context.

This specific case study on Zomba explores the reestablishment of Ward Development Committees (WDCs), Community Development Committees (CDCs) in Zomba as a whole and explores a participatory planning process in the informal settlement of Chikanda.

The city of Zomba served as the capital of Malawi under the British colonial rule until 1975 when the capital function was transferred to Lilongwe. At the last population census in 2008 Zomba had a population of 88,314 with a growth rate of 3.0 percent. Zomba is the fourth largest city in Malawi and over 60 percent of the population live in informal settlements (UN Habitat 2011).
The Malawi Local Government Act stipulates that the Local Governments shall further participation of people in decision making and development processes. However, one of the preconditions for engaging with participatory planning is active mechanisms of representation on the ground. In the absence of the local councilors since 2005 this mechanism has to a large degree been filled by Chiefs and organized community groups. While these structures are likely to continue playing an important role, it is expected that Ward Development Committees will be reestablished in the cities to serve as the formal contact point between people and their local governments following the tripartite elections in May 2014.

The Zomba City Council (ZCC) has already started working towards this goal. In collaboration with GIZ (Deutche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and the civil human rights organization Bwalo Initiative they have established Ward Development Committees (WDCs) in all wards and built their capacity through trainings. The ZCC has also established Community Development Committees (CDCs) to support each Ward Development Committee. The goal of this initiative was to establish robust local political structures for the future councillors to work with after the elections.

Zomba City has 10 Wards and 25 CDCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>No. of Community Development Committees</th>
<th>No. of Traditional Village Headmen</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>8526</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambo</td>
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<td>Chinamwali,</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mbedza</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mtiya</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpira</td>
<td>6865</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadzi,</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>88313</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nyirenda 2012: Community & Ward Development Committees Election Report 2012 – Bwalo Initiative
COMMUNITY AND WARD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

The elections were conducted in 2012 and were facilitated by the City Council with help from the Bwalo Initiative. The process was conducted in two steps:

1.) Community meetings to raise awareness about the importance of the Ward and Community Development Committees: Here the criteria of candidates, their roles and responsibilities, and how the committees relate to political parties and traditional Village Headmen were communicated. As part of this communication two theatre groups for development also performed drama shows on the topic in the different communities.

2.) The election of Ward and Community Development Committees: The election was announced through letters to the Village Headmen and by driving through the areas making announcements from the car. The CDC was elected first and comprised of 10 office bearers (Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer and 5 members). The communities were asked to nominate three candidates for each position. The candidates were then blind folded, and community members lined up behind their candidate. The person with the most votes was declared the winner, the second the vice, and the third a committee member. The CDCs then elected the Ward Development Committee who has the same 10 member structure as the CDC.
As noted in the election report (Nyirenda 2012), the process did not provide confidentiality since people were lined up behind their candidates. The process could therefore easily be influenced by group leaders. However, the Bwalo Initiative reports that the elections were rarely disputed since the election results were immediate and visible for all to see.

The facilitators attempted to keep party politics out of the elections to make the committees as inclusive as possible. In the meetings the communities supported this notion and decided that no politicians should be elected to the committees. Similarly, to mitigate nepotism and favoritism the kinsmen of traditional leaders were also not eligible for election. The traditional leaders are still to play a role as advisors to the committees, but without imposing their decisions. While politicians were not eligible for election, party political divides was still reported to influence the nomination of candidates and the elections. This is not surprising given the political nature of resource and project distribution and the blurred lines between the different spheres of community governance. Also, when the Councilors are elected in 2014 they will become heads of the Ward Development Committees.
The role of the Community Development Committees will be to come up with prioritizations for development in their respective communities. This is supposed to include what the communities can contribute with and do themselves, and what is needed of expertise and resources from the CC or other actors. They will also be responsible for community participation in projects and monitoring of funds. The Ward Development Committee are to act as the link between the communities and the City Council and communicate the priorities from the different CDCs and for the overall Ward.

To build the capacity of the committees an introductory meeting and a leadership training was organized on the roles and responsibilities of the WDCs, the local government system and the city's planning system. The Monitoring and Evaluations officer at the City Council was also assigned as the WDCs contact point for liaising with the office of the Director of Planning and Development.

Zomba City Council is currently engaging Ward Development Committees in a participatory budgeting exercise. The input from the WDCs will also be included in the Urban Development Plan process. However, it remains to be seen what level of influence the committees will have on the actual resource allocations, and what amount of resources exists for community prioritized projects in informal settlements in particular.
One of the settlements in Zomba is making use of the CDC and WDC structures to come up with community development strategies and action plans is the informal settlement of Chikanda. While the initiative is not led by the CDCs and WDCs alone, they constitute an integral part of the process.

Chikanda settlement is located in the South East of the city of Zomba. It is some 2 km away from the city centre. It takes about thirty minutes to walk to the community along the unpaved road that leads to the settlement. People from Nankhalamba near Lake Chirwa settled in Chikanda in 1921 after having been moved around in Zomba several times by the British colonialists. The settlement today is estimated to host around 13 350 people (Chikanda Community Profile 2014). The area is growing not only because of population growth, but also because it is becoming an increasingly popular area for students to take up housing given its proximity to the University of Malawi, Chancellors College. Chikanda has a diverse economy with people employed in the nearby township, doing piece meal works, or growing maize and vegetables.

There is currently no functioning public or private health clinic within Chikanda. As for sanitation most families use pit latrines which is often shared by two or more families.

*Satellite image Chikanda Settlement—Zomba. Source: Zomba City Council*
Most people in Chikanda community do not have problems in accessing safe water both for cooking and drinking (Chikanda Community profile 2014). The Southern Region Water Board (SRWB) has made water available on household taps and through water kiosks. In this effort the SRWB has managed to reduce walking distance to access water to an average of 150 meters, and this water costs the users 300 MWK (0.7 USD) per month. Access to electricity is a challenge due to high connection costs and delays by the Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi (ESCOM) to provide connections that are already paid for. Most households therefore continue to use wood or charcoal when cooking. This places growing stress on the surrounding natural environment resulting in deforestation which again impacts the stabilization of the steep slopes of the Zomba plateau.

The community has three nursery schools and a primary school which is quite overcrowded. The closest secondary school is 1.5 km from the settlement.

The area is under the leadership of the Traditional Authority (T/A). The settlement has a Group Village Headman and a Village Headman that works in corroboration with 10 Chiefs. Previously people used to obtain land in the area by applying to the village leaders. Now individuals have to buy land. The chiefs are called in to bear witness to the land transaction.
PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY PLANNING

In 2013 Chikanda community started mobilizing to learn about slum upgrading approaches in Lilongwe and Blantyre through an exchange programme organized by the National Slum Dwellers Federation (previously called the Malawi Homeless People’s Federation). After this the community started to collect data through community surveys in partnership with the Zomba City Council. Following up on this community representatives gathered in February 2014 to develop a Chikanda Development Strategy. The planning training organized by CCODE illustrated below formed part of this initiative.

At the training the community representatives identified and prioritized initiatives and projects for their settlements and discussed how these could be best realized.
One of the main priorities identified was rehabilitation of the community health clinic. The clinic was built by the community with the help of UNICEF in 2004. The facility was being managed by the District Health Office (DHO). In 2008 the DHO left management of the facility in the hands of the Zomba City Council. However, after a few months of operation the water and electricity were disconnected and the clinic’s equipment was sold off. Since then the building has deteriorated and is in need of renovation. The community is prepared to do much of this renovation themselves. They have recently begun to collect money from each household, something that was agreed at a community meeting called by the Chief. The money will be used to replace doors, windows, locks, to work on the ceiling and to paint the clinic. The community also plans to use money from an existing community fund of 140 000 kwacha.

*Community representatives and the Clinic building in Chikanda. Photo: Hilde Refstie*
COMMUNITY RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

This is not the first time the community has mobilized to support certain projects. In 2011 they collected money and organized the building of a foot bridge to make it easier to cross into Chikanda.

“We thought we had to do something at least to invite people to come to Chikanda.”

Group discussion Chikanda 26.02.2014
While strategies and plans are important and necessary as a first step, the key challenge is exactly this, to get the prioritized projects actually implemented (Kruse & Manda 2005).

“*We have that relationship that they [Zomba CC] will hear. But they have not done anything concrete on the ground yet.*”

Community Group discussion 26.02.2014

Some projects as the footbridge can be organized by the community themselves, but projects such as the health clinic for example, require the involvement of a range of actors. The responsibility for staffing the clinics has been the role of the District Health Office (DHO). Consequently, while the City Council are the ones facilitating the application to the DHO they do not decide the actual outcome. Considering how several clinics in Zomba still stands empty, one can assume that getting the clinic staffed could be a time consuming process. One also has to make sure that the clinic is maintained and that the problems from 2008 do not reoccur. For the Chikanda community groups the challenge will therefore be to keep up their energy and mobilization in a process that can turn out to be complex and lengthy.

In light of this, the community may choose to in parallel work on some of the less complicated projects identified in the plan. In the Chikanda context it therefore seems important to identify 1) what the community can do by themselves, 2) what they need technical expertise and some funds from the city or other agencies for, and 3) what requires engaging with policy issues, general resource distribution and shortages.
While the process is still in its initial phase, Zomba City Council has shown that they are willing to engage with their informal settlements and take a proactive role in participatory urban planning. As such they are a role model in the Malawian setting for trying to come up with solutions to real problems on the ground and thereby fulfilling their role as stipulated in the 1998 Local Government Act.

“**The relationship with the City Council here is good. Almost every other week we have meetings. I think compared to other cities we are better off.** “

Community Group discussion 26.02.2014

However, the Council also struggles with funding constraints. Following the Decentralization Policy and the Local Government Act, governance, promotion of democracy at the local level, planning, and mobilization of resources for infrastructure and economic development was devolved to the City Councils. However, local revenue generation, for example through city rates, has been slow and the Councils struggle with low capacity and lack of funding (GoM 2012).

At the same time existing funds have not been directed to informal settlements proportional to the number of people living there. For the Chikanda community representatives their next important step is therefore to make their demands heard by getting some of the projects identified included in next year’s city budget. They will also need to get some kind of confirmation from the City Council and the District Health Office on the potential staffing of the health clinic. As recognized by the community members it is crucial to accomplish concrete results on the ground for the whole community to see if mobilization efforts are to keep up.
This case study shows how developing and building the capacity of representation at the local level can provide an avenue for local communities and City Councils to work together. However, several factors seems to have played a role. One is existing networks on the ground, in this case the National Slum Dwellers Federation. In terms of community mobilization and planning efforts they seem to fill a very important role in Chikanda. Another is how the Zomba City Council is 1) open to participatory planning and 2) recognizes the function of traditional leaders in the communities. Chiefs are not formally recognized in the city when areas are designated planning areas. However, they continue to play a role in the communities in terms of conflict resolutions, land allocation, community mobilization and planning. In many cases projects require negotiations around land and compensations. Collecting community contributions can also be difficult without their support. The involvement of Chiefs together with the CDCs and WDCs in participatory planning processes therefore seems crucial.

“We recognize community structures as the local leaders. Legally when something is designated a planning area no chiefs are recognized. But they are still there and they make noise. So why not recognize them?” Interview Zomba CC official 25.03.2014

Zomba City Council has built a foundation that is likely to ease the transition for the forthcoming local councilors. However, in Chikanda and other settlements the big challenge will be to move from plans to action. Both in terms of securing financial resources and in implementing programmes and projects. It is such concrete results that will measure the real value of the Community and Ward Development Committees as structures of representation.
SOURCES

- CCODE (2014) Chikanda Community Profile
- GoM (2012): Report on the Capacity Needs Assessment for relevant Government Departments, City Councils, and Communities involved in slum upgrading programmes in Malawi
- Interviews Chikanda community members and representatives, Zomba City Council, Ministry of Lands and Housing, Bwalo Initiative, CCODE, NSDF, and GIZ.
- UN Habitat (2011): Malawi – Zomba Urban Profile

“A lesson learnt is that people have ideas and solutions to own problems. Let them have a chance. It should not only be the city thinking of solutions to community development.”

Interview Director of Physical Planning ZCC 24.03.2014

This report was prepared by Hilde Refstie, Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU) in close collaboration with CCODE, NSDF, and Chikanda community representatives. Thanks also to Adrian Hodgson (GIZ) for provision of material and comments.