

# Malawi Community Planning Studio<sub>s</sub>

Urban Planning Education and Applied Research in Sub-Saharan  
Africa

P131278

# LEARNING

# DIFFERENTLY



## Malawi Community Planning Studios

Malawi Homeless People's Federation

Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI)

Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS)

Centre for Community Organisation and Development (CCODE)

University of Malawi- The Polytechnic and Mzuzu University

## **This booklet has been produced by:**

Baraka Mwau, Noah Schermbrucker & Adi Kumar

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Participants:**

Malawi Homeless People's Federation-Nancholi and Salisbury Lines Communities.

CCODE: Skue N, Nevas S, Patrick C, Cynthia P, Zilile L, Gerald, Holger & Raphael.

University of Malawi-The Polytechnic  
(Physical Planning, Architecture and Land Surveying Departments)

Mzuzu University- Land Management Department

Lutwama M- Act Together-Uganda

Nosiphiwo & Joshua - Informal Settlements Network- Cape Town

Photos: Baraka M & Nevas S

## **Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI)**

<http://www.sdinet.org>

## **Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS)**

<http://www.africanplanningschools.org.za>

**September 2012**

# Foreward:

## Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS)

In 2010 a MoU was signed between the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS) and SDI to promote collaboration between schools and country-based affiliates of SDI. The joint aim of the partnership is to promote initiatives, plans and policies which encourage pro-poor and inclusive cities and towns in Africa. The MoU represents a recognition that planners play an important role in either facilitating or hindering the inclusion and improvement of informal settlements and slums, and that the education of planners has a fundamental impact on their values and understanding, responses and practices, in relation to urban informality. Planning laws and regulations in most African countries are usually inherited from past colonial legal planning frameworks, and continue unchanged today despite the fact that they are (and always have been) highly inappropriate in contexts facing rapid urbanization and extreme levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality. The nature of these planning laws has meant that the majority of poor urban residents in Africa have been forced to 'step outside' of the law in order to survive, thus adding illegality to the range of other factors that ensures their marginalization and exclusion. While there is recognition in some quarters that urban planning law needs drastic reform, this has been very slow in coming due in part to the ways in which planning law entrenches and protects elite and political interests.

Reforming the way in which planning students are educated represents one step towards changing planning systems in Africa, and this has formed the basis of the work of the AAPS network which now consists of 50 member schools across the continent. The AAPS-SDI MoU recognizes that one of the most effective ways to change the mind-sets of student planners is to offer them direct experiential exposure to, and interaction with, the conditions and residents of informal settlements and slums. Exposure to real-life situations is shown to have far greater impact on student understanding than many hours of lectures given in a class-room. To this end the Partnership has planned six joint AAPS-SDI learning studios in which planning students and their staff engage directly in assisting a community with

enumeration and analysis and then upgrade ideas. These studios are facilitated by an SDI professional.

The results of the three studios completed so far, of which two are profiled in this booklet, have convinced us of the huge value of these studios, both for students and communities. The challenge now is to mainstream this approach into university planning curricula so that all future planning professionals emerge with a deep understanding of what it means to be urban and poor in Africa.

Vanessa Watson (Chair: AAPS Steering Committee)



## Foreward:

### Slum Dwellers International (SDI)

The federations of the urban poor that comprise the SDI network have detailed knowledge of their own settlements and communities. They know who lives where, how long they have been there and where they came from. They are fully aware of what basic services their settlements lack and the difficulties in accessing these. They know what it feels like to be excluded from the city, marginalized from the flow of resources and cast as illegal citizens. They know and understand these things because they make up their everyday experiences. Who knows an area and community better than those who live there?

Informality is implicit to the urban fabric, a part of African cities that needs to be recognized and incrementally improved, and not a "blight" to be replaced by the formal. It cannot be contained or ignored. Planners play a crucial role in shaping African cities however a gap exists between their practices and theories and the grounded realities of informality. Spatially this is expressed through the provision of infrastructure and plans that largely exclude the urban poor from the flows of capital and resources. A failure to meaningfully engage with defunct planning norms and standards perpetuates an engagement that is far detached from the grounded reality of informality.

African planning schools have a lot to learn from organised urban poor communities. Exposure to informal knowledge and conditions calls into question existing ideas, planning frameworks, infrastructure standards and laws. It also stresses the value that community knowledge and meaningful participation can add to the planning process. A process that helps planning professionals to respond to the needs of informal communities is long overdue and stresses the importance of "informal" knowledge to academic planning discourses. It makes little sense to plan for a community you have never visited from an office located miles away, even worse, without the knowledge on how urban informality functions.

The planning for inclusive African cities calls for a radical shift in policy and practice. This can begin with the exposure of planning students to conditions and ideas that have for too long existed outside traditional curriculums. The value in the studios described in this book and the partnership between SDI and AAPS is the forum it creates for re-invigorating African planning to include the urban poor as crucial agents to urban planning and development.

However, to have meaningful impact on a citywide and policy scale, such studios cannot be a once off occurrence. They need to become part of the annual curriculum of all African planning schools with informality seen as vital to any discussion of urban planning. It is only then that enough traction can be generated to push citywide planning and legislation towards more pro-poor and inclusive outcomes.

# BACKGROUND TO THE STUDIO

As noted in the forward the studios are the result of a partnership between AAPS and SDI. The SDI affiliate NGO in Malawi, CCODE (Centre for Community Organization and Development), had existing relationships with University of Malawi-Polytechnic and Mzuzu University. The studios built on these relationships, attempting to lay the groundwork for more inclusive planning forms through the exposure of students to urban informality.

CCODE had already conducted enumerations in both Nancholi (Blantyre) and Salisbury Lines (Mzuzu), the sites chosen for the combined studio. There was hence a strong federation (of the urban poor) presence in the communities making them the ideal backdrop for community-based engagement and learning. The studios took place in July and August 2012 and it is hoped they will become regular events. This booklet tells the story of both studios.



# Table of Contents

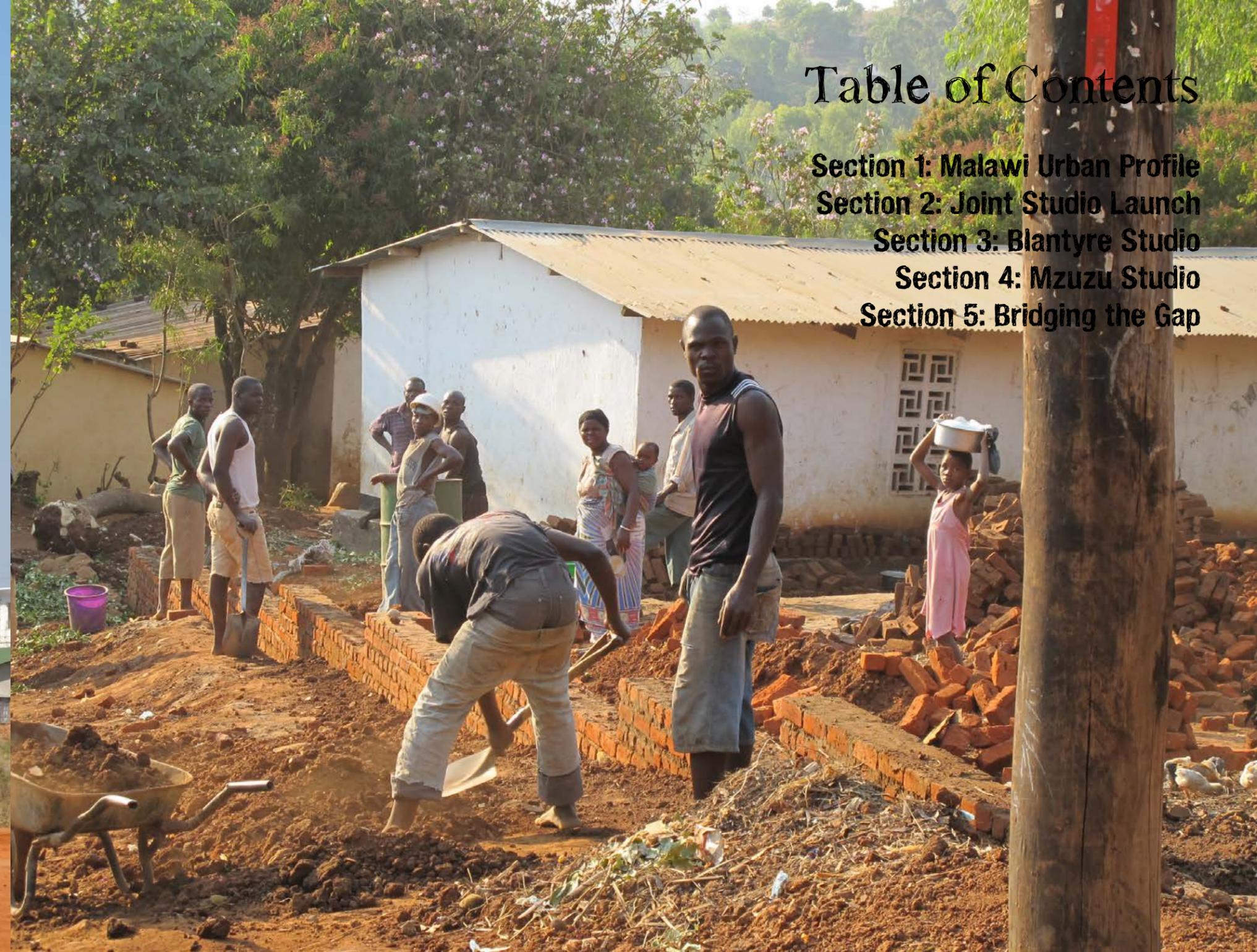
**Section 1: Malawi Urban Profile**

**Section 2: Joint Studio Launch**

**Section 3: Blantyre Studio**

**Section 4: Mzuzu Studio**

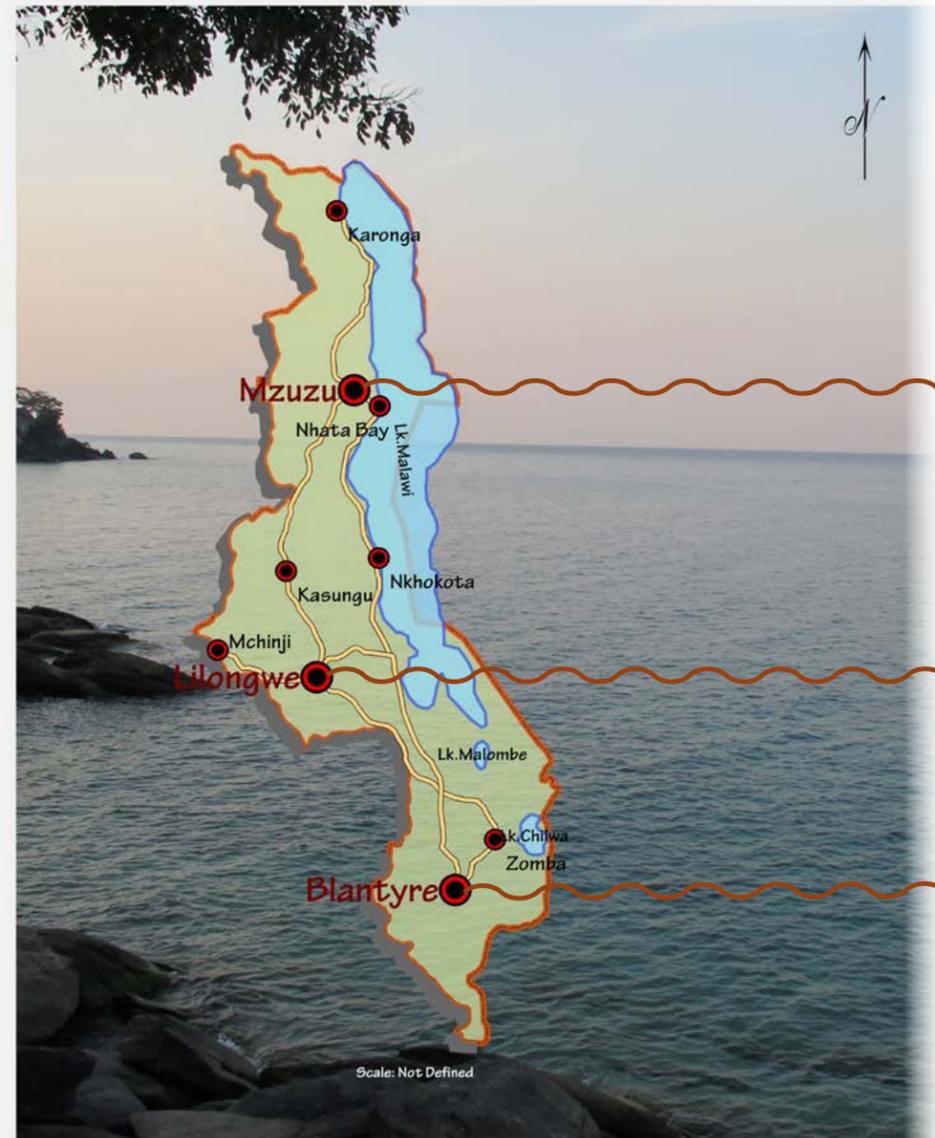
**Section 5: Bridging the Gap**



# SECTION 1: MALAWI URBAN PROFILE

## Overview of Urbanization in Malawi

In Malawi 20% (3.1 million) people live in urban areas. The annual rate of urbanization is 5.3 %. The main urban centres are Lilongwe (The capital city), Blantyre and Mzuzu. Blantyre and Lilongwe have a combined population of less than 2 million while Mzuzu's population is under 200 000 people. The urban population is projected to increase rapidly in the next decade and it is uncertain if already stretched infrastructure can keep pace with this development. Infrastructure services are public sector dominated with local governments and line agencies such as the Water Boards tasked with service delivery.



### Mzuzu

- Third largest urban centre in Malawi
- Low population (less than 250, 000 people)
- Administrative and commercial hub of the Northern region
- Rich agricultural activities and forested hinterland
- Complex Peri-urban interface

### Lilongwe

- Capital City of Malawi
- Planned Capital City which has an old and new town
- Infrastructure development is a major constraint
- Complex peri-urban Interface is a major urban planning and management challenge

### Blantyre

- The Commercial and Industrial hub of Malawi
- An estimated population of 700,000 people
- Commercial enterprises, missionary work, administrative functions and industrial complexes drive the city's economic development.

## Population and Demographics

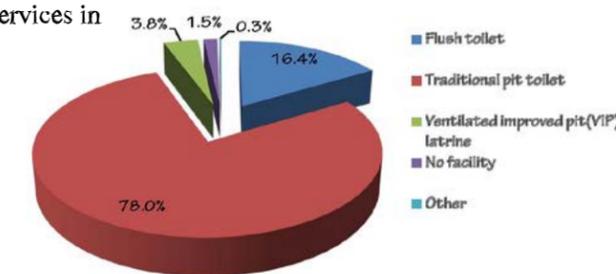
Malawi's population is currently estimated to be 13 million of which 20% is urban and the majority (80%) remains rural. The average national household size is 4.6 persons. 45.9% of the population is under 14 years old while the average life expectancy is 55 years (Government 2008 census statistics). 20.8% of seats in the national parliament are held by women and currently Joyce Banda is the country's first female president.

## Housing, Land supply and Administration

Malawi is characterized by low densities and urban sprawl creating a complex peri-urban interface. The Malawian National Land Policy and the Town & Country Planning Act are the main pieces of legislation addressing urban spatial development. Challenges include the extension of municipal boundaries without a clear-cut strategy to administer newly incorporated rural areas; failure of planning policies and lack of expected compensation to land owners. This confusion has created a unique type of 'squatters'. The spatial development morphology still conforms to rural and peri-urban set ups and housing is primarily permanent unlike the normal shack housing common in other African cities' informal settlements.

The informal land delivery processes (administered by chiefs) is convenient and less costly in comparison to the formal system that is perceived as 'tedious' and 'extortive'. Due to the absence of technical guidance the informal and administration systems have resulted in irregular land subdivision leading to poor land use planning and the escalation of informal and un-serviced areas.

Sanitation Services in Malawi

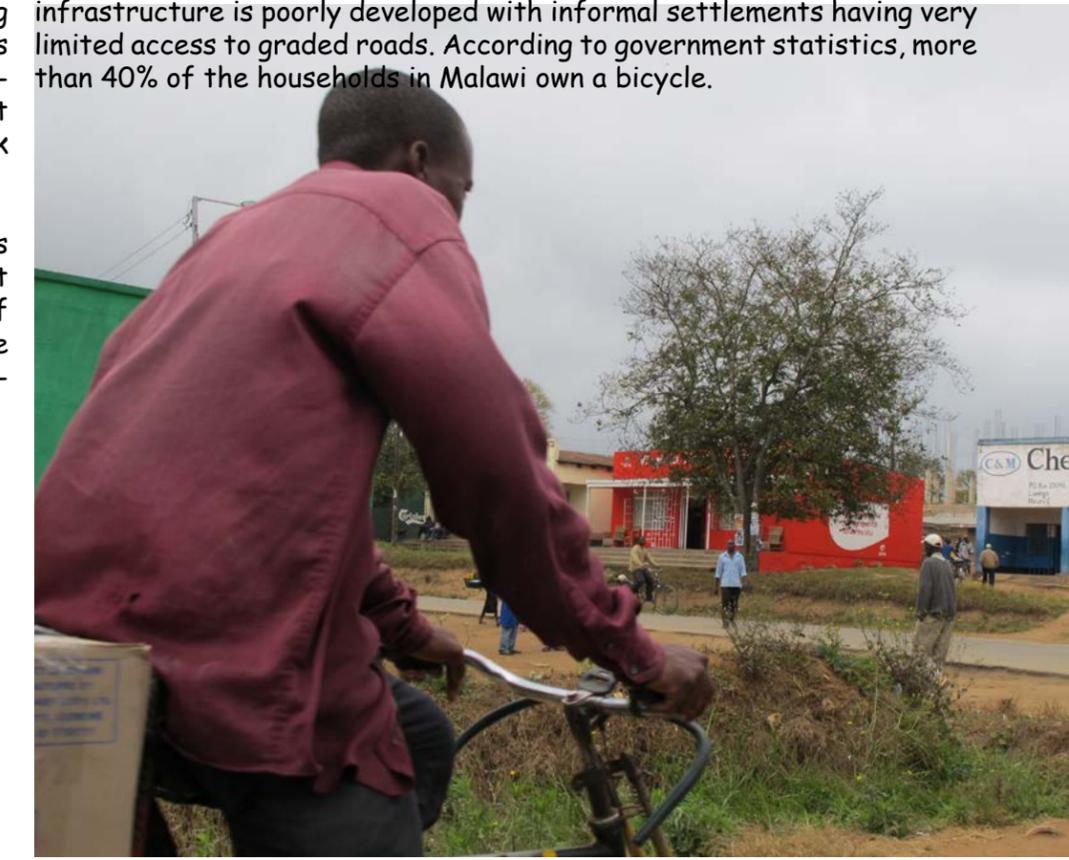


## Water and Sanitation Services

Water in the cities is provided by Water boards. These are state corporations mandated to provide water services in respective cities (e.g .Lilongwe Water Board, Blantyre Water Board.) Dry sanitation and use of septic tanks are the primary sanitary infrastructure in urban areas. In some cases there are network sewerage works but these cover less than 12% of the urban population. Topographical (steep terrain) and geological (high water tables) are natural constraints to the implementation of local sanitary solutions, especially in informal settlements. Municipal solid waste management services are highly inadequate in all cities. These services are practically non-existent in informal settlements

## Roads and Transport

Road infrastructure is financed internally (through Fuel Levies, local authority rates and external funding-primarily the European Union). This infrastructure is poorly developed with informal settlements having very limited access to graded roads. According to government statistics, more than 40% of the households in Malawi own a bicycle.



## Blantyre

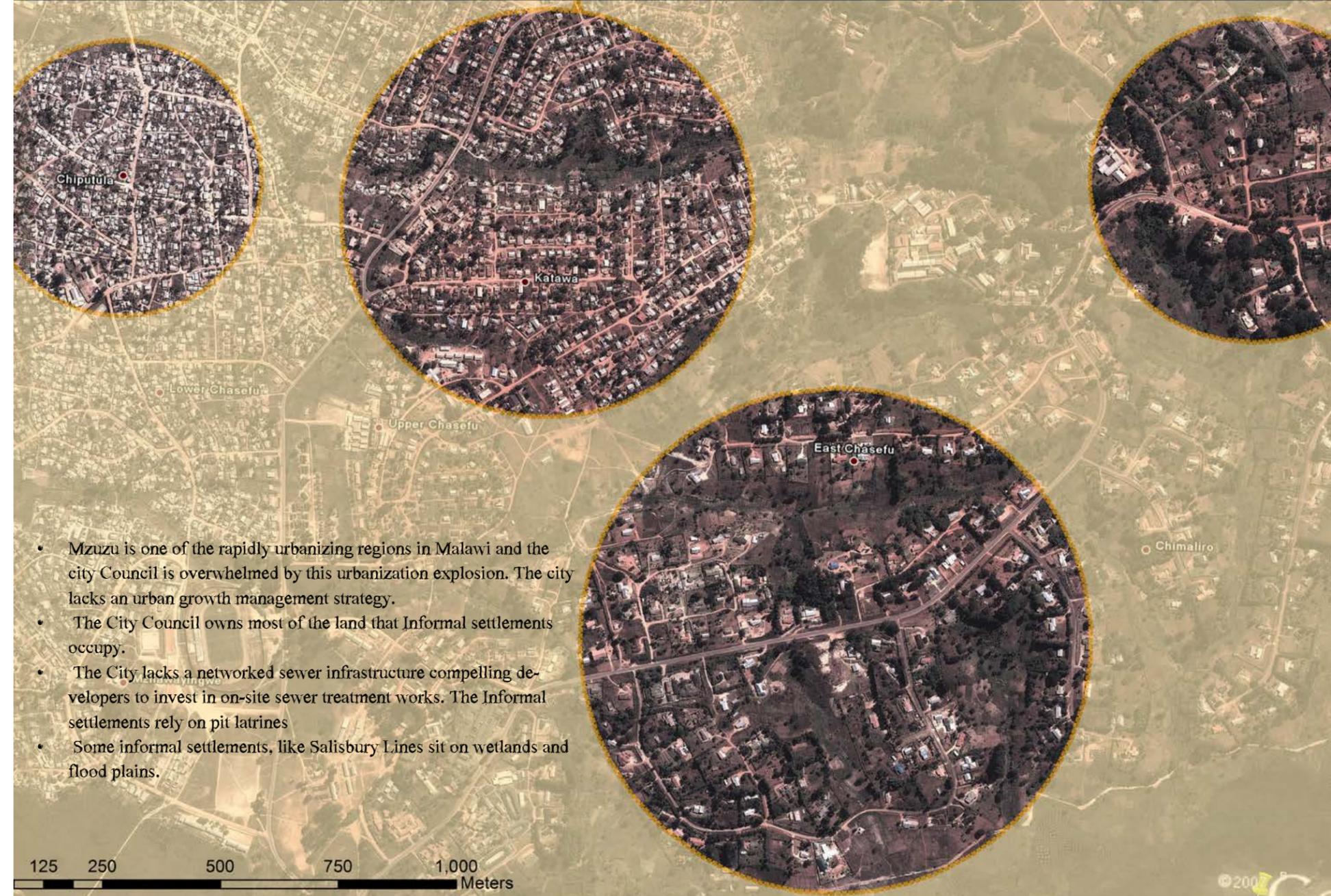
The irregular subdivision of land in Blantyre is not only limited to the informal settlements but also in formal development. This is illustrated by the irregular plot sizes and layouts in upmarket housing developments. Traditional and informal land delivery systems have contributed to increasing densification in the informal settlements.



Networked sewer infrastructure is very limited and only concentrated in the upmarket neighbourhoods. As urban growth increases, the capacity of these networks is highly stressed. At the same time, the city is struggling to expand existing networks.

0 125 250 375 500 Meters

## Mzuzu



- Mzuzu is one of the rapidly urbanizing regions in Malawi and the city Council is overwhelmed by this urbanization explosion. The city lacks an urban growth management strategy.
- The City Council owns most of the land that Informal settlements occupy.
- The City lacks a networked sewer infrastructure compelling developers to invest in on-site sewer treatment works. The Informal settlements rely on pit latrines
- Some informal settlements, like Salisbury Lines sit on wetlands and flood plains.

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## SECTION 2: JOINT STUDIO LAUNCH

On the 16th July 2012 participants from both the Blantyre and Mzuzu teams (Universities, students and community leaders) held a joint launch of the studios. Key issues and community expectations were discussed. The Nancholi community indicated that circulation, water and sanitation were prioritised issues. It was agreed that the agenda for the Mzuzu studio would be set by the wider community in Salisbury Lines during their launch (only a delegation had travelled for the joint launch). The joint launch was critical as it enabled both studio teams to have a common understanding of the studio process. The Blantyre studio started the following day while the Mzuzu team travelled back to finalize the preparations for their studio.



### Malawi Homeless People's Federation (MHPF)

The Malawi Homeless People's Federation (MHPF) is presently comprised of 1,321 savings groups, an increase of 691 since last year. There are now 16,688 active savers in the Federation. MHPF operates in Malawi's four major urban centres (Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba) and 29 towns.

The Federation continues work on a large-scale low-income housing project in Blantyre, as well as various home improvement, water and sanitation projects in Blantyre and Lilongwe. In the Machinjiri area of Blantyre, 540 plots of land have been donated by the Blantyre City Council for construction of new homes for low-income families. MHPF leaders have been actively working with savings group members to support all aspects of the project - from planning and design of the homes, to material purchase and savings. Other upgrading projects have included home improvement loans to 139 households in Malawi's central province, and 21 toilets in the second round of upgrading projects in Lilongwe.

Women are central to the MHPF processes, a strength that was very evident during the studio process with female community members taking the lead in both Nancholi and Salisbury Lines.

**'KUSONKHA NDI CHOLINGA'**

**-Saving with a Purpose-**

**MHPF**



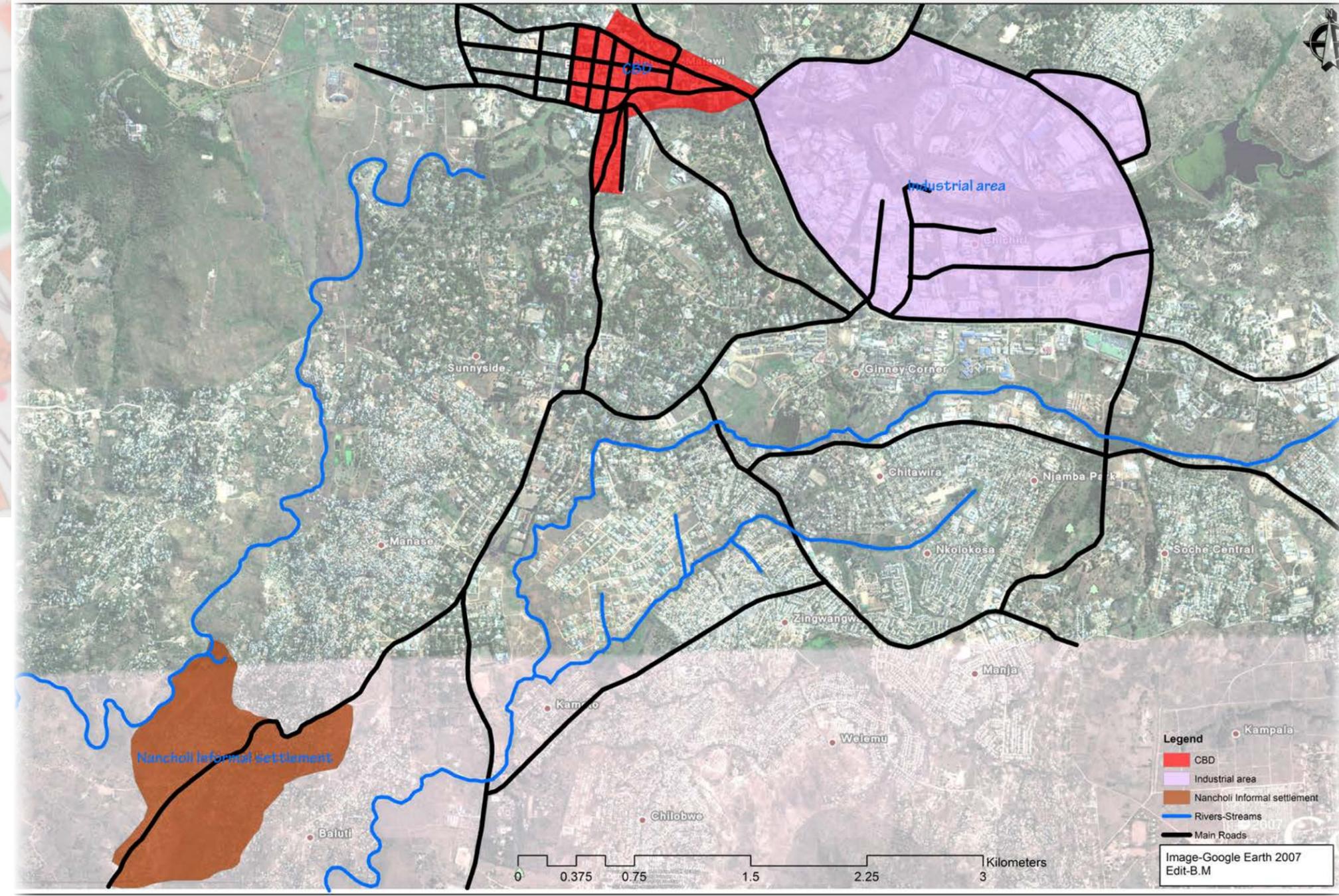
# SECTION 3: BLANTYRE STUDIO

## Location Context of Nancholi

Nancholi is located 5km from the Blantyre Central Business District(CBD) and has an estimated population of 9000 people. The settlement occupies about 1km<sup>2</sup>. The land is owned by the city but administered by the traditional chiefs. The study area (Cluster A) has a population of 1478 people from 301 households. This settlement is predominantly peri-urban in that it portrays both rural and urban characteristics in terms of economic activities, social relationships, the built environment and modes of infrastructure provision.

## Brief Description of the Settlement

- Land is owned by the city and administered by the traditional leadership(chiefs)
- Housing is a mix of permanent, semi-permanent and temporary-construction with soil bricks being the main wall material used. The density is very low.
- Service provision is almost non-existent. Water access is inadequate and no networked sewerage infrastructure exists. The roads are poorly paved (majority not paved at all) and circulation is mainly through footpaths. Electricity connections are uncommon (the community cited expensive connection rates as a prohibiting factor)
- The terrain of the settlement is highly ragged with extremely steep inclines. This makes circulation and mobility a major challenge. The steep slopes coupled with poor storm water drainage systems has led to the surface erosion of the circulation networks (footpaths and roads).
- Many families use their plots to grow crops and keep animals such as goats and chickens for food and sells the surplus.





## Preparation For Data Collection

The first activity in the Nancholi studio was profiling. To begin profiling the settlement, the participants were divided into 5 teams. These teams comprised of students (architects, planners, surveyors) and community members. The studio adopted a 3-phase approach:

1. Settlement Profiling/ Data collection
2. Situational analysis and proposal development
3. Community Presentation and report compilation

Teams were representative of the entire community and included both Malawi Homeless People Federation (MHPF) members and non-federation members. The team also included residents from other clusters in the settlement and other settlements in the city. An Informal Settlements Network (ISN) member from Cape Town, South Africa who was on a learning exchange, also participated.

## Clustering the Settlement

The teams decided to focus on sub-clusters as CCODE and the community had just completed an enumeration and mapping exercise in the area. Since the initial mapping was focused on housing and water facilities the community saw this as an opportunity to build upon the existing information. This was done through modifying the data capture tools to collect more detailed information. The actual data collection began with briefing the teams: students were first briefed separately to introduce them to codes of conduct when working with communities and then a joint briefing was held with all participants to develop a strategy for the data collection. Teams agreed on the general approaches; sketch mapping, use of mapping sheets, photography, interviews, measurements, GPS locators and observation techniques. Each team was allowed to develop its own mapping codes and system of capturing the attribute data e.g. checklists, casual interviews and note taking.

## Actual Data Collection

The teams in each sub-cluster collected data around the following themes:

### 1. Plot Layouts And Structures

The team mapped the existing plot configuration/subdivision in the settlement. This included taking measurements and sketching out the plot layout in the cluster. They also took part in updating the existing mapping of structures. During the studio process mapping proved to be very useful in understanding the current status of the settlement as well as projecting its future development. Never before had the community undertaken such a detailed mapping exercise in their settlement. The community team led the students in engaging residents to identify boundaries of their plots. Without the community leading this process the sensitive data on plot boundaries would not have been collected; at least not without resistance from plot owners. This mapping was done with the intention to gauge implications of the current land administration to service delivery and circulation in the settlement.

### 2. Circulation Networks and Services

With circulation as a key studio priority it was necessary to map and profile the conditions of all existing networks. These maps included roads and footpaths. The teams measured pathway width at various intervals, profiled the conditions, level of usage, connectivity and linkages within and adjacent to the cluster. The team also mapped all the services (drainage, electricity, water, waste disposal etc.) along the networks and other related uses such as businesses.

### 3. Sanitation and Environment

With the absence of a networked sewer infrastructure, proper storm drainages and adequate solid waste disposal environmental concerns were of vital importance to address during the studio. In that regard the teams mapped out and profiled the existing systems of waste disposal and drainage networks. This also included the mapping of green spaces and farms.

## Situational Analysis

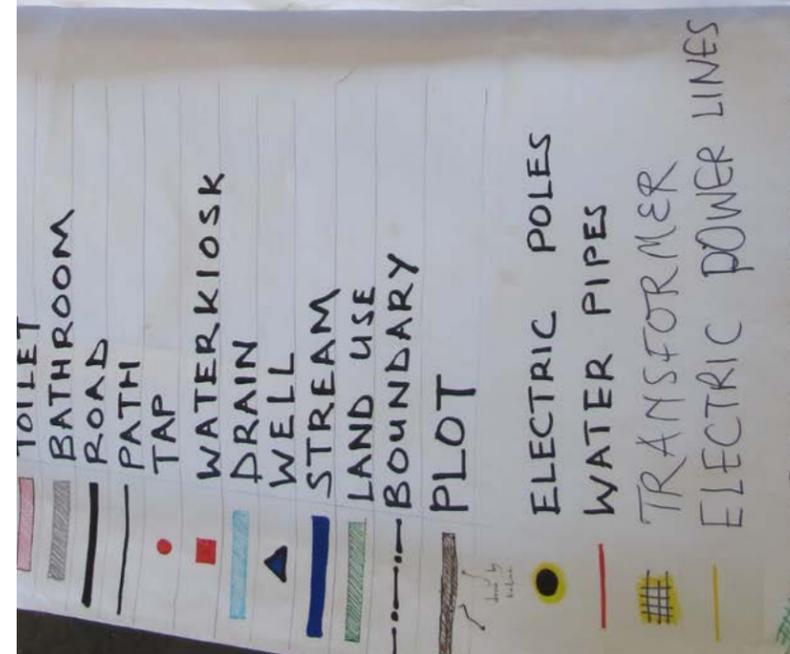
After two days of intense fieldwork the teams assembled in the community hall to analyse the information and develop proposals. To actively engage the community the use of hand copy maps and free hand drawing and painting techniques were adopted. Scaled maps were printed and both the community and students used tracing paper to develop working maps for each theme. Teams cleaned their sub cluster data and later merged the sections to develop a composite map. New groups were formed around the following themes; circulation and network services, storm drainage, sanitation and environment, plots and housing. This was the platform where participants analysed development in the context of local governance and city governance.

In each theme the groups identified the main problems, causal factors, previous interventions and the inherent opportunities and challenges. This resulted in the production of a situational analysis of the settlement including maps and reports which each team presented to the rest of the participants before embarking on the development of proposals. The community team played a vital role in helping the students interpret the emerging situational analysis. Such critical inputs included; socio-economic issues relating to water and electricity services, reliability of the services and seasonal dynamics.

## Analysis of the Enumeration Data

Part of the studio process was to expose students to working with community enumerations data. Enumerations are a powerful tool for getting a deeper analysis of informal settlements, providing insight into the socio-economic dynamics in a community. A community driven enumeration is a process rooted in active participation where communities gather their own information in a simple and systematic manner, which is not only a means of empowering community members but produces more detailed information. The students undertook an analysis of the Cluster A enumeration data and shared the outputs with the community.

Apart from the technical analysis of enumeration data the community team was able to identify a simplified system of analyzing the attribute data of the mapped features. They managed to sum up counts of structures, plots, taps, wells and businesses in the settlement. This summary provided the community team with a rapid tool for taking stock of the existing development in the settlement in a simple and pragmatic manner. It was striking to observe how communities consistently took recordings during the entire process.



"the community was excited to work with the Polytechnic students because we always think they are difficult to work with. But their skills to draw maps, make model, and identifying our problems and solutions to such problems have helped us to know how we should further the studio process on our own". -community participant

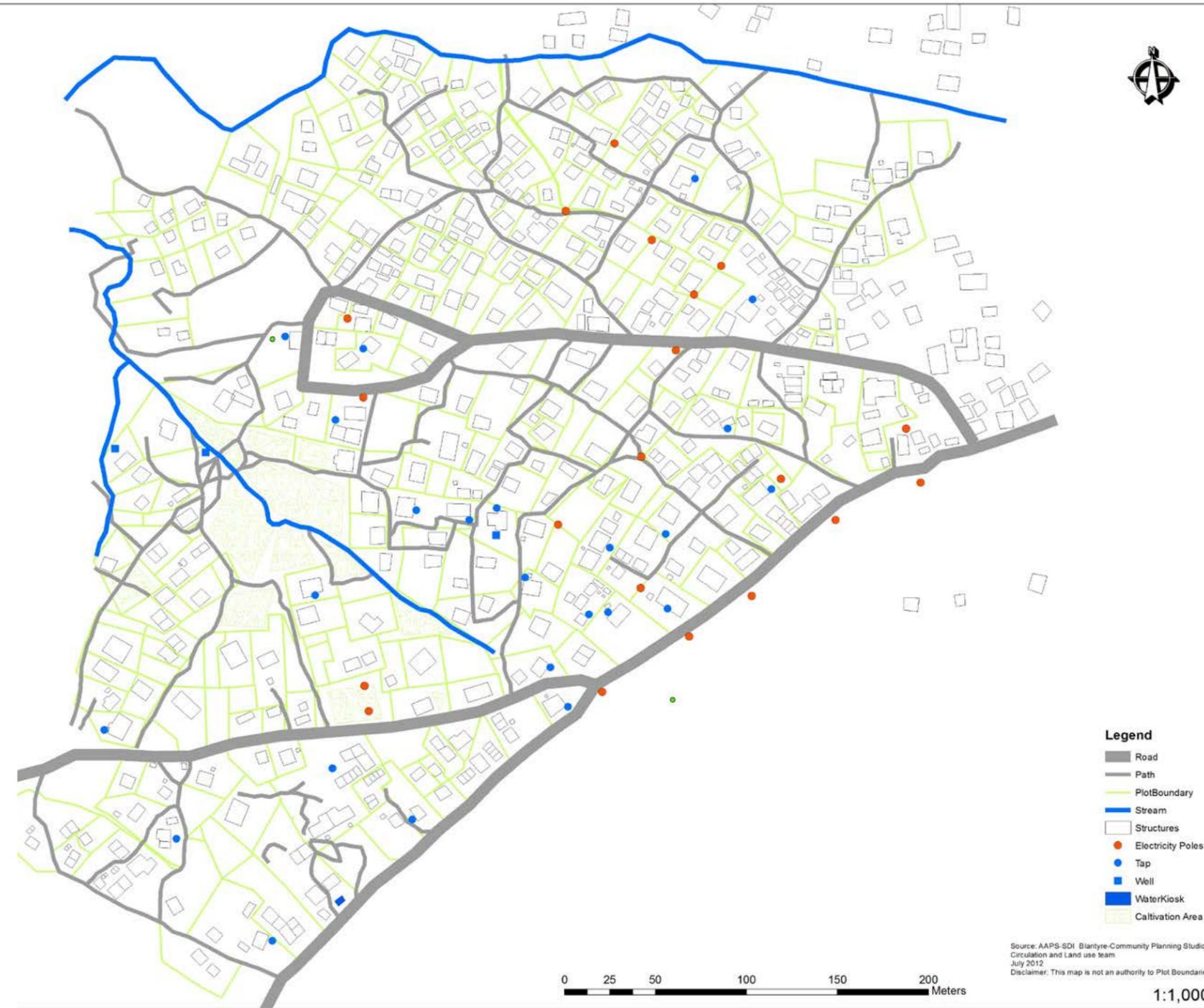


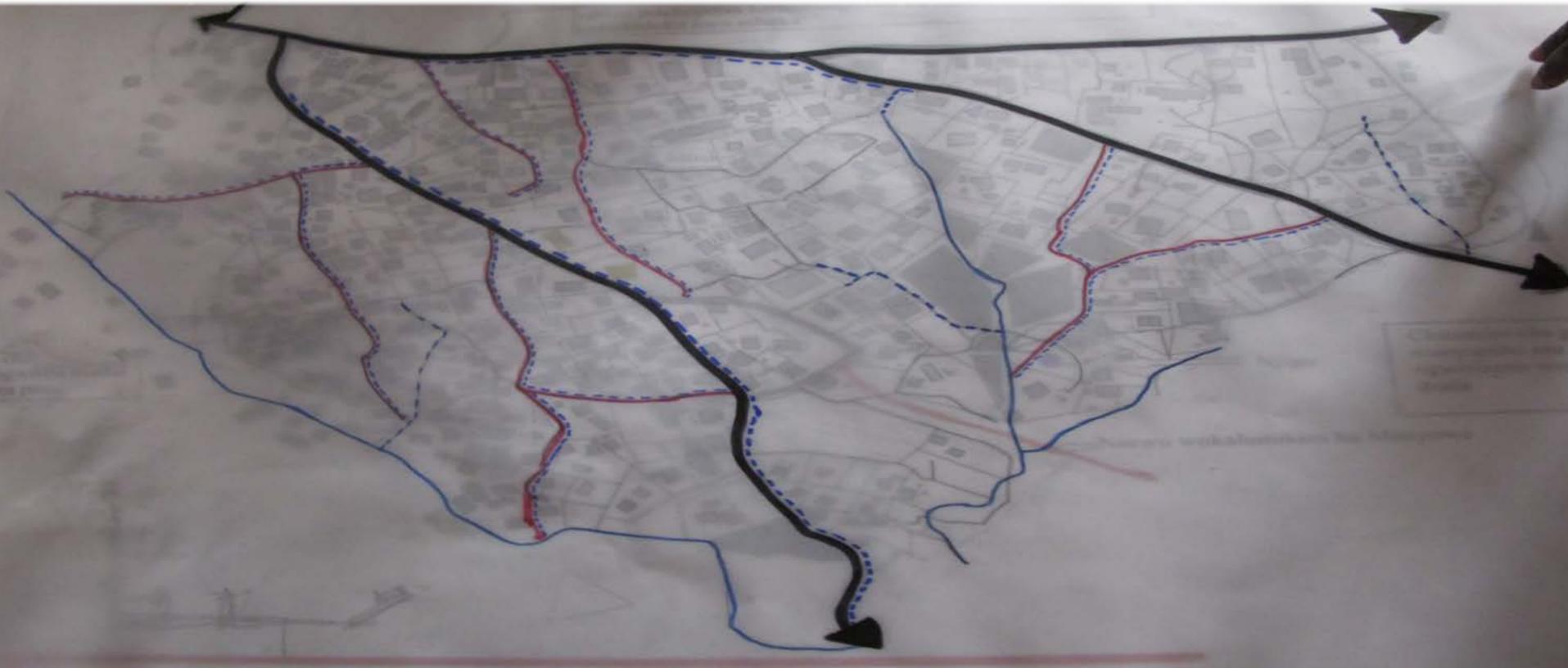
"In Manase studio we did not involve the people because we treated them as ignorant to planning issues we developed our own solutions which aimed at eradicating the existing settlement and introduce new settlement's patterns that adhere to conventional planning standards"  
Student Participant

"Working together with the community and Homeless Federation members has opened me up that I should not undermine the poor people's input when planning their settlement and finding solutions to their problems. The in-situ upgrading approach is one thing that amazed me because it really works well because it complements the efforts of the poor to solve their own housing and settlements problems as oppose to relocate them. This means the intervention measures may not be that costly because they are not starting from scratch".  
Student Participant



### NANCHOLI CLUSTER A-EXISTING LAND SUBDIVISION





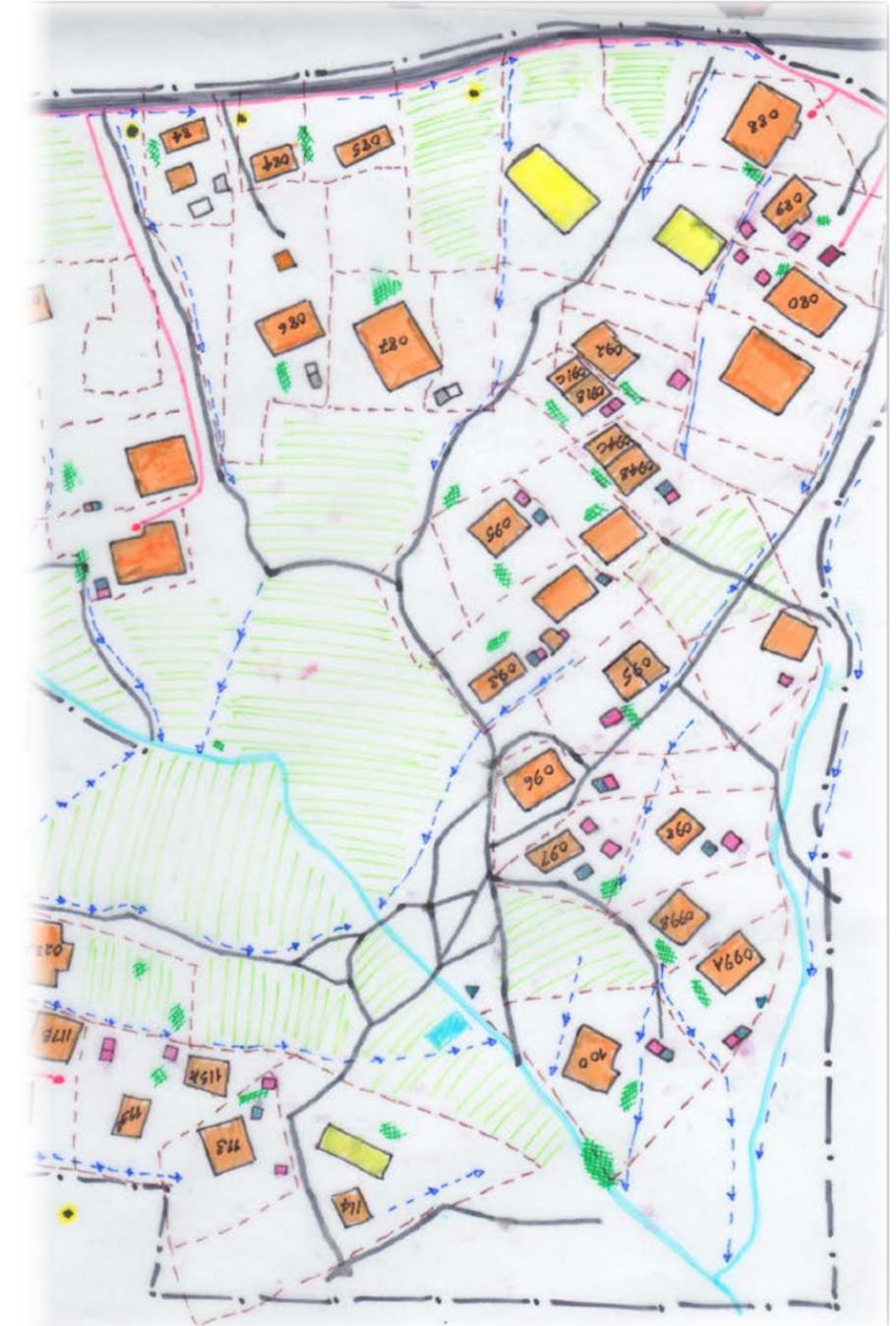
### How do we Intervene?

After the situational analysis, the next step was to develop proposals. The first draft of this was presented to the wider community and from that the teams proceeded with refining the proposals. Before presenting the second draft of proposals to the wider community the teams held internal presentations. These proposals were guided by the principle of pragmatism with a strong emphasis on community input. The community team cited inadequate access to applied technologies as the major constraint to initiating community led interventions. This was especially noted in terms of sanitation improvement. The community capacity to manage local development was emphasised.

### Reaching the Wider Community

As previously mentioned the teams jointly held two presentations. One of the presentations was on the situational analysis and tentative proposals while the second presentation discussed the refined proposals. In the first presentation, the wider community had significant input that aided in formulating the second draft of proposals. For example, a mother from the community was had concerns around storm water drainage. She was concerned that, "...a retention pond will be a safety hazard to the children" (a retention pond was one of the proposed interventions for storm water management).

The presentations influenced the teams' proposals and the approaches that were developed. The presentations allowed students to actively engage informal communities on multiple levels of participation: one at the representation level and the other through a general open forum. Both levels pose diverse dynamics as the students would later realize. This also provided the platform for community participants to enengage the wider community on local development issues.

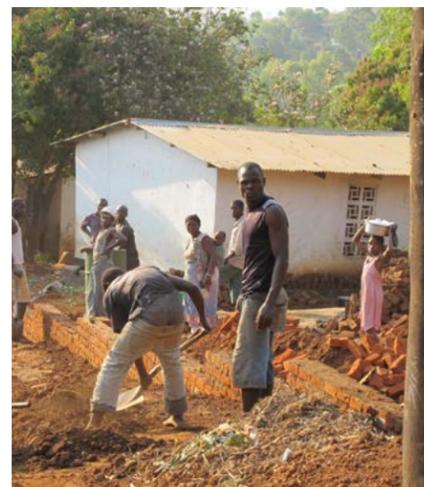


"It has been such an awesome experience working with the community. **It is been a learning process for me.** I have been learning it in class but to actually participate in it has been amazing. I have realised how much the communities expect from us as students or even professionals and how much I as a student can **help create a better Malawi** and be a better citizen. I am quite grateful that I got the chance to participate".  
 Student Participant

" it created a **bond with the poor communities** and I learnt how to work with them"  
 Student Participant



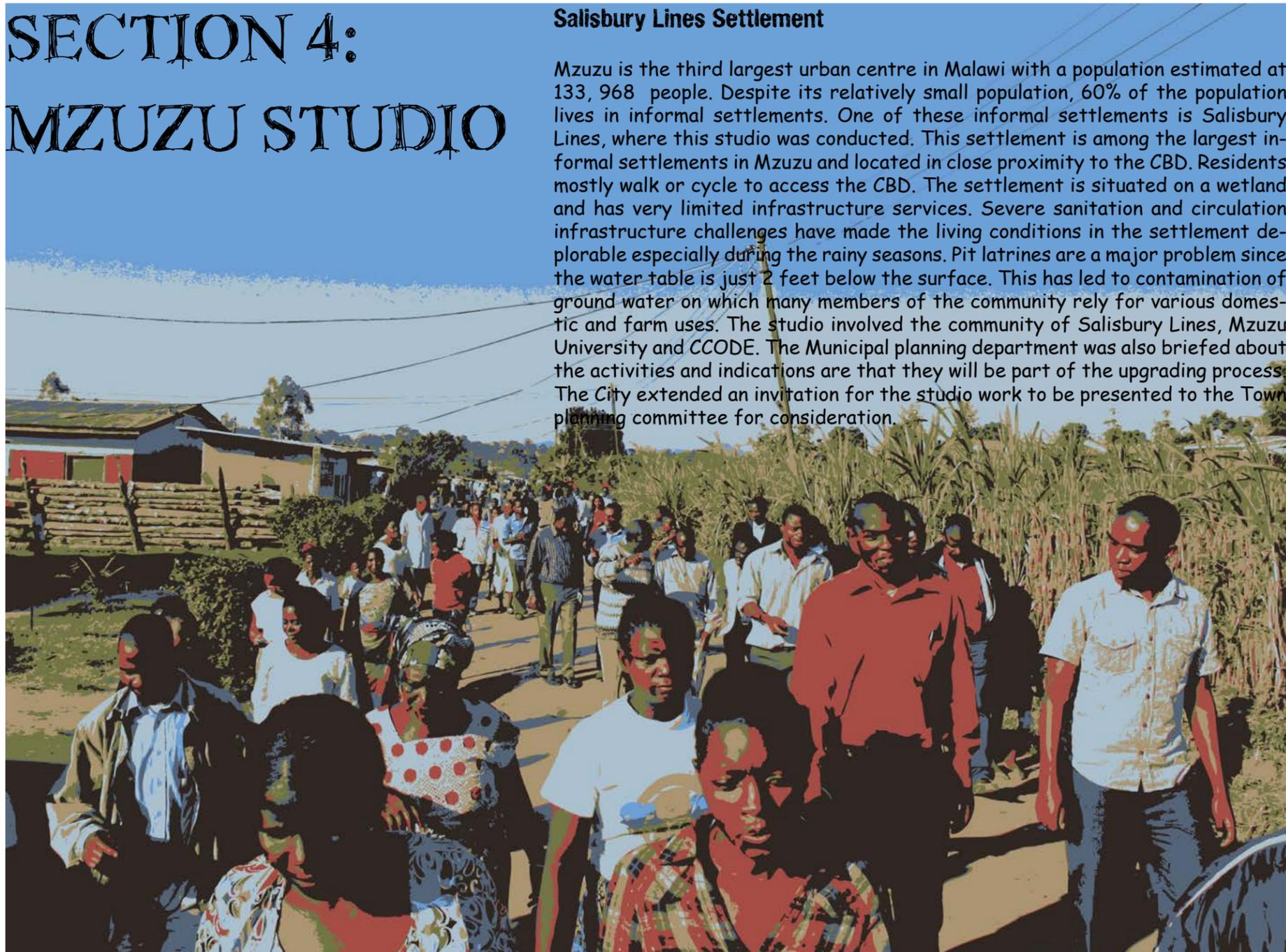
Themes	Problems identified	Opportunities	solutions	Weaknesses in solutions
Circulation routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-only one main vehicular access roads.</li> <li>-Poorly maintained roads.</li> <li>-Roads become water ways during rainy season.</li> <li>-Two secondary roads not accessible by cars.</li> <li>-Some sections of the roads have projected stones causing difficult in mobility.</li> <li>- Some sections of the roads become slippery during rainy season.</li> <li>-These roads are very narrow – causing traffic and pedestrian congestion.</li> <li>-Inadequate road network is delaying of provision of water, electricity, and drainage system.</li> <li>-Footpaths are narrow and not paved.</li> <li>-Footpaths passing through plots – causing loss of privacy and security.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Availability of rocks for building materials.</li> <li>-Existing routes – only maintenance and drainage required.</li> <li>-Slope – necessitating drainage of stormy water.</li> <li>-Few formal footpaths to be upgraded.</li> </ul> <p>-Free interaction, shortcuts, and security.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Resurfacing the main roads using gravel.</li> <li>-Widening the most used foot paths to 1200mm and 2500 to allow cycling access.</li> <li>-Extending vehicular access roads to end of the settlement.</li> </ul>	-Lack of clarity on the classes of roads and related solutions.
Drainage system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Existing drainage blocked with wastes and soil erosion.</li> <li>-Roads become drainage channels.</li> <li>-Many houses without storm water drains.</li> <li>-Drainage at plot level not provided– causing a lot of damage to houses</li> <li>- Drainage for the whole settlement not defined/controlled</li> <li>-Natural gully which form part of main drainage are not protected from soil erosion – may affect the nearest plots, may result in construction of bridges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Readily available construction materials – stones</li> <li>-Labor (sweat equity)</li> <li>-Natural galleys form part of drainagesystem.</li> <li>-Slope necessitates drainage of stormy water.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crown roads and provide drainage on both sides.</li> <li>-Construction and rehabilitation of drains around houses and plots.</li> <li>-Stone lining the existing galleys to avoid soil erosion</li> <li>-Develop well-coordinated drainage system throughout the settlement to avoid uncontrolled rainy water.</li> <li>-Civic education on the dangers of dumping wastes in the drainage channels.</li> <li>- To introduce big pipe with strainers to trap</li> </ul>	-Foul water drainage neglected.



# SECTION 4: MZUZU STUDIO

## Salisbury Lines Settlement

Mzuzu is the third largest urban centre in Malawi with a population estimated at 133,968 people. Despite its relatively small population, 60% of the population lives in informal settlements. One of these informal settlements is Salisbury Lines, where this studio was conducted. This settlement is among the largest informal settlements in Mzuzu and located in close proximity to the CBD. Residents mostly walk or cycle to access the CBD. The settlement is situated on a wetland and has very limited infrastructure services. Severe sanitation and circulation infrastructure challenges have made the living conditions in the settlement deplorable especially during the rainy seasons. Pit latrines are a major problem since the water table is just 2 feet below the surface. This has led to contamination of ground water on which many members of the community rely for various domestic and farm uses. The studio involved the community of Salisbury Lines, Mzuzu University and CCODE. The Municipal planning department was also briefed about the activities and indications are that they will be part of the upgrading process. The City extended an invitation for the studio work to be presented to the Town planning committee for consideration.



## SALISBURY LINES



## Community Identifies its Priorities

The launch of the studio took place on the 18th of July 2012 on the grounds of the Katoto Primary school. The purpose of this launch was to:

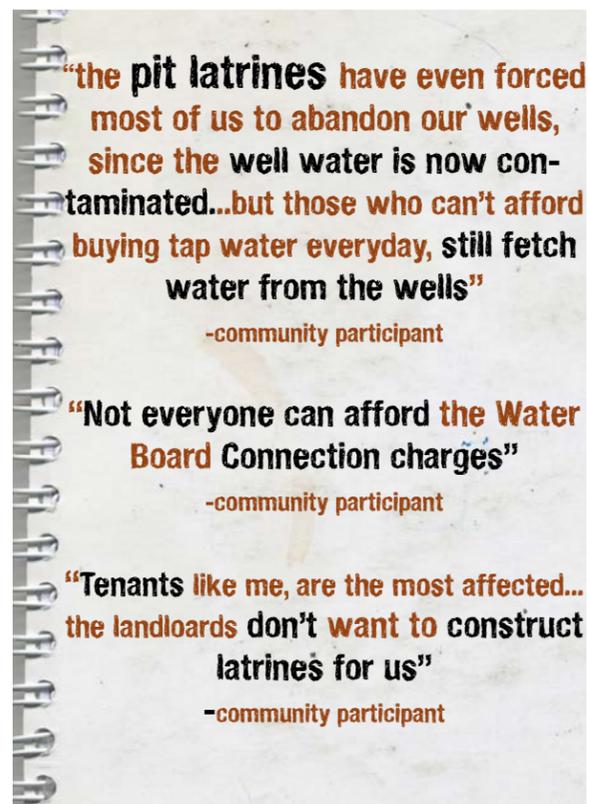
- Introduce students to the community and setting of the communities priorities
- Brainstorm on the background of development in the settlement including the: aspirations of the community, previous projects/interventions, opportunities and challenges and as well as understanding the socio-political organization of the community.
- Select a section of the settlement as the main focus for the studio workshop and form working teams.

Through a ranking system the community identified the following issues (in order of priority for intervention):

1. Poor Water and Sanitation
2. Poor transport infrastructure -Roads and footpaths
3. Inadequate access to electricity services

They attributed the poor sanitation to:

- The absence of municipal sewer infrastructure,
- A high water table which makes investment in improved pit latrines highly problematic (ground water contamination).
- Lack of waste collection services
- Flat terrain which causes drainages to stagnate (this drainage collects grey water from bathrooms)



## Profiling Salisbury Lines

The student and community teams joined and formed four smaller teams. Each team was tasked with the mandate of profiling the study area in line with the theme at hand. The following teams were formed: Electricity and Water, Sanitation (toilets and solid waste disposal), Drainages (Storm water and grey water channels) and the circulation and land use team. The first activity for the data collection was to develop tools and techniques of profiling the settlement.

The community team took the lead in aiding the students develop the codes for mapping, checklists (outlining key features) and basic interview questions for casual interviews with households.

The teams were using digitized map sheets, printed satellite images, notebooks, cameras and tape measures for data collection.

Through mapping, taking notes on conditions, identifying previous drainage works, household-drainage relations and establishing the general flow of drainage in the settlement (this is a relatively flat area), the team was able to understand all drainage systems in the settlement

## Water and Electricity services

This team was tasked with profiling water and electricity services in the settlement. Among the key issues they captured were: spatial distribution (mapping), conditions of the services, accessibility, connection rates, tariffs and reliability of services provided. Focus was also driven to the nature of reticulation as it relates to circulation systems and the infrastructure delivery modes.

## Sanitation Team

This team profiled: solid waste disposal, toilet facilities, environmentally stressed areas (e.g. marshy areas, waste clusters, pit latrines, solid waste disposal, bathrooms and grey water drains). They also sought household opinions on the coping strategies they have devised. These teams had two sub teams: One specifically detailing the drainage system and the other dealt with other relevant issues.

## Circulation and land use Team

The wider community had advocated for spatial illustrations of the irregular land allocation happening in the settlement. In that regard the teams engaged in mapping out the existing layout of plots and taking measurements of their sizes. This team also updated the structures map; indicating all new development since the last mapping exercise in the settlement. This team also profiled the circulations networks and commercial activities in the settlement. In addition, the team profiled transportation modes and sought from the community land administration issues.



“Some of the students in our team are taking things for granted. **One was mapping a structure as a latrine before verifying if it was a latrine or a bathroom.** We almost took the map from him, but later he learned to verify before indicating on the map”. --community participant

## Participatory Mapping

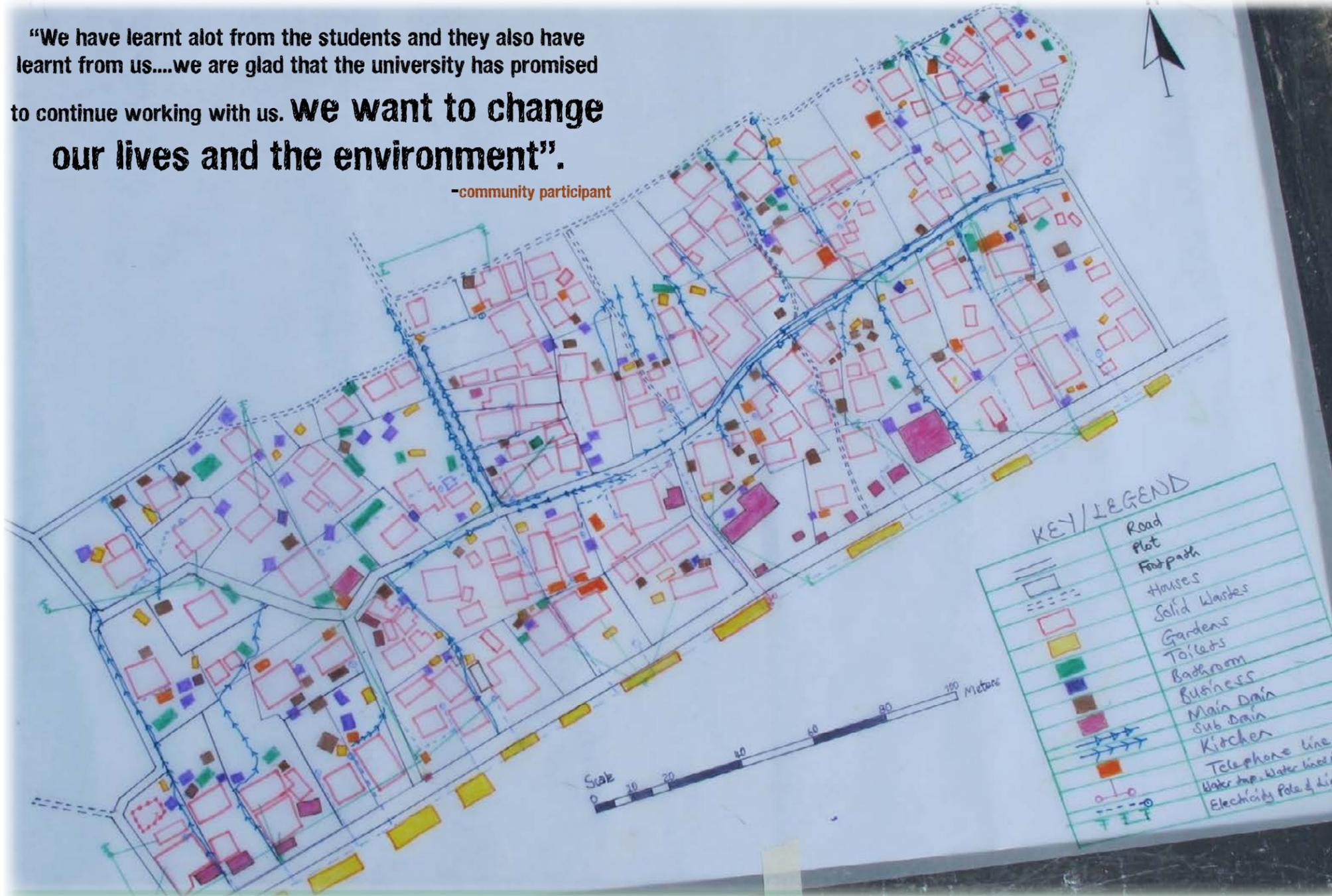
In both Blantyre and Mzuzu studios students and community members were able to collect spatial data (object and attribute data), draft maps and interpret the emerging spatial issues. The basics of ground mapping, verification and the scaling of objects were valuable by skills learnt by those who participated.

The students were able to realize their technical limitations with regards to mapping and in particular mapping complex spatial environments such as informal settlements. The teams mapped the unmapped: informal land subdivisions perceived to be contested were profiled while establishing the causal factors linked to the subdivisions.

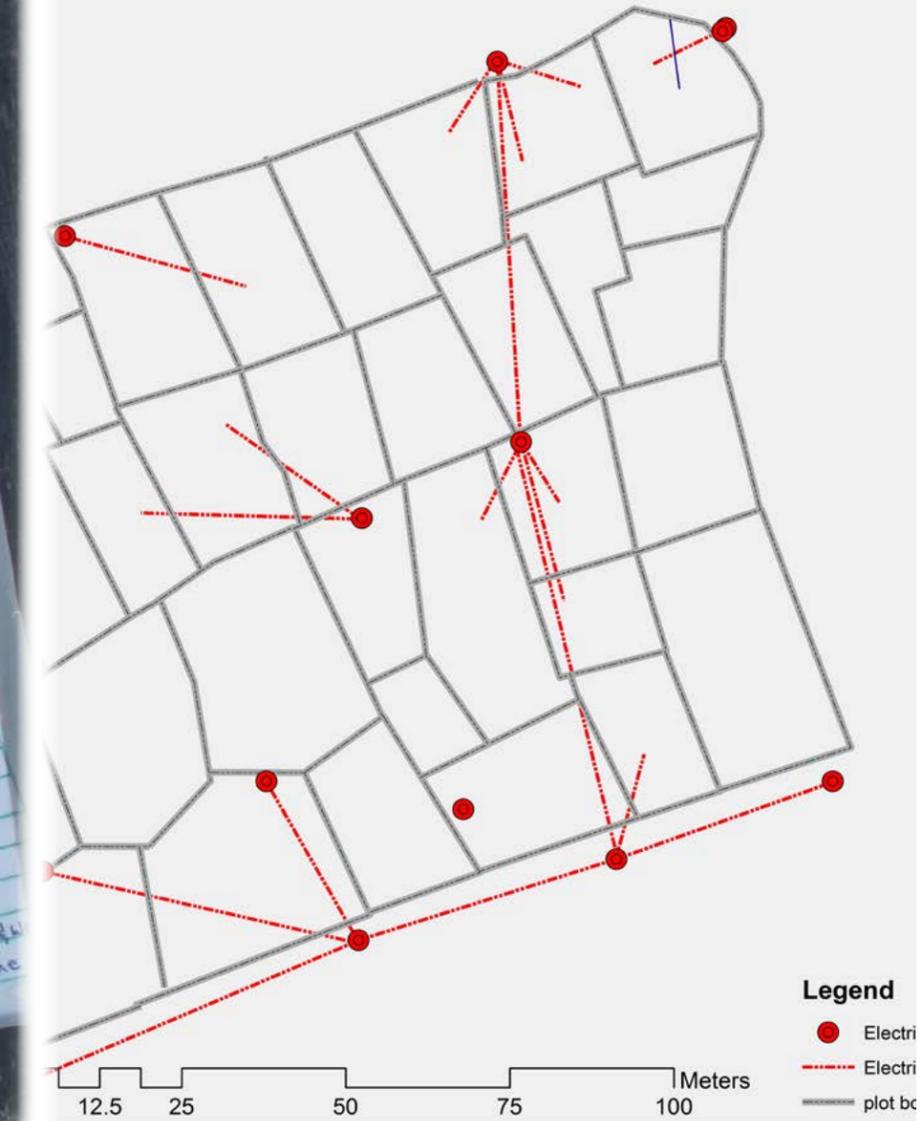


**“We have learnt alot from the students and they also have learnt from us....we are glad that the university has promised to continue working with us. We want to change our lives and the environment”.**

-community participant



## Salisbury Lines-Plot Subdivision



## Analysis and Developing Proposals

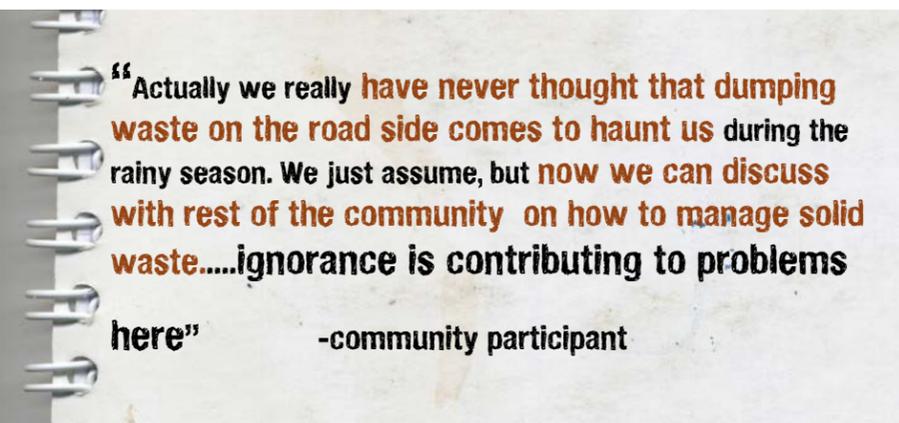
After thorough fieldwork, the participants covered in a hall within the settlement where they embarked on situational analyses and the synthesis of emerging issues which led to the development of proposals.

Teams worked thematically: Sanitation, Circulation, Land and Housing and Electricity.

Active involvement of every participant was evident. Both communities and students exchanged skills in drafting of maps, analysis of information and building scenarios. Brainstorming sessions played a significant role in understanding policy and institutional framework governing urban development.

For two days the participants focused on developing interventions for upgrading the settlement. The proposals developed were grounded on three main principles:

- Proposals that the community can implement with minimal external funding
- Minimal disruption to the existing spatial configuration of the settlement and the existing social fabric
- Proposals that build on the existing capacities and opportunities in the settlement



“The project has helped me to gain experience on how to work in an informal settlement and with urban poor communities. I am now confident in working in similar contexts”



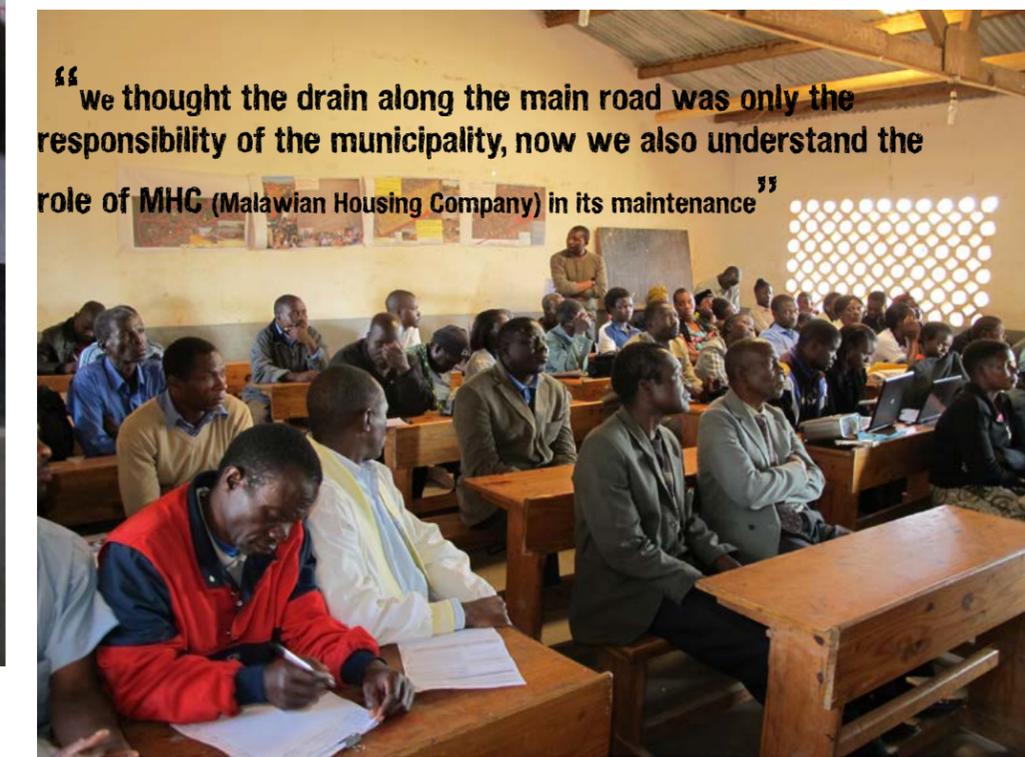
## Presentations

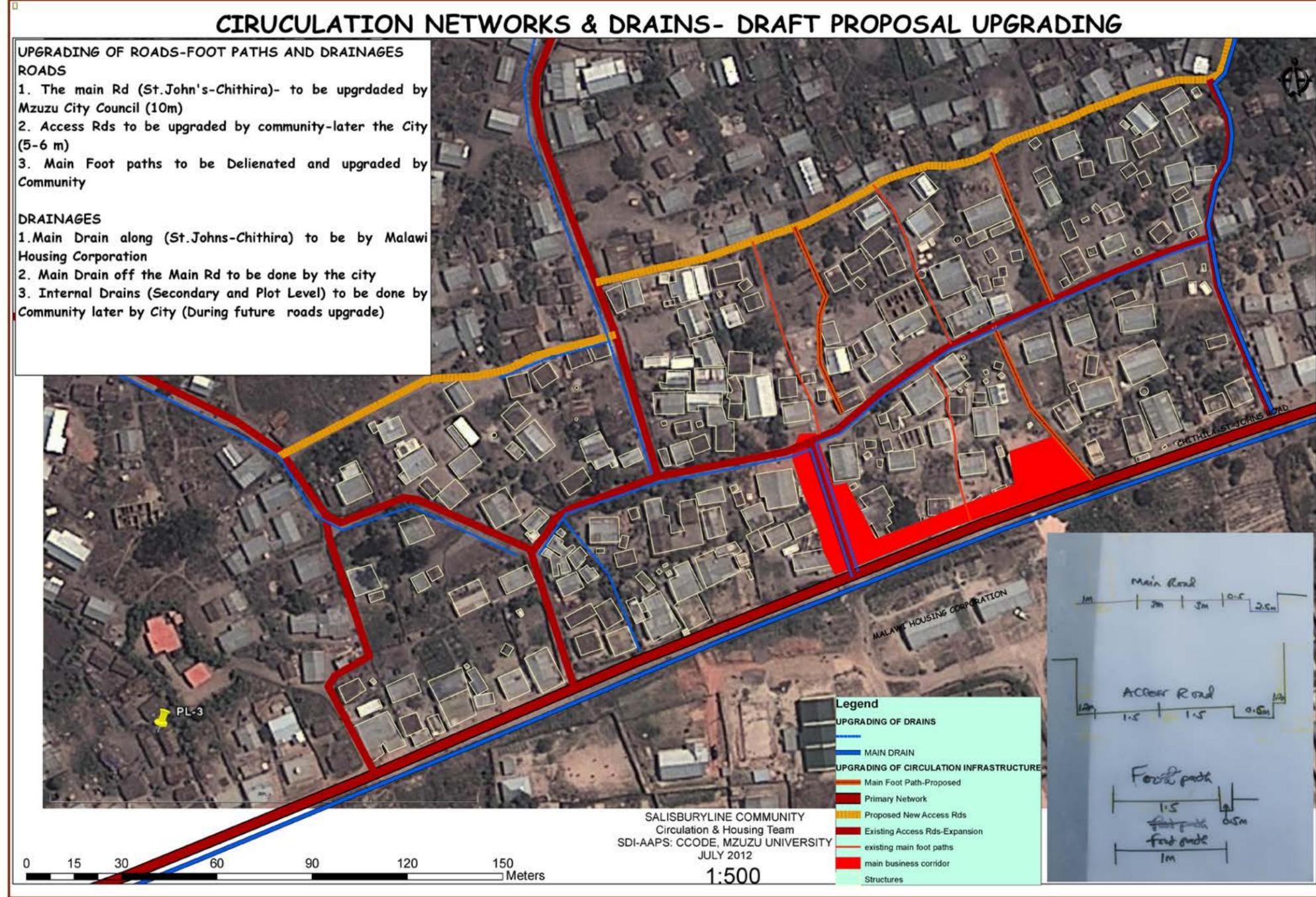
The working teams conducted a series of presentations; several internally (team presentations) and one to the wider community.

The internal presentations aided in the intergration of sectoral/thematic issues to the general planning process. Both students and communities were able to critique their work and build capacity amongst themselves. Various modes of presentation were being used: Powerpoint, pin charts, maps and oral presentations.

From the presentation to the Wider community, the following emerged:

1. Present community members expressed willingness to start improving drains and negotiating with other community members on the widening of roads and footpaths.
2. Both the community and the students could relate to municipal infrastructure delivery systems and how they affect service provision at the informal settlement level.





# SECTION 5: BRIDGING THE GAP

## Reflection

What the Malawian studio illustrates is that significant "gaps" exist practically, institutionally and legislatively between informal conditions and academic presuppositions. Institutional fragmentation where civil society, academia and the state work at cross-purposes and information is compartmentalized represents a significant challenge. Whereas planning processes move across numerous spheres these institutions are often disconnected and overall co-ordination is unclear. This is reflective not just of Malawi but also of many other African citywide planning strategies.

In many such cases a strong argument can be made for re-building planning from the bottom up. Not by looking at existing frameworks but at what is actually happening on the ground, a cityscape that is largely poor, informal and un-serviced. Poor communities have knowledge based on lived experience that is imperative to this discussion. There has for too long been a "gap" between academic knowledge which is deemed privileged merely because of where it is situated and informal community knowledge. Communities may not have the verbal toolkit to couch their speech in theoretical terms but they understand the spaces that they occupy better than any professional.

Another "gap" on the planning continuum exists between municipal legislature and informal conditions. This has already been alluded to in discussions about the disjuncture between outdated planning standards and informal realities. If significant progress is to be made this gap needs to be narrowed in a clear and co-ordinated manner that draws communities into the framework as partners and drivers in a sustainable planning and upgrading process.

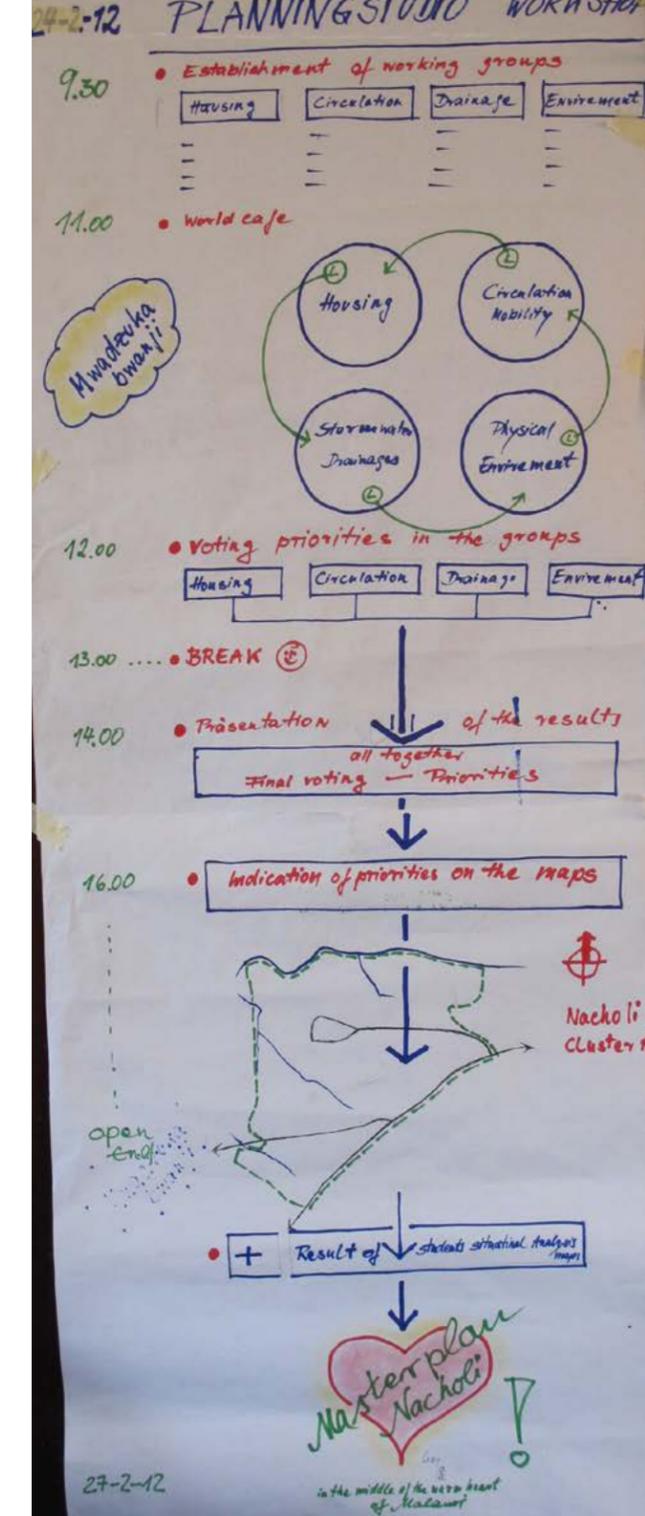
What is important is that the studios are part of a far larger challenge that calls into question the ways African cities are developing to exclude the urban poor. Planning schools are only one of many organisations that affect the urban landscape and while working to re-imagine planning will make strides in changing current perceptions of African informality, it is only part of re-thinking African cities.

## Why this Matters to the Federation/Communities

The work produced in both studios has a profound impact in influencing future investment in the upgrading of the settlements. It has been observed that upgrading projects secure significant funds for preliminary surveys and community mobilisation and often repetition of works previously done in the settlement. The work produced in the studios can thus be regularly updated and used for the design of upgrading projects in the respective cities by CCODE and the federation (Community). This regular update of the work can significantly minimise information collection expenses hence such funds can be channelled to other project activities.

Similarly, the studio process if sustained can be used to leverage development funds for the implementation of various projects. This includes local government funds, national funds and external (donor) funding. Building upon this work can thus become a regular activity for the federation in Nancholi and Salisbury Lines.

By the close of the studio workshop in Salisbury lines, 7 members from the community had expressed willingness to pilot a dry sanitation project, while the community leadership agreed to hold regular meetings with the community on implementation of a drainage project. However they cited lack of appropriate skills to implement this. This opened room for CCODE, the University and the City to further engagements with community. Similar projects were also identified in Nancholi.



## Demystifying the Myths on Slum Upgrading-Reframing Thinking

The students in both studios indicated that the exercise was timely in their training. They observed that informal settlement upgrading was not as abstract as it sounded on paper or in lectures. It was noted that the studios played a significant role in changing their mind-sets and it also acted as an opportunity to test the relevance of their training to the looming urbanization landscape in Malawi. The spatial form complexities, portrayed by informal settlements were scrutinized with regard to their implications to housing and service upgrading options.

In the Blantyre studio the students were reluctant to engage the community on sensitive land tenure issues. However, they ended up mapping out the plot configuration and land use patterns in the settlement and freely discussing these issues with the community. This demonstrates the unique opportunities that participatory urban planning offers. In this case, the Malawi Homeless People's Federation facilitated this vital interactive space. It is certain that the participatory planning practices can significantly aid in reframing the highly technocratic approaches that have little room for blending with informal systems.

Contrary to popular thinking in conventional urban planning informal settlements and slums are often not the blotches that dot the 'organised' urban form; students realised that informal settlements have their own form of planning. Though not structured, the informal planning systems tend to respond to particular needs (that formal planning often ignores). Bizarre as it sounded (to the students) in some instances the community participants accused other members of the community for encroachment on 'circulation reserves' and conspiracy with city authorities to develop 'informally'. These are the unique value systems embedded in urban informality, which technocrats tend to brush over. There is a need to engage urban poor communities actively in urban planning and development where the poor become active agents of development. Blanket condemnation and assumptions will lead to missing out on this important opportunities.

Students established that poor as these communities may be, they extensively dedicate their labour to improving their livelihoods. As a result, housing and land is a lifetime investment for households in informal settlements. The relative investment in improving these vital physical needs of human existence is unparalleled, thus the design of upgrading approaches sustained engagement with communities to upgrade livelihoods and living conditions with the minimal negative impacts possible should be adopted. The manner in which the training of planners is done has a huge implication in reframing of these approaches (of slum eradication). Are the modern approaches building on the assets and capacities possessed by communities or are they having a total disregard of them?

## Learning Differently

The first hand experience in working with communities in informal settlements was an eye opener for students. Students were exposed to the real living conditions that characterise informal settlement/slums. This is a learning experience that is largely ignored in many African Planning schools. Students in both studios indicated that the studios were a great learning experience in terms of understanding how communities in informal settlements connect with the wider city. The following were outlined as the key issues observed by students:

- Informal service delivery systems played a significant role meeting the demand for services in slums and informal systems
- Existing policies and urban planning approaches are inconsistent with the reality in informal settlements
- Communities in informal settlements should be embraced as agents to development rather than simply, beneficiaries of state resources
- Communities have skills and knowledge that have profound impact in improving the efficiency of informal settlements/ slum upgrading projects.
- Urban poor communities have values and aspiration in urban development as well

On the other hand, the studio provided an opportunity for community participants to acquire or improve their skills in community development planning, urban planning and the understanding of the legislative framework. Where settlements are governed by informal/extra-legal institutional frameworks the community participants were able to understand how urban planning regulations and policies impact on their development aspirations.

Are the existing policies undermining or fostering community led development? The studio participants pointed out a weak and outdated policy framework that has no room for community led development as a significant impediment to community led planning and development.



## Managing Community Expectations

The studio processes generate interests and expectations within the community both during the preparatory phase, actual studio time and subsequent to the studio. Although there is a consensus that community federations identify settlements that have exhibited a capacity for upgrading there is a need for an improved strategy to maximize community benefits from the studios (discussed on the subsequent page).

Even with prior consensus within communities that the studios are intended to build capacities for both communities and students, the outcomes of the studios tend to build a re-energized momentum within the community. In this case the institutions involved need to design strategies geared towards supporting communities advance their development agenda. The outcomes and interests generated by the community are not always capital intensive but most can be advanced with the existing resource capacities; both technically and financially.

The knowledge capacity build within the community should also be managed, by consistent engagement with the barefoot planners and widening their scope of working within the community. CCODE, the Non profit organization involved in the studios is better placed to build upon this capacity.



## Way Forward Building Strategic Partnerships

The forewords of this booklet touched on the key challenge of taking the thinking, planning and action encapsulated in the Malawian studios to a citywide scale. It is clear that such studios cannot be isolated events and only through sustained engagement with informal communities will planning thinking and practice begin to change. This would undoubtedly have a knock on effect in terms of policy and revisiting citywide development strategies, norms and standards, pushing them towards more inclusive forms.

To attain the critical cumulative impact to influence urban planning policy and urban planning education, strategic long-term partnerships are necessary. As earlier stated, the studios should not be isolative but be part of a series where every planner graduates having been exposed to the nature of training we are advocating here. On the other hand, studio outputs should be tailored for actual development implementation.

The civil society (in this case MHPF & CCODE) and the municipalities play a critical role in these partnerships. The unique challenges of urbanization in African cities, is a battle that will require the collaboration of the state and the civil society.

Academic research will be significant to the management of African cities if it is tied to urban informal realities. The partnership involving Federations, NGOs, Local authorities and academia provides this platform for making urban planning responsive to the real issues at hand.

Fiscal resources will always be cited as a constraint to furthering such platforms; nevertheless, pooling the limited resources that partners have can significantly contribute towards reframing learning and practice. Community planning studios should be part of a long-term framework. The process of change (Reframing ideologies, approaches and practice) has to be consistently incremental and not once off and random.



