Hilde Refstie

Voicing Noise

Action research with informal settlement groups and their partners in Malawi

Hilde Refstie

Doctoral thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

NTNU

Hilde Refstie

Voicing Noise

Action research with informal settlement
groups and their partners in Malawi

Thesis for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, April 2018

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Geography

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Voicing Noise – Action research with informal settlement groups and their partners in Malawi

PhD thesis, candidate Hilde Refstie

Department of Geography, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences

Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU

Trondheim, April 2018

Abstract

This thesis explores the space for transformative participation within participatory planning practices in Malawi. It does so by analysing different and overlapping participatory spaces and discussing what opportunities and barriers participants face when striving to realize citizenship rights such as housing, services and political voice through these spaces.

The overall argument of the study is that global discourses on community mobilizing and participatory planning that were largely developed from major cities in India, South Africa and Latin America simply promise too much in the Malawian context. Overly ambitious slum-upgrading proposals often produce expectations that are impossible to meet within the existing frameworks, which results in a form of participation fatigue among informal settlement groups who have mobilized to improve their living conditions. Inspired by postcolonial urban literature the thesis thus explores how global perceptions and policies that emphasize rights and citizenship are informed by local conditions. It points to the importance of unpacking 'the urban' in different contexts in order to give way to more grounded approaches for understanding urban practices.

In Malawi, for example, limited national and local resources, disconnections from national and urban policies of redistribution, and a local politics shaped by both clientelism and democratic reforms limit the range of strategies and practices available to local groups seeking to realize their citizenship rights through participatory urban planning. The thesis therefore suggests a framework for mobilizing that takes as its starting point existing capacities and a focus on what can be done in the short, medium and longer terms at different levels. This involves identifying what community groups can solve with self-organizing, what they can do with better connections and technical advice at the city level, and what requires more systemic political change. Together with clear communication and long-term mobilization, such an approach could prevent transformative participation from deflating before it has begun.

The PhD project itself was built using an action research approach. This means that the project has been heavily inspired by the priorities of participants and project partners, which were informal settlement groups, the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor, the Centre for Community Organization and Development and the latter's Research

Institute in Malawi. The project used an integrated approach that combined pragmatic and critical elements of action research in order to utilize the dynamics between theory and practice in addressing participatory planning issues beyond the immediate community level. The opportunities and dilemmas involved in employing such an approach are discussed both in the foundation and in the articles, and forms an important part of the thesis.

The thesis adds to urban and participatory scholarship in several ways. One is by presenting a story that does not fit neatly into mainstream narratives on transformation – neither those based on notions of inclusive citizenship as a feature of neoliberal urbanism nor those drawing on the idea of communities as collective insurgents. The thesis therefore explores, formulates and to some extent establishes a third way between a programme of insurgent radical action and more pragmatic consensus-based participation models that helps to identify participatory spaces for transformation. This third way is embedded in a 'trialectics' of participation and enables an exploration of notions of 'voice', 'noise' and 'silence' to better understand dynamics of participatory spaces and the relationship between people's political agency and what change they want to engage in.

Given the thesis's action research approach, its theoretical contributions are closely related to its methodological advancements: First, the thesis documents and analyses the multiple beginnings of an action research project in order to show how a space for action research is co-produced. Second, the thesis develops an integrated approach that combines pragmatic and critical elements to respond to some of the multiple imperatives in action research regarding the need to be critical and rooted, explanatory and actionable. Lastly, by working with community groups at scale, the thesis responds to some of the criticisms commonly levelled against action research that accuse it of being too localized and depoliticized.

When I started out as a PhD student, I was told it could be a very lonely journey. It did not take me long to realize, however, that a PhD project, and especially an action research–oriented one, depends on the efforts and goodwill of a whole range of people. It takes a village to produce a PhD. A lot of people therefore deserve to be thanked for their contributions.

First of all, I would like to thank all the research participants from the informal settlements in Malawi. Thank you for welcoming me into your homes, shops and community meetings, and for your active engagement in the research process. I would like to thank Lackson Phiri, Sarah Kalenjeka and Mr Banda from Senti in particular, all very inspiring Federation leaders who remain true to the Slum Dwellers International slogan[1] 'No development for us, without us'. I would also like to give special thanks to the community representatives in Kauma, Chinsapo and Mtandire in Lilongwe, Nancholi Chimiire and Ndiranda Makata in Blantyre, Salisburyline in Mzuzu, and Chikanda settlement in Zomba who participated actively in forming the case studies series.

For the people at the Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE) and The Research Institute (TRI), thank you for being so welcoming and open minded towards me as a researcher and inviting me into your work. Your critical reflexivity and strong work ethics have humbled me, and it was a true privilege for me to learn from you, and to be your collaborative partner and part-time colleague. Thank you Siku Nkhoma, Patrick Chikoti, Wonderful Hunga, Sungani Chalemba, Cynthia Phiri, Zilirewekha Luka, Nevas Chirwa, Moses Padzala, Mazgo Khonje and Mariana Gallo, in particular. Thank you also Florence Mwula, Ngaba Chatata and Austin Njere at TRI for all your hard work with organizing the workshop and the radio debate, and I also would like to thank Owen Lupeska for so skilfully facilitating the debate itself.

Thank you to Evance Mwathunga and Wiseman Chirwa at Chancellor College for our collaboration and for being good advisers on some of the finer points of urban research

---

[1] The official name of SDI is Shack/slum Dwellers International with 'shack' being used in South Africa. In this thesis Slum Dwellers International will be used to reflect how the network is referred to in Malawi.

you have endured our long stays apart as I have spent time in Malawi and my fluctuating mood throughout the different stages of the thesis work. You have also been the amazing key parent to our wonderful daughter, Nora. You guys are my rock. I love you. Thank you also to our extended family: my parents, Solveig and Terje; my sister, Tonje; my brother, Ståle, and his family; and my mother-in-law, Åse Gyda, in particular. When the going has gotten tough, you have been there and stepped in, easing our load.

I have been pondering over a number of questions since I started thinking about and doing research within academia. Questions like: Why do we do research? Who does research? What is 'good' research? Who decides what 'good' research is? What and who determines what is researched on in which ways? All leading up to the fundamental question: What are universities really for?

We are experiencing a commodification of knowledge within society, also at our universities (Davies and Bansel, 2010; Levidow, 2002). Norwegian universities have not come as far in this process as universities in many other countries, but the climate is changing also here (Andresen et al., 2015). Research is increasingly project based – typically responding to funding calls from governments or companies. Employment in academia continues to be precarious, with short-term contracts and increased pressure to produce measurable impact and secure external resources to continue one's work (Berg, 2016). Universities are increasingly run as businesses (Del Gandio, 2010), and what was before a tradition of university democracy in Norway has been replaced by a bureaucracy governed from the top down, where leaders at all levels respond upwards instead of downwards and outwards as the previous model of elected leaders facilitated (Andresen et al., 2015). Given this context, it has been difficult for me to understand how universities might be able to fulfil what I see as their most important function: to create independent critical research and education that responds to challenges faced by all layers of society, both current and future.

I have always believed that a significant amount of research (though not all)[2] should be dedicated to solving concrete challenges faced by society. NTNU's slogan, 'Knowledge

---

[2] I also believe it is crucial to maintain and protect a 'basic research' component, since it is not always evident what 'useful' knowledge is or what could be important knowledge in the future. Basic

for a better world', has therefore resonated with me (NTNU, 2011). What I have a problem with – and this has shaped me significantly as a researcher and educator – is 'who' decides what 'knowledge for a better world' is. Working at a university that has one of the highest levels of research activities oriented towards industry and the private sector both in Norway and in the world (Universitetsavisa, 2010), I worry that our research is more influenced by profit-thinking than by social and environmental inclusivity and sustainability. Given the precarious work situations many scholars find themselves in, especially younger ones, I also question whether there is sufficient critical capacity to provide checks and balances for these strong interests. As a starting point, it has therefore been important for me to explore a way of working within academia that differs from the ways typically promoted at my university. It is here that the critical action research approach comes in.

Action research means working in a collaborative way with participatory research methods to develop knowledge that feeds into participants' change strategies. In a way, this is also applied research, but the 'clients' are typically marginalized groups with little voice in society. Furthermore, the 'critical' component means that the researcher is not just a mere facilitator of knowledge but a critical partner that attempts to reveal power relations and to question taken-for-granted truths, also those internalized by participants and the researchers themselves. Taken together, I believe these elements make up a different way of working within the academy that can take us one step towards rebuilding our universities as critical institutions.

My engagements with the questions listed above have also led me to find a community of scholars that have sought this type of 'thirdspace' (Soja, 1996) in academia. Together, we have been running the New University Norway initiative,[3] along with the ProtestPub concept,[4] to take the discussions about the future of our universities back to the grassroots. This community and the great friends I have made through it have increased my hopes about 'fitting in' within academia – and 'fitting in' in my very own way. So thank you,

---

research is also an important avenue for thinking outside the box and the mainstream, free of the constraints under which more applied research is typically conducted.

[3] See http://www.newuniversitynorway.org/.

[4] See https://www.facebook.com/protestpub/.

you wonderful people: Silje Aurora Andresen, Thomas Sætre Jakobsen, Eli Smeplass, Ida Marie Henriksen, Morten Langfeldt Dahlback, Levon Ephremian, Ragne Øwre Thorshaug, Silje Mathisen, Nina Helen Aas Røkkum, Marita Løkås, Brita Flatvad-Nielsen and everyone else who has supported and engaged in this work.

> Critical participatory action research – and forms of 'engaged research' like it – often occurs in the context of social movements in which there is a widening consciousness that current social structures or practices are producing untoward consequences; that they are illegitimate; that they exclude, dominate or oppress particular groups; or that they cause suffering or dissatisfaction.
>
> Under such circumstances, people do in fact undertake exploratory action to find other ways of thinking, relating to one another, and doing things that might have other, less unsatisfactory consequences. They often do so against seemingly overwhelming odds, often in small and cautious ways, taking heart from the understandings they reach with their fellows, the solidarity of working together, and the rewards of making a difference even if the achievements seem small and local.
>
> Out of such small steps, larger movements sometimes grow. These small steps make people feel 'alive' in a universalistic sense – making them feel connected to the circumstances of all people everywhere: alive to history, alive in history, and alive in making history – their own and others'. This is the emancipatory face of an 'effective-historical consciousness' that aspires to a better history than the history we face if things go on as they are. It is the eternal other of human suffering – hope. (Kemmis, 2008: 208)

List of figures:

List of photos:

List of tables:

Abbreviations

AAPS – Association of African Planning Schools

AR – Action Research

ARALIG – Action Research Action Learning Interest Group

BWB – Blantyre Water Board

CAR – Critical Action Research

CCA – City Council administration

CAKE Club – Critical Academic Knowledge Exchange Club

CBO – Community Based Organization

CCODE – Centre for Community Organization and Development

CDC – Community Development Committee

CDF – Constituency Development Fund

CICOD – Circle for Integrated Community Development

DHO – District Health Office

ESCOM – Electricity Supply Corporation

EU – European Union

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GIZ - The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

GoM – Government of Malawi

IGO – Inter-Governmental Organization

INGO – International Non Governmental Organization

JICA – Japan International Cooperation Agency

LCA – Lilongwe City Council administration

LDF – Local Development Fund

LGSC – Local Government Service Commission

LUPPEN – Lilongwe Urban Poor People`s Network

MALGA – Malawi Local Government Association

MASAF – Malawi Social Action Fund

MHC – Malawi Housing Corporation

MoIWD – Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development

MoLHUD – Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development

MoLGRD – Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

MK – Malawian Kwacha

MP – Member of Parliament

NGO – Non Governmental Organization

NLGFC – National Local Government Finance Committee

NSDF – National Slum Dwellers Federation

NSO – National Statistics Office

NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology

PhD – Philosophiae Doctor

PSUP – Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme

SCDP – Malawi Secondary Centers Development Programme

SDI – Slum Dwellers International

SDKP – Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform

SMS – Short Message Service

SPARC – Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres

THA – Traditional Housing Area

TRI – The Research Institute

UN – United Nations

UNDESA – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UN Habitat – United Nations Habitat Programme

UNICEF – United Nations Children`s Fund

WDC – Ward Development Committee

WHO – World Health Organization

WUA – Water User Association

ZCC – Zomba City Council

PART I – SITUATING THE THESIS

Chapter 1   Introduction

Most of the world's population is now understood to be living in urban areas. Urbanization and urban growth have therefore regained attention on the international development agenda. Asia and Africa in particular are urbanizing fast, and the populations of several African cities are expected to triple in the next 35 years (UNDESA, 2014).

While cities are hubs of economic and social processes that can generate wealth and opportunities, many people – in some cities, the majority – end up having little or no access to housing, services or political processes that affect their lives. The World Health Organization and UN-Habitat (2016), for example, estimate that over 880 million people live in slums. They have further projected that without dramatic changes in urbanization patterns or sharp increases in housing supply for the urban poor, this number will increase dramatically in the next 15–20 years. A New Urban Agenda has therefore been adopted by the UN General Assembly, and a specific Sustainable Development Goal has been developed on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (United Nations, 2016).

Malawi is not very urbanized (20%), but it has some of the fastest growing cities in sub-Saharan Africa (NSO, 2010). This means that the urban in Malawi will change drastically over the next years. To address this, government policies in Malawi have typically focused on developments in rural areas with the aim of preventing rural-to-urban migration (Manda, 2013; Article II). However, migration continues to add to the rapid natural population growth in cities. Since 70% of the urban population is estimated to live in areas with slum-like conditions, this is causing Malawi's informal settlements[5] to grow at an alarming rate (UN-Habitat, 2012).[6]

---

[5] In this thesis foundation, 'informal settlements' is used to refer to villages incorporated into city boundaries, squatter areas and overcrowded traditional housing areas, where housing and sanitation are poor and the status of land tenure unclear (Manda, 2013).

[6] Malawi's attempts to ensure a regionally balanced urban development have yielded some results (Manda 2013) but have not prevented rapid urbanization and city growth.

It is difficult to see how slum upgrading[7] at scale can realistically be achieved in Malawi. The country is one of the poorest in the world and was ranked 173rd out of 188 on the Human Development Index in 2015 (UNDP, 2015). The issues of urbanization and urban growth are not prioritized on the national development agenda, and local governments struggle with weak capacity, which is exacerbated by the outdated and sometimes conflicting planning frameworks in place (Chinsinga, 2015). As a result, when global discourses on participatory planning and slum upgrading are exported to this setting, the results that they achieve are not necessarily the same as those that have been observed in other countries, where the state plays a more active role in housing and service provision and where more resources are available for redistribution. It is therefore important, as this thesis aims to do, to understand the strategies and practices available to informal settlement groups in Malawi and what opportunities and barriers they face when attempting to realize their citizenship rights through participatory planning spaces.

1.1 Building a PhD project through action research: Thesis summary

The overarching objective of this study has been to explore the space for transformative participation within participatory urban planning practices in Malawi. The study started out in a quite exploratory fashion, focusing on three informal settlements in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi. I was curious as to what motivated groups of people in informal settlements to mobilize in participatory planning and upgrading processes, what they achieved through such mobilization, and how this all linked together at various levels of governance (for more information on the inception of the project, see Article III). The first phase of the fieldwork was therefore oriented towards mapping actors and conducting in-depth interviews and group discussions on these issues.

During the first phase, it became clear that the informal settlement dwellers interviewed had made some accomplishments in terms of mobilizing and slum upgrading (see, for

---

7 In this foundation, 'slum upgrading' refers to an integrated approach, small or large, that aims to improve conditions in a given area. These conditions may be related to legal (e.g. land tenure), physical (e.g. infrastructure, housing), social (e.g. health, crime or education) or economic issues.

example, Mitlin, 2014a, 2014b; Case Studies 1, 2 and 3).[8] However, there was a growing sense of frustration about the lack of substantial results from their efforts. For many informal settlement groups, it seemed as though they had reached a glass ceiling for what they were able to achieve within the existing frameworks. This realization formed the basis for a collaboration with two of the main actors operating in informal settlements in Malawi: the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor (hereafter, 'the Federation') and its support NGO the Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE). Through this collaboration, a research project was developed to document and analyse ongoing participatory planning and slum-upgrading initiatives in four major cities in Malawi to highlight what had worked and what had not in terms of implementation. As part of the collaboration, a case study series was developed (see Appendix IV), and three events were organized: a large stakeholder workshop, an interactive live radio debate and a researcher network meeting. Together, all these initiatives helped to shed some light on the potential for transformative participation within participatory urban planning practices in Malawi.

From the interviews, observations and discussions conducted in the research project, it became clear that if the informal settlement dwellers involved in the study were to achieve citizenship rights such as housing, services and political voice, their participation within planning processes needed to challenge mechanisms of exclusion and the current distribution of resources. This corresponded well with the understanding of transformative participation as participation that goes beyond increasing the influence of marginalized groups in local decision-making to confront the forces that cause social exclusion to begin with (Cornwall, 2002, 2004, 2008; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Millstein, 2007; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). At the same time, it was not necessarily desire for radical change (Marchart, 2007; Mouffe, 2000; Rancière, 2001, 2009, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2014) that motivated people to participate in planning processes in Malawi. Most of the participants expressed that they wanted to be included *into* practices and frameworks. For them, it was therefore more important to create spaces where

---

[8] 'Case study' here refers to the case study series developed as part of the PhD project (see Appendix IV).

participants were included, gained recognition and got their voices accepted than to create 'noise' that challenged existing structures and frameworks.

It thus became important for the researchers to understand that what we initially interpreted as 'silence' on the part of informal settlement groups was not the same as passiveness. People were actively pursuing a variety of strategies, and sometimes the lack of 'noise' was a strategic choice. By not drawing attention to their areas, people were able to continue a range of informal practices related to housing and planning without the government's interference (Mwathunga, 2014). For many people it also made more sense to try to negotiate their individual place within the system than to challenge it in a collective way (Cammack, 2007). Resistance was rather found in the ways in which people settled in informal settlements and organized themselves directly with service providers (Case Study 2), or in how community groups organized services for themselves (Case Studies 1 and 3). People also exploited bureaucratic slippages and connections and made use of a multitude of subject positions to negotiate their state or client relationships (Millstein, 2017; Case Studies 3 and 4). In the project, the understanding of transformative participation was therefore broadened to take into account some of what Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield (2014: 286) describe as the balancing people do between 'the complex negotiation of local clientelist linkages that render daily lives bearable' and 'the generally more external, ephemeral, and oppositional politics of rights, which often discard, expose, or confront clientelist links, at the risk of losing resources, if the new mobilization network does not last or succeed'.

In Malawi, for example, limited national and local resources, disconnections from national and urban policies of redistribution, and a local politics shaped by both clientelism and democratic reforms limit the range of strategies and practices available to local groups seeking to realize their citizenship rights through participatory urban planning (Article II). These contextual constraints are often not taken into consideration when global models on participatory planning are transferred between countries and cities. Instead, global discourses on participatory planning fused with the idea of 'urban citizenship from below' tend to promise too much, for example by overemphasizing the significance and potential of participatory planning spaces as avenues for change. This does not mean that approaches promoted by, for example, Slum Dwellers International

are useless in Malawi. Longer-term mobilization with a focus on people's capabilities may be exactly what is needed to influence resource distribution and capacities of inclusion in Malawian cities. However, without tangible results there is a risk that mobilization might fold in on itself before it gets that far. The work in this dissertation therefore cautions against the democratic promises of global discourses on participatory planning, and argues for more locally rooted approaches to participatory planning that take into account some of the realities described above. From there, one can develop a more grounded approach to community mobilizing and slum upgrading that takes as its starting point existing capacities and focuses on what can be done in the short, medium and long terms at different levels. This involves identifying what community groups can solve with self-organizing, what can be done with better connections and technical advice at the city level, and what requires more systemic political change. In some cases, it also means to 'plan as if there are no money' (Interview, Director of Physical Planning, Zomba, 24 March 2014). Most importantly, it means acknowledging that the solution is not necessarily to be found with participatory planning at all, even when it transcends scale. The approach developed in the thesis thus calls for a more modest link between participatory planning and the substantiation of citizenship rights. Accompanied by clear communication and long-term mobilization, the thesis argues that such an approach could prevent transformative participation from deflating before it has begun.

The PhD project itself was built through an action research approach. This means that the project was heavily inspired by the priorities of participants and project partners. It also means that the thesis contains elements that are not typically included into a thesis. For example, in addition to academic articles, the thesis includes a case study series (seven cases in all) that took the form of booklets that were developed as part of the project (see Appendix IV). In addition, as noted above, the project also facilitated a discussion workshop with stakeholders in Malawi, a national live radio debate and a researcher network meeting. This represents the action part of the project, which came out of and fed into the study as a whole.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

Overarching research objective: To explore the space for transformative participation within participatory urban planning practices in Malawi.

Research questions:

1. What are the different and overlapping spaces for community participation in urban planning and slum upgrading in Malawi and how do informal settlement groups engage with them?
2. What opportunities and barriers for realizing citizenship rights do informal settlement groups face in participatory spaces?
3. How can we better understand the transformative potential of participatory strategies and practices available to informal settlement groups?
4. How can action research be used to know, theorize and support spaces for transformative participation?

Recounting a rich action research process in a thesis format can be challenging (Herr and Anderson, 2015). The insights that enabled us to respond to the research questions came as much from the research process itself as from the more traditional ethnographic material collected. In this context, substance is process and process is substance (Dick and Greenwood, 2015). In addition to the expanded thesis foundation, the thesis therefore consists of four articles, two of which bring in the project's methodological elements.

1.3 Academic articles and structure of thesis

At the time of this writing, Article I has been published in *Geoforum,* Article IV is in press with *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies,* Article III is to be revised and resubmitted to *Action Research,* while Article II is presented in this thesis in draft form.

I. Refstie, H. and Brun, C. (2016). Voicing noise: Political agency and the trialectics of participation in urban Malawi. *Geoforum* 74, 136–146.

II. Refstie, H. and Millstein, M. (draft). Does participatory planning promise too much? Global discourses and the glass ceiling of participatory planning in urban Malawi.

III. Refstie, H. (revise and resubmit to *Action Research*) The Beginning is never the beginning: How to co-produce a space for action research.

IV. Refstie, H. (in press) Action research in critical scholarship: Negotiating multiple imperatives. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*.

One of the biggest challenges with writing this dissertation has been to find a good way to structure the foundation to account for the above-mentioned interplay between substance and process. After experimenting with different ways of telling what became the story of the action research project, I decided, for example, not to include a separate section with summaries of the four articles. I have tried, instead, to incorporate the articles into a narrative text, where they are used to explain the research process and key findings of the project. This was so that I might better describe the dynamics of the action research process and how it drove the changing inquiry throughout the study.

The empirical material for the thesis came out of the exploratory phase, the work with the case study series, and the meetings, workshop and radio debate organized as part of the project. As discussed by Reitz (2017), the abstraction inherent in research tend to move us away from the details and the relationships that makes up the wholeness of a study. To avoid getting stuck in a case–theory divide, I have therefore chosen to insert boxes with field notes to integrate the empirical material better into the dissertation as a whole throughout the foundation. In addition, the case study series is attached as an appendix to the dissertation giving more detailed descriptions of some of the processes studied. To give the partners and participants a more direct voice within and into the thesis, I have also included a number of quotes from the interviews, meetings and observations. Finally, to follow up on the importance of 'unpacking the urban', described in Chapter 2, I have included a comprehensive discussion of the landscape of urban actors in Malawi that was not possible within the article format (see Chapter 3).

This background material is essential for understanding both the urban dynamics in Malawi and the action research project itself.

The foundation is therefore structured as follows: Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to the project and explains the research objectives and questions. Chapter 2 situates the thesis in terms of urban scholarship and participatory approaches to planning. Chapter 3 explores Malawi as a research context and provides an overview of urbanization, governance and informality in Malawi to help unpack 'the urban' in the Malawian context. Chapter 4 presents the theoretical inspirations and foundations for the thesis and goes through some of the important concepts that shaped the theoretical framework. The methodology and research process, as has been emphasized, is an important part of this thesis. Chapter 5 describes the methodology and Chapter 6 the research process, including ethical aspects of conducting critical action research. Chapter 7 consists of the four academic articles, and Chapter 8 discusses the findings and theoretical and practical contributions of the thesis. The foundation ends with a short reflection on the ramifications of the findings for future research and practice.

Chapter 2   Urban scholarship and practice

Urban studies has a long tradition consolidated from the 20th century, with its large-scale industrial city building and major demographic and socio-economic shifts. Today, the urban represents an increasingly worldwide condition in which political-economic relations are enmeshed (Brenner and Schmid, 2012), with the global south developing as urbanism's epicentre. Despite this, however, much of the theoretical work in urban scholarship is still firmly located in the experience of Euro-America, built on a handful of metropolitan cities (Roy, 2005; Sheppard et al., 2013; Watson, 2009). In this chapter, then, I aim to position the present thesis in relation to some of the emergent literature from and on the global south that emphasizes the importance of unpacking different urban realities and contexts of participation.

2.1   The Euro-American centrism of urban studies and the rise of alternative paradigms

Recent debates in urban studies have reflected an effort to rethink the dominant Euro-American framing in order to consider the 'relational multiplicities, diverse histories and dynamic connectivities of global urbanisms' (Robinson and Roy, 2016: 181). Roy (2009a), for example, suggests a 'New Geography of Theory' that dislocates the current centres of theory construction towards the global south to recalibrate the geographies of authoritative knowledge. This does not just mean adding empirical variation to existing urban theory. It means opening up how 'the urban' is typically taken for granted and mainstreamed in the quest for universal frameworks for understanding. The notion of 'planetary urbanism' launched by Brenner and Schmid (2012) therefore does not cut it for Roy. One has to open up for new imaginations, epistemologies and concepts of the urban and urban life (Roy, 2009).

In current research, this reimagination has been achieved mainly through ethnographic studies within postcolonial scholarship (Roy, 2015a): The long tradition of theoretical

deconstructions produced by Edward Said (1978) has questioned the ways in which one's theories are 'world'. Chatterjee (2004) and Appadurai (2000, 2001) have developed critical theories of subjectivities and power, with a focus on 'political society' and 'deep democracy'. Studies on informality and everyday practices of participation are on the increase (Bayat, 2000; Roy, 2003; Ismail, 2014; Mmbembe and Nutall, 2004; Peake, 2016; Simone, 2006; Oldfield, 2014), together with the notion of 'people as infrastructure' that emphasizes economic collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from urban life (Simone, 2004: 407). Other contributions to the field include work on conditions of urban citizenship and the possibilities that lie in 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston, 2008), as well as studies on popular politics and the apartheid and post-apartheid city (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2015, Miraftab, 2005; Oldfield, 2002). There is thus a growing set of studies centred on the global south that develop different notions of the urban and of social organizing by opening up ethnographic spaces and promoting a 'postcolonial' perspective to the study of cities and territories (Robinson, 2003).

At the same time, the postcolonial approach to urban theorizing has been accused of being too fragmentary and particularistic to enable a coherent response to, for example, neoliberal structures of exploitation (Chibber, 2013; Scott and Storper, 2015). Like Roy (2015b: 206–207), I believe Chatterjee's response to this critique is worth quoting at length:

> There is a price to be paid for this shift to the ethnographic, the practical, the everyday and the local.... It is undoubtedly true that the weaving of a local historical narrative with detailed ethnographic description of local practices requires immersion in a seemingly bottomless pool of names, places and events that are unlikely to be familiar to readers outside the immediate geographical region.... But then, we should remember that if history students all over the world read about daily life in a single village in the French province of Languedoc in the 14th century or about the mental world of a solitary Italian miller in the 16th century, then in principle there is no reason why they should not do the same with a book about subaltern life in a village or small town in south Asia (Chatterjee, 2012: 49).

In my understanding, to take into account historical difference does not necessarily mean to sidestep generalization. Rather, it means to recognize that general processes are not automatically universal (Roy, 2015b). 'The urban' therefore has to be unpacked in relation to different contexts, giving way to more grounded approaches to understanding urban practices. It is this tradition and idea that I will follow in the thesis by exploring the processes and potential of participatory planning and slum upgrading in a particular context, that of urban Malawi.

2.2   Participatory planning and slum upgrading

Urbanization and urban growth in the global south have traditionally been framed in terms of slum formation and 'urbanization without growth' (Fay and Opal, 2000). However, the topic has recently received more of a positive spin. Urbanization is now increasingly associated with economic growth and innovative industries. In this context, cities are promoted as 'engines of economic growth' (World Bank, 2010) or the 'engine rooms for human development as a whole' (UN-Habitat, 2013: v). Opportunities associated with urbanization and urban growth have thus been recognized and absorbed in a number of reports and policy documents. Yet, while cities are, in most cases, extensive producers of gross domestic product (GDP), the challenges with slums and informality remain largely unsolved. Slums continue to develop, and environmental challenges are not dealt with (Gleeson, 2014). Urbanization – and urban growth in particular – therefore persists as an enormous challenge for many countries.

In the simplest terms, slums are heavily populated areas characterized by substandard housing and lack of access to basic services. They range from high-density squalid city dwellings to more spontaneous squatter settlements, without legal recognition or rights, sprawling at the edge of cities. Given their often ambiguous legal status, they are also commonly referred to as 'informal settlements'. Not all urban poor live in slums, and not all slum dwellers are poor (Davis, 2006). However, slums can be seen as spaces of marginalization, since the people who live in them tend to be excluded from formal service structures and in some cases the formal economy itself (Mitlin and Patel, 2014;

Mukhija, 2012). When the United Nations Millennium Development Goals were developed, they therefore included a target aiming to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. The Sustainable Development Goals developed in 2015 took the urban poverty agenda further and made 'making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' one of their goals (SDKP, 2017). This makes up part of the 'New Urban Agenda' and a commitment to 'leave no one behind' (United Nations, 2016).

A common response to informal settlement growth has been a renewed focus on urban planning – both to upgrade existing settlements and to plan for future urban growth. Upgrading existing settlements is a complex matter, since it usually involves moving people. It is both economically costly and complicated from a human rights perspective. Planning for urban growth is therefore crucial, since getting ahead of the curve presents a huge opportunity for reducing human and economic costs. At the same time, existing slum areas are growing and also need to be addressed.

Slum prevention and upgrading have been approached in a number of ways. Often, planning efforts take the shape of control instruments and evictions to try to hinder people from settling in the first place. However, evictions have created mass protests, as people often have few other places to go. Furthermore, people tend to find their way around the system and often settle again later at the same place or somewhere else (UN-Habitat, 2007). Another common approach to slum upgrading has therefore been to move people from informal settlements to other areas where they are offered houses or land on which they can build. These places, however, are often located away from city centres and the livelihood opportunities that such proximity presents. People therefore typically sell their new homes and look for shelter near their jobs again. As the failures of the above approaches have become evident, the focus within the planning literature on how to deal with slums has moved towards more inclusive and participatory planning approaches (Miraftab, 2012).

The participatory turn in planning has its roots in Habermasian thinking on 'communicative spaces' (Habermas, 1984), but it has also been influenced by discourses on 'good governance' that became more prominent within development thinking and practices in the 1990s (World Bank, 1992). Participatory approaches are therefore often

advocated for two reasons. One is instrumental: Through involving beneficiaries into planning, it is assumed that better, more tailor-made solutions will be found. Furthermore, when communities are involved in planning processes, they develop a sense of ownership towards projects, which again promotes sustainability in terms of use and maintenance. The other argumentation is more rights based. Here the function of community participation is to supplement electoral representation in order to increase transparency and ensure a broad-based inclusion of the poor and marginalized in development efforts (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Törnquist et al., 2009).

Over the last few decades, participation has become mainstream within development thinking, and participatory planning is now commonly promoted as an avenue where people can realize their citizenship rights in terms of land, housing, services and political voice (Miraftab, 2012). The success of this participatory turn, however, has been widely contested. The critique has highlighted how participatory approaches can be used to legitimize outside interventions and destructive development practice. Participation can also become a 'tyranny' by reinforcing existing power relations within communities and between communities and development actors (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The response to this critique has been to connect grassroots participation with citizenship and democratic practice to create participation that is more 'transformative' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004, to be discussed in Chapter 4). However, many of the challenges with participation remain, and much of the critique now commonly accepted in academic discourses on participation is not necessarily incorporated into practice. This means that while the discussions on participation have been taking place within the fields of development, urban planning and political geography for some time now, how the discourses on participation play out in different contexts, what the driving forces are, and how different participatory approaches can be transformative remain relevant topics for inquiry.

Chapter 3   Urbanization and urban governance in Malawi

Malawi is a landlocked country that borders on Zambia to the north, Mozambique to the west, and Tanzania to the south. It is relatively small (118,500 square kilometres), while Lake Malawi makes up 20% of the country's area. With its 18.5 million people, Malawi therefore has a very high population density (Government of Malawi, 2012). The economy of Malawi is based primarily on agricultural crops such as tobacco, tea and sugar, and over 80% of the total population is engaged in subsistence farming (Harrigan, 2000).

Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries. In 2004, the country was described as being 'at the edge of an abyss' (Booth et al., 2006: vii). Exogenous stresses and geopolitical events such as increasing oil prices, the war in Mozambique and the reduction of employment opportunities in South Africa had exacerbated an already vulnerable and mismanaged economy (Booth et al., 2006). While national poverty rates have decreased somewhat since 2004, Malawi was ranked 173rd out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index in 2015 (UNDP, 2015). Over 70% of its population live on less than 2 US dollars a day (World Bank, 2016). Malawi also remains dependent on foreign aid, which has comprised up to 37% of its national budget (Government of Malawi, 2012).

Despite land and resource scarcity and the corresponding potentials for conflict, the country have had a relatively peaceful history. The exceptions to this occurred during the period of colonial rule and the establishment of Kamuzu Banda as lifetime president during the one-party era following independence in 1964 until the introduction of the country's multiparty system in 1993. Banda's rule was enforced by brutal retaliation against almost any signs of disloyalty and left deep marks in Malawi's political landscape (Englund, 2002a). Following a peaceful transition to multiparty rule, Malawi has undergone a number of reforms both in terms of electoral democracy, neoliberal governance as part of the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s, and in recent years with reforms oriented towards decentralization and 'good governance'. Still, Malawi continues to perform poorly on key aspects of good governance and democratization, and a number of donors have pulled back support in the light of the many corruption scandals that have been revealed in recent years (Dionne and Horowitz, 2016).

While Malawi is not very urbanized, it does have some of the fastest growing cities in sub-Saharan Africa (NSO, 2010). Government policies focus on development in rural areas with the aim of preventing rural-to-urban migration (Manda, 2013; Article II). Meanwhile, migration continues to add to the high levels of natural population growth in cities, and the country's informal settlements are growing rapidly (UN-Habitat, 2013):

> As government, we have to rethink, to reposition ourselves to say, yes, we are a rural country but we are urbanizing fast so we have to do something about it. Because when we focus on the poverty in rural areas, we are building another poverty in the urban areas (Interview, Director of Physical Planning, Zomba, 24 March 2014).

The greater part of Malawi's urban population (77%) live in four major cities: Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba (Manda, 2013). As the country's commercial centre, Blantyre was for a long time Malawi's largest city, with over one million inhabitants. However, following independence in 1964 and the moving of the capital from Zomba to Lilongwe in 1974, the latter has overtaken Blantyre and is now the largest city in the country. Mzuzu also grew rapidly in the same period, while Zomba's urban growth stagnated (Manda, 2013).

MALAWI

ZAMBIA

UNITED REPUBLIC
OF
TANZANIA

MALAWI

MOZAMBIQUE

MOZAMBIQUE

ZIMBABWE

Tunduma
Chitipa
Chisenga
Karonga
CHITIPA
KARONGA
Nyika Plateau
Katumbi
RUMPHI
Bolero
Rumphi
NORTHERN
Ekwendeni
Chikwina
Kafukule
Mzuzu
Euthini
Nkhata Bay
MZIMBA
Chintheche
Mzimba
Chizumulu
MALAWI
Edingeni
Likoma
Lundazi
Lake Nyasa
KASUNGU
Kasungu
Nkhotakota
Lichinga
CENTRAL
NTCHISI
Ntchisi
Mponela
MCHINJI
DOWA
SALIMA
Chipata
Mchinji
Dowa
Salima
Makanjila
Chilobwe
LILONGWE
Chipoka
Namitete
Lilongwe
Monkey Bay
Nathenje
DEDZA
Dedza
MANGOCHI
Mandimba
Mangochi
Lake Malombe
Lake Amaramba
NTCHEU
SOUTHERN
Lake Chiuta
Ntcheu
Ntaja
MACHINGA
Balaka
Liwonde
Nayuchi
Machinga
Lake Chilwa
Neno
ZOMBA
Domasi
MWANZA
Lirangwe
Zomba
Lanzu
Namadzi
Nambazo
Mwanza
BLANTYRE
Chiradzulu
CHIRADZULU
Phalombe
Blantyre
MULANJE
Chikwawa
Mulanje
THYOLO
Thyolo
Milange
CHIKWAWA
Thekerani
N'gabu
NSANJE
Bangula
Tete
Zambezi
Shire
Nsanje

National capital
Regional headquarters
District headquarters
Town, village
Airport
International boundary
Regional boundary
District boundary
Main road
Secondary road
Railroad

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

0   25   50   75   100 km
0   25   50   75 mi

Figure 1. Based on UN Map Malawi No. 3858 Rev. 3 January 2004. The four cities where research was undertaken are highlighted.

While there are clear differences between informal settlements in, for example, the commercial city of Blantyre and in the capital, Lilongwe,[9] slum areas in Malawi are typically not as congested and crowded as those in many other countries. Malawi's informal settlements tend instead to have more of a 'rural' feel (Englund, 2002b).[10] Many of the settlements have grown on village land, and village governance structures remain active. Urban governance in Malawi therefore has to be understood in the light of overlapping layers at the community, city and national levels, with roots in the country's precolonial and colonial history.

Research literature on Malawi's urban development has been scarce. The work that has been carried out by academics on urbanization and informal settlements consists typically of reports commissioned for various programmes, projects and policies. With some exceptions (e.g. Cammack, 2012a; Cammack et al., 2009; Chinsinga, 2015; Englund, 2002a; Manda et al., 2011; Manda, 2009; Mitlin, 2014a, 2014b; Mwathunga, 2014), few studies focus on informal settlement dwellers with primary data collection over and beyond stakeholder meetings. Studies that combine more technical planning-oriented approaches with reflections on wider governance issues are also lacking (Researcher meeting, 10 May 2015). The next two sections therefore represent a significant part of the data collection for the thesis, since there were few readymade studies already in existence that described the landscape of urban governance and informal settlement actors in Malawi. These sections are not just descriptive in nature. By using field notes and examples, they contribute to the overall analysis of the dynamics of urban actors in the country, unpacking some of the specifics of urban organizing in Malawi that are relevant for the study.

---

[9] For more context on the different cities, see the case studies in Appendix IV.

[10] At a workshop organized in Lilongwe as part of the research project, Professor Wiseman C. Chirwa from Chancellor College, University of Malawi, posed the interesting question: 'Are we seeing an urbanization of villages, or a villagization of urban areas in Malawi?'

3.1   Urban governance in Malawi

Malawians lived with colonialism for over 70 years (1891–1963) under the British, and independence, as already mentioned, was immediately followed by over 30 years of dictatorship. In this context, opposition politics were not permitted and independent civil society organizations were banned. Malawi is thus a young democracy, with only 20 years of institutionalized multiparty rule (Chirwa, 2014).

In 1998, a Local Government Act was passed that established town and city assemblies as the unit of local government in urban areas. However, local council elections were not organized until the Malawi Decentralization Policy came into effect in 2000. A range of functions related to planning and development were now delegated to the local councils, but this move was not accompanied by sufficient resources to match the new responsibilities. There were also strong tensions at the local level between councillors, district commissioners, members of parliament and traditional chiefs.[11]

As President Muluzi (1994–2004) had before him, President Bingu wa Mutharika (2004–2012) feared that the local government elections would strengthen the opposition (Cammack et al., 2009). The local government assemblies were therefore dissolved in 2005, and local government elections were postponed for almost a decade. In the meantime, and at the time of the current study, local governments were run by technocrats without councils and were therefore directly answerable to the central authority (Chasukwa and Chinsinga, 2013). During this period, the closest elected representatives for Malawians were their members of parliament.

Politicians in Malawi are in theory held accountable through elections, and the fact that only one third of Malawi's politicians succeed in being re-elected testifies to this. However, since few politicians are able to live up to the grandiose promises they make during their election campaigns, politicians tend to think in the short term when they are

---

[11] 'Chief' is here used in a general sense and may refer to the paramount chief, senior chief, chief, group village headman or village headman.

in office, focusing more on their own gains than on engaging with their constituencies (Cammack, 2011):

> What I want to explain is that as people from informal settlements we encounter challenges that our government is not helping us with. For example, we had political campaigns last year and various leaders promised us that when we empower them they should assist us accordingly. However, when we take them to task they are full of scapegoats and say they are not able to develop our areas because we are not within the laws, and yet during their campaign the same people did not warn us of this. We are only told when they are in power (Community member, Mtandire, at radio debate, 10 May 2015).

Given the issues illustrated in the quote above, many people in informal settlements prefer to deal with the traditional chiefs, who are expected to remain independent and not engage in what are seen as disruptive party politics and competitive electoral games (Cammack, 2011; Articles I and II). Chiefs have more power in Malawi than in many other African countries (Cammack et al., 2009). Both the colonialists and life president Hastings Banda exploited the functions of Malawi's chiefs to stay in control. Chiefs headed the local development committees and were indispensable to the state as the final link between the authorities and the people. After 1994, in the multiparty era, Malawi's chieftaincies gained further power. Their formal mandates were reduced (for example, they were no longer to be chairs of development committees), but their influence in community matters increased in the absence of alternative local government structures (Eggen, 2011; Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2007):

> We mobilize people and negotiate any development that has come to the community. We act like a bridge between organizations and the community (Interview, secretary for Chief Nancholi Chimiire, Blantyre, 2 April 2014).

Malawi's town chiefs are thus a 'type of hybrid political order for they operate within overlapping normative universes, and perform acts which have both historical resonance and modern purposes' (Cammack et al., 2009: 2). The 1994 constitution recognizes chiefs and does not distinguish between urban and rural areas. Additionally, the 1998 Local

Government Act allows for chiefs to sit in city assemblies as advisers. However, according to the 1967 Chiefs Act, chiefs are not supposed to operate in urban areas – a policy that is generally upheld by Malawi's authorities and bureaucrats. Regardless of this, town chiefs are numerous and play an important role in community development (Cammack et al., 2009). For example, while the city authorities, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, and the Malawi Housing Corporation officially control public land in cities, town chiefs continue to allocate land and oversee land transactions in informal settlements:

> Traditional leaders are not acknowledged in cities, but people buy land from traditional leaders (Interview, Program Officer, Malawi Local Government Association (MALGA), 11 March 2013).

Chome and McCall (2003) call this a neocustomary land practice that has complicated the capacity of local authorities to plan informal settlements. Chiefs also preside over traditional courts, allocate burial sites and act as community gatekeepers for civil servants and NGO workers (Eggen, 2011). These dynamics between formal and informal elements of governance makes it complicated to identify what constitutes formal state relations as opposed to everyday political practices:

> For those people who are well to do, the government prepare settlements, prepare roads, prepare water pipes and elected democracy. But the government does not plan for the poor. So when the poor see idle pieces of land they will just settle there informally. There are no roads, no water pipes and no electricity. So people just organize themselves. They elect chiefs that allocate pieces of land. In the situation of Senti [informal settlement in Lilongwe], for example, people went to the village head woman [chief] and asked for land. The problem now is accessibility and issues with water and sanitation. In the past, before I became a member of parliament, people used streams to get water and some dug wells. However, that water is not suitable for human consumption so there were cholera outbreaks. The government has therefore now come in through the Lilongwe Water Board and built strategically positioned water kiosks there (Interview, Member of Parliament, 28 May 2013).

As exemplified by the rule of the chiefs in urban areas and the above quotation, the state operates in a number of ways along the formal–informal continuum, and not always in a formalistic and top-down way. This is highly significant for how participatory practices are organized and how community groups connect with different development and urban planning actors.

3.2 Urban planning actors in Malawi

Urban planning actors in Malawi can be categorized in various ways, but broadly they include national and local government, service providers, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), associations, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and various community leaders such as chiefs and church leaders. This section aims to provide an overview of the different actors and how they relate to or work with informal settlements. This is important for understanding both Malawi's urban dynamics and how the action research project was developed.
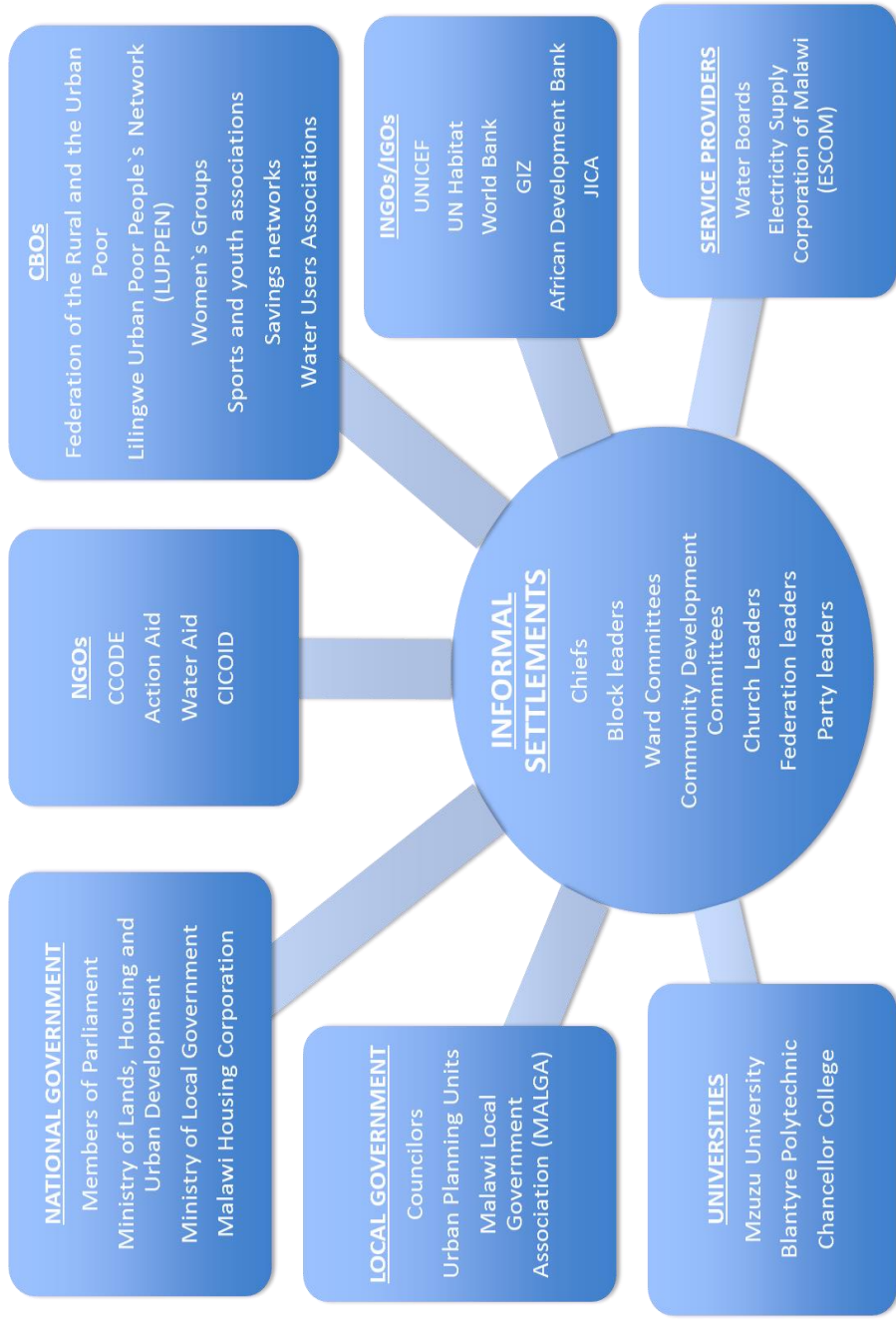
Figure 2. Urban planning actors in Malawi. Source: Author

National and local government

Public land in urban Malawi is generally owned and managed by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MoLHUD), the Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) or the city authorities. At MoLHUD, the Department of Physical Planning provides policy guidance and technical support on planning aspects. The Department of Lands provides land to various stakeholders for different uses, including low-cost housing to local authorities and NGOs. The Department of Housing and Urban Development manages government office accommodation and home-ownership schemes. Six officers at the headquarters of the Department of Housing and Urban Development work on informal settlement issues, but there are no established positions in the department for informal settlement staffing. This means that informal settlement issues are handled by different officers, who keep rotating and are assigned whenever the need arises.

The Malawi Housing Corporation was established in 1964 to provide rent-controlled housing. However, during its 50 years, the MHC has provided services for less than 20% of people living in cities. Furthermore, the MHC targets the middle-income segment of the population. Housing for the urban poor is thus not its focus:

> This is a statutory body on behalf of the government to develop residential units. We get land and are supposed to build on it and make houses to rent. We also offer residential plots. The target is middle-to-high-income people, and 90% of our work is in formally planned areas. Initially, MHC worked with low-income groups and traditional housing areas too, but in the 1990s the government administration allocated the responsibility to the local governments so all land was transferred. We have therefore left all low-income areas (Interview, MHC officer, 6 May 2015).

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGRD) is the other ministry most relevant to urban development. The ministry is mandated to promote and accelerate local governance, participatory democracy and the socio-economic development of 34 councils (6 urban councils and 28 district councils). The ministry has several affiliates, which include the National Local Government Finance Committee (NLGFC), the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) and the Malawi Local Government Association (MALGA). The NLGFC is mandated to lead the fiscal

decentralization process, while the LGSC recruits professional staff for local authorities. MALGA is a local authority association. Its vision is to strengthen Malawi's local governments, but it has struggled with raising membership fees. MALGA has also had primarily a rural voice, as it represents all local government authorities in the country:

> MALGA represents all local authorities. Urban authorities are therefore automatically members. However, the urban authorities think they are not well represented and that they need another voice. There is a need to focus on urban development, but rural development has more clout in the population and the Ministry of Local Government does not work much on urban development (Interview, Programme Officer, MALGA, 11 March 2013).

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development manages the Local Development Fund (LDF), which became operational in 2009 with a mission to improve community livelihoods and local service delivery through mobilization and financing of socio-economic development interventions and local capacity enhancement at the local council and community levels. The LDF manages the Local Authority Window programme for local authorities seeking funding for infrastructure development in their areas. Projects under this window include road upgrading, storm water drainage excavation and environmental management. More specific community projects such as the drilling of boreholes and the construction of school infrastructure (classroom blocks, teachers' houses, etc.) are supported through the Community Window. Projects to upgrade informal settlements and slums can apply for support from either of these two windows, as well as the Urban Window. However, the Local Development Fund does not have a special window for informal settlement development through upgrading, and community groups have found it difficult to access money through the LDF.

Malawi's local authorities are responsible for coordinating and managing local socio-economic and physical development within the areas of their jurisdiction. The city councils are to provide policy and technical guidance on planning, housing and land issues, enforce bylaws, and source funding for urban and community development programmes. They are also responsible for providing various infrastructure and services

to all areas of a city, including informal settlements. As illustrated by the following quotation, however, this is not always the case:

> The city council has not done anything. Like any other cities they do not fulfil their promises. They can administer and collect money, but they never do any implementation of activities. They always say that slum upgrading is not included in the budget (Group discussion, Chikanda, Zomba, 10 February 2014).

In practice, most city authorities do not engage much with informal settlements, especially if the latter are located on customary land on the outskirts of the city (Kruse, 2005). There is not much planning, and evictions are also relatively far between:

> No, there is no planning, not to my knowledge. Only when there are special needs, for example through the Local Development Fund. Then the city council will supervise (Interview, Manager, Informal Settlement Unit, Lilongwe, 9 May 2013).

The laissez-faire approach towards informal settlements also reflects the lack of capacity and resources that characterizes local governance in Malawi (Chinsinga, 2015):

> There are not enough resources at the city councils. The local governments do have their own ways of generating revenues, but it is not enough. You have maybe seen this challenge in our townships, like the issue of garbage. There was a time when we were holding a meeting with Lilongwe City Council. We asked why there was uncontrolled garbage in markets and townships. They said they did an assessment: on average each person in Lilongwe produced 0.5 kg of litter per day. If it is 700,000 residents, that is 350,000 kg of litter per day. They say they simply do not have the capacity to collect and dispose of this, which I think is true (Interview, Member of Parliament, 28 May 2013).

The sector has also been plagued by unethical behaviour and corruption among city planning officers. The tendency for politicians to override the decisions of technocrats has undermined the culture of respect for the rule of law, and has promoted corrupt

tendencies on the part of the technocrats that are entrusted with these responsibilities. The governance system has thus lacked mechanisms for checks and balances to both politicians and bureaucrats (Chinsinga, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, during the past decade the closest elected representatives for people in Malawi's informal settlements have been their members of parliament. MPs are involved in local development mainly through their constituency development funds (CDFs), but these are most often used to buy votes and cement political backing. Politics in Malawi is heavily neopatrimonial, and political leaders tend to buy support through handouts and promises (Cammack, 2012b). This is, however, by no means a one-way process. As exemplified in the field note below, community groups also exploit upcoming elections to get projects implemented.

Field note 1: 'Exploiting' aspiring politicians in Nancholi Chimiire

In Nancholi Chimiire, an informal settlement in Blantyre, community representatives managed to get several aspiring politicians to fund parts of their community development plan in the run-up the tripartite election in 2014 (Case Study 3).

In 2012, community members in Nancholi Chiimire engaged with CCODE and the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor and started organizing themselves into clusters. They produced a settlement profile and started working on enumeration and mapping of the settlement. Community representatives also engaged with students from Malawi Polytechnic University in planning studio exercises to design identified community projects and quantify project materials. Nancholi is surrounded by the three rivers Mudi, Namasimba and Chiwandira. Up until 2013, there were no proper footbridges over these rivers. This had caused problems with children falling into the rivers. Bridges were therefore a high priority.

> Politicians may make promises now, but after elections they may not keep them. We therefore decided to take advantage of the current stage. With the mapping in Nancholi, we gave the plans to a shadow member of parliament who had approached the chief. The chief said that instead of himself pocketing the money, the shadow MP could do a bridge. Two bridges were then constructed (Group interview, Federation district leaders, Blantyre, 28 March 2014).

Photo 1. One of the two footbridges constructed. Source: Author

Parastatal actors

The global economic crises of the 1980s led the government of Malawi to adopt neoliberal economic policies. This included private sector investments and privatization of government services. However, the private sector did not fill the vacuum created by the

retreating state, resulting in a neglect of public sanitation services, waste management and urban infrastructure (Chinsinga, 2015).

Nevertheless, parastatal corporations such as the Electricity Supply Corporation (ESCOM) and city water boards manage services such as water and electricity. ESCOM is a limited liability company that was established under the Companies Act of 1984, with a mandate to transmit and distribute electricity in the country. ESCOM does operate in several informal settlements but does not necessarily provide organized access in line with existing community plans. Community members also sometimes access electricity lines both legally and illegally when they are provided to, for example, churches in informal or semi-informal settlements:

> In terms of electricity, in the past people were building big churches so electricity came in. ESCOM came to install them so others now have access (Interview, Senior Chief, Chinsapo, 15 March 2013).

The main bodies responsible for the provision of water supply in Malawi are the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development (MoIWD), city assemblies and the city water boards. Malawi's water boards are parastatal organizations established under the Water Works Act of 1995. There are two city water boards for Lilongwe and Blantyre, and three regional water boards for Northern, Central and Southern Malawi (Manda, 2009). Water is provided to informal settlements either through individual taps or through water kiosks. The water kiosks are often managed by water user associations (WUAs). These are cooperative water societies, where community committees establish a legal business entity and register it with the government to operate all water facilities in a designated area. They are supposed to sell water at a tariff agreed with the local water board and sign a business contract with the board.

ESCOM and the water boards do have officials designated to different areas, including informal settlements. How accessible these officials are, though, varies from city to city and from area to area. It is also very dependent on personalities and personal acquaintances, as there are no clear guidelines on how the water boards are to engage with different community structures. While some community leaderships and committees

almost never meet with representatives from the water boards, others are able to make use of personal and organizational networks to maintain an ongoing dialogue.

Field note 2: Service negotiations in Ndirande Makata

Ndirande is the largest informal settlement in Blantyre, with a population of about 118,000 people. The settlement consists of four parts, one of them being Ndirande Makata, which has a population of 35,000. In 2013, community representatives, facilitated by the chief, decided to form committees to address issues such as access to water.

Photo 2. Committee representatives and Federation leaders in Ndirande Makata. Source: Author

To increase access to water for the growing population in the area, Blantyre Water Board (BWB) constructed a new pipeline in 2012. The development was welcomed by the communities, but there were several problems with the new pipeline in terms of continuous water provision and water pressure. Some of these were due to general problems with water provision and capacity in the area, while others were caused by the pipes not being put deep enough in the ground. Since the pipes were too close to the surface, they were, for example, vulnerable to leaks, and the water board had previously been slow in responding to such problems.

Photo 3. Pipe on road surface. Source: Author

One of the first tasks of the water committee was therefore to link up with the Blantyre Water Board. The committee asked for a meeting, which was facilitated through CCODE and the Federation, in which most of the committee members were active. Following this, representatives from the BWB came to the settlement and met with the representatives. At the meeting, it was agreed that the committee representatives could contact BWB officers directly if there were any problems with the pipes (water shortages, breaches, etc.). The community representatives promised for their part to keep a better eye on the pipes to make sure they were not breached on purpose to tap free water. They would also work to prevent people from constructing structures – for example, pit latrines – on top of water pipes or in places hindering their maintenance:

> Another problem is, for example, how someone set up a toilet on top of the pipe. We found the person and stopped the development. We referred the person to some other land (Group discussion, community representatives, 30 March 2014).

While the main problems with the new pipeline – water pressure and inconsistent water provision – remained, the community representatives interviewed said they had called the BWB on several occasions and that the water board had been quick to respond. In the instance photographed below, a pipe had been broken by a vehicle. The water committee then called the BWB, who turned up to fix the pipe the following day.

Photo 4. Workers from BWB fixing the water pipes. Source: Author

There are also other instances where community groups have been able to negotiate directly with service providers. As a representative for the Lilongwe Urban Poor People's Network (LUPPEN) explained with regards to sewage, which is mainly the responsibility of the city council:

> For example, in Kauma [informal settlement in Lilongwe] it was about sewage. It was a lot of bad smell. We went as representatives to the city council to get them to treat the sewage. The city council did not do anything. Then we organized our members and went to the city council together. Later on, within one week, they treated the sewage. When people there heard, they then joined and came up to be members [of LUPPEN] (Interview, LUPPEN representatives, 12 April 2014).

Community leaders and networks

The government organization at the community level has been implemented differently in different cities and settlements. In theory, when city councils are constituted, their anchoring to local communities would be through councillors, ward committees and community development committees (CDCs). Each councillor sets up a ward development committee (WDC). These ward development committees then establish community development committees under the chairmanship of an elected community member (Chinsinga, 2015). In addition to councillors, there are also block leaders in each ward. Block leaders were initially introduced to function in urban areas in the absence of councillors. Communities were therefore split into blocks, with each block leader being elected by committees in the block to serve for two years (Chinsinga, 2015). At the time of the present study, councillors were not in place, but block leaders existed in several of the informal settlements studied, and some also had community development committees. In Zomba, for example, the city council administration had organized a bottom-up approach to establishing community and ward development committees in the absence of local councillors.

Field note 3: Building representation in Zomba

In 2012, Zomba City Council, in collaboration with the German Development Corporation and the civil human rights organization Bwalo Initiative, decided to establish ward development committees in all wards, along with community development committees to support each ward. The goal of this initiative was to establish robust local political structures for the future councillors to work with following planned elections.

The election process was conducted in two steps. The first was a series of community meetings to raise awareness about the mission and mandates of the committees. Two theatre groups were also hired in to perform drama shows on local governance and election procedures in different communities.

Photo 5. Theatre for Development at the community awareness raising meetings. Source: Adrian Hodgson, GIZ

The second step was the actual elections. These were announced through letters to the chief and by driving through the settlements making announcements from the car. The CDCs were elected first. Community members were asked to come together and nominate three candidates for each position in the CDC. The candidates were then blindfolded, and community members lined up behind their candidate to show their votes. The elected members for the CDCs then elected the ward development committees.

Photo 6. Election of a CDC in Zomba. Source: Adrian Hodgson, GIZ

The fact that people had to line up behind their candidates made it easier for group leaders to influence the process. At the same time, the elections were rarely disputed, as the results were visible for all to see. The facilitators attempted to keep party politics out of the elections in order to make the committees as inclusive as possible. No politicians was therefore to be elected to the committees. Similarly, to mitigate against nepotism and favouritism, the kinsmen of traditional leaders were also not eligible for election. Traditional leaders are still to play a role as advisers to the committees, but without imposing their decisions. While politicians were not eligible for election, party-political divides were 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 councillors were elected in 2014, they were to 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 Committees 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.

Church leaders have also played an important role in community development and politics at local and national levels in Malawi. In 1992, for example, Malawi's churches mobilized actively and would play a key role in bringing Life President Banda's dictatorship to an end two years later (Newell, 1995). At the community level, churches

function as gathering places where social organizing takes place, complementing the system of political representation.

Following the tripartite elections of 2014, local councils were established, giving people a more decentralized form of political representation. However, the reintroduction of elected local urban governments has created serious challenges over leadership at the community level in urban areas. Block leaders still exist, even after the tripartite elections, and tensions have been reported between block leaders, councillors, chiefs and CDC members over jurisdictions and mandates related to community planning and development (Chinsinga, 2015).

CBOs, NGOs and INGOs

> I think the NGOs are the most important actors in informal settlement work because of the national budget. The government has a lot of things to take care of and many areas are left unattended, so NGOs find themselves doing the job of the government (Interview, Member of Parliament, 28 May 2013).

With the establishment of the multiparty system in 1994, Malawi experienced a mushrooming of both national and international NGOs that had previously been banned in the country. New ways of community participation emerged, with an emphasis on project participation and 'bottom up' development, with much of the work being oriented around how to be a 'good' citizen in the emergent democratic system (Englund, 2006). Since that time, a number of organizations have been established in Malawi, the majority focusing on agriculture and food security, education, and health, with only a minority focusing on and operating in urban areas.

The leading NGO working on informal settlement issues is CCODE, which works through the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor. As I will come back to, CCODE and the Federation became partners in the action research project presented here, and much of the focus in the thesis is therefore centred on them and their strategies:

In 2003, I joined the Federation. CCODE came to the chief in Mtandire [informal settlement in Lilongwe]. They wanted women who do not work but stay in the houses. The chiefs called them, and 50 women came. CCODE told us that we can sit in a group and make some changes with regard to, for example, shops or markets, and that we could help each other. I thought it was a good idea, so I agreed to be in a savings group. Some were to save 20 kwacha, some 50. We were 45 women and had an account with the bank. After 2–3 months, I had saved 7,000 kwacha. Then we loaned to each other. We used it for small income-generating activities like selling tomatoes, firewood and mandasi. We saved for one year, for two years, and this started the Federation. Now it has spread all over Malawi (Interview, national Federation leader, 14 March 2013).

Another important partner in the research was The Research Institute (TRI), previously called The Urban Research Institute. TRI was established as part of a reorganization within CCODE. CCODE and the Federation wanted to become more self-reliant with regard to funding, and they therefore established a holding company owned by CCODE and the Federation. Activities such as housing construction, brick production, economic administration and research were moved to this company, which now offered these services to the broader market. Any economic surplus is to be channelled back to CCODE and the Federation for community projects:

We are trying to move towards longer-term development, to not rely on handouts (Interview, CCODE Programme Director, 1 March 2013).

CCODE and the Federation are affiliated to Slum Dwellers International (SDI), which was founded in 1996 in India, and spread first to South Africa and then to several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The network is now active in 32 countries, including Malawi (Patel et al., 2001; SDI, 2016):

CCODE is the secretariat for the Federation, and the Federation is affiliated to SDI. The details of our work are not governed by SDI, but the concept of power to the people is. Some of the work involves if slum dwellers want to learn and to share. The Zimbabweans, for example, came to provide support

to the Malawi Federation. The Malawi Federation has also provided support on savings and ecosan toilets to Zimbabwe. We have also learned from others through linkages. The slum-upgrading concept, for example, engaged whole communities from South Africa (Interview, CCODE Director, 10 May 2013).

SDI asserts that the urban poor are skilled capable groups that are able to manage their own development if they are given the opportunity to do so (McFarlane, 2004). Its model for mobilization is founded on the idea that place-based mobilization through activities such as information gathering, savings and learning exchanges builds capacities and voice so that the urban poor can influence decision-making and be drivers and implementers of development (Watson, 2014). SDI has been praised for its ability both to develop community-based strategies for poverty reduction and to challenge conventional development thinking (Boonyabancha and Mitlin, 2012; Satterthwaite, 2001; Patel et al., 2001). In Uganda, for example, local savings into citywide funds were connected with the government's 150-million USD municipal support programme as well as resources from the World Bank, Comic Aid, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Cities Alliance, 2016). In India, an alliance made up of the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) and Mahila Milan used enumerations and collection of data about themselves and their settlements to initiate a dialogue with city officials. This dialogue gave results, and by the end of 2005 SPARC and the NSDF had obtained land from the government and had managed to construct homes for over 50,000 households (Chen et al., 2007). Similar initiatives have taken hold in South Africa, where the South African Federation is very active in terms of influencing policy (Manda et al., 2011; Millstein et al., 2003; Satterthwaite, 2001). SDI's credentials have laid the ground for the establishment of the network in a number of different contexts through grassroots federations and national NGOs. Malawi is no exception, and CCODE and the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor work with many of the same instruments used by SDI affiliates in other places around the world.

Action Aid is another NGO that has some informal settlement programmes in Malawi, but its urban focus is mainly linked to Lilongwe, where it supports the Lilongwe Urban Poor People's Network. LUPPEN was established in 2007 as a membership-based

advocacy community organization that seeks to strengthen the voices of urban poor residents in Lilongwe. It currently has 3,000 members in 29 urban poor settlements (Interview, LUPPEN representatives, 12 April 2014). Another NGO with a base in Lilongwe is the Circle for Integrated Community Development (CICOD), which covers a number of themes ranging from livelihood security and education to environmental and climate change, as well as water and sanitation. Within the housing sector, Habitat for Humanity Malawi has been active. It used to target urban poor clients with its loans, but because of high loan default rates has now started targeting the lower-middle class instead:

> Q: Do your interventions then reach the urban poorest?
>
> I fear they do not. Our mandate is the economically active poor, but those cannot pay. So we might go up the pyramid. It is a dilemma really. Some vulnerable groups need grants and fully subsidized houses. Sometimes the families contribute with unskilled labour if they can afford, but this type of housing is heavily dependent on donors (Interview, Operations Manager, Habitat for Humanity, 27 May 2013).

Water Aid is a fifth NGO that is active in several informal settlements throughout Malawi, working mainly with water kiosks and community capacity-building on water and sanitation. There are also a number of women's groups and savings initiatives in various informal settlements that are linked to various CBOs and NGOs.

As for intergovernmental and governmental organizations, few have a very pronounced urban focus. UNICEF has some projects in informal settlements, but these are often limited to structures such as schools or health clinics or to specific one-off initiatives. The UN agency that has had the most influence on informal settlement work is UN-Habitat. By providing information and conducting media trainings, it has been driving much of the advocacy on urbanization and informal settlement growth in the country. Despite its limited staffing, UN-Habitat has worked actively with several projects and has also been instrumental in pushing the National Urban Forum that was organized in 2008 and 2011. The organization has, however, struggled with identifying and finalizing funds for its proposed projects, as donors in Malawi do not relate actively to urban challenges:

> The urban sector is not yet up there, it is not prioritized by government. According to the Paris Declaration, donors align with government priorities, which are rural (Commissioner for Physical Planning, Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, 4 March 2013).

GIZ is one exception in terms of funding, as it has pushed for and engaged in work on decentralization, which has included an urban focus. Its Malawi Secondary Centers Development Programme (SCDP), for example, developed municipal infrastructure in selected medium-sized towns in Malawi. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is another development partner that has been relatively active. It has worked with Lilongwe's city council administration to develop a master plan for Lilongwe. The African Development Bank has also funded some projects, and the World Bank has supported the government of Malawi through the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF), which provides funds for community-driven public works and building livelihoods. MASAF also includes the Local Development Fund, which has some windows that benefit urban areas.

Universities

There are three urban planning programmes in Malawi, located at Mzuzu University, Blantyre Polytechnic and Chancellor College. Students at Chancellor College's Department of Geography and Education have had a broad-based focus on urbanization and planning challenges with individual works, while both Mzuzu University and Blantyre Polytechnic have worked actively in informal settlements with community studio planning exercises. As described in the field note below, such exercises have played an important role in both community mobilization and project implementation. They have also served to educate planning students on how to work in informal settlements.

Field note 4: Planning studios in Salisburyline, Mzuzu

Slum Dwellers International and the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS) have facilitated planning studio exercises in several parts of the world, working with communities in an effort to close the gap between planning education and practice. In Salisburyline in Mzuzu, this took the form of a collaboration between community groups, the Federation, CCODE and Mzuzu University.

Photo 7. Planning meeting between community representatives and students. Source: Author

Students and community representatives worked together in teams focusing on electricity, water, sanitation (toilets and solid waste disposal), drainages (storm water and grey water channels), and land use and circulation in two pilot clusters of the settlement. The information was compiled into a community profile. The next step was to map the two clusters using digitized map sheets, printed satellite images, cameras and tape measures for data collection. At the end of this process, the teams met with the rest of the community to discuss relevant issues and develop proposals for concrete projects.

Figure 3. Map over cluster in Salisburyline with suggested interventions. Source: CCODE

The community representatives and the students alike described the planning studio in Salisburyline as very useful and enriching, where both parties learned from each other. The collaboration was therefore deemed successful in terms of facilitating a bottom-up planning process while at the same time providing a learning platform for all partners involved. Salisburyline community representatives now had information maps and project proposals for two of their clusters. As I will come back to later in the foundation, however, implementation would prove to be another matter.

When the present study began, researchers working on urbanization, governance and informality at the three universities had not met as a research community. Furthermore, the work that had been carried out by academics on urbanization and informal settlements in Malawi was to a large degree limited to reports commissioned for various programmes, projects and policies. More substantive studies were rare. As part of the PhD project, my supervisor and I, together with researchers at Chancellor College, therefore applied for extra funds to enable the PhD project to organize a researcher network meeting in Malawi. The aim of this meeting was to discuss and establish what research had been conducted in Malawi on urbanization, governance and informality, and what form future directions and collaborations on the topic might take:

It is maybe a bit strange, but this is the first time we are meeting as a group of urban researchers, and it took an initiative from the outside for us to do so. It was in high time, and hopefully now that we have sat down as a collective we will be able to create more collaborations in this field going forward (Professor Wiseman C. Chirwa, opening the researcher meeting, 10 May 2015).

3.3   Participatory urban planning and slum upgrading in Malawi

As I have shown in this chapter, Malawi has a long history of development control, planning and infrastructure development dating back to the colonial era. Some changes have of course been made to adapt to development needs, but the frameworks still focus on physical planning modalities based on the Western experience. They are not adapted to the context of increasing informality and the urban challenges Malawi faces. Instead, planning tends to entrench further inequalities as it continues to build on the system of zoning based on income levels (Chinsinga, 2015).

Several slum-upgrading projects have been initiated in Malawi. Few, however, have been deemed very successful (Manda, 2013; Articles I and II). Plans have been formed, but they are seldom followed up by resources for implementation. Where slum upgrading *has* happened, the areas typically fall victim to 'downward raiding', where the middle class benefits and the original renters are displaced further out at the city margins (Manda, 2013):

> In the past when government go to areas they would go to plan themselves. But when they did this the poor run away and the rich bought the areas. Improving roads benefitted the rich (Interview, national Federation leader, 12 March 2013).

Some of the challenges with slum upgrading in Malawi have been attributed to lack of participation in planning and project processes. In response, recent slum-upgrading projects have therefore sought to involve civil society more actively (Manda, 2013):

> If councils are to perform in terms of service delivery, we need to involve citizens. We need to plan with them, to implement and to do monitoring with them. If not, we will not perform as expected. We need to have a common understanding (Interview, Director of Physical Planning, Zomba, 24 March 2014).

There have been several 'waves' of community participation in development throughout Malawi's modern history, but the most significant turn accompanied the reconstitution of the multiparty system in 1994 and the mushrooming of NGOs that followed. New ways of community involvement emerged, with an emphasis on project participation and 'bottom up' development. Subsequent discussions on decentralization and 'good governance' in the 1990s and 2000s further strengthened the argument for community participation, and today participation is promoted within most development interventions in Malawi.

In some instances, community groups are also driving their development themselves. One example is described in the field note below, where community groups have worked together with CCODE and the Federation to organize a type of 'communitization' of services such as waste management and minor infrastructure improvements.

Field note 5: 'Communitization' of services in Senti, Lilongwe

In Senti, community groups undertook a mapping and enumeration exercise that resulted in a list of projects prioritized by the community. Knowing that access to funds through the government, donors or NGOs might not be an option for realizing their plans, community members therefore agreed to use their own finances (100MK, 0,2 USD per month) to realize some of the prioritized projects.

The money collected for the development plans was used to hire jobless community members to work on, for example, waste collection, road maintenance and opening up new roads in the settlement.

Photo 8. Left: Mrs Kawundu is one of the house owners who gave up a 1.5-metre-wide stretch of land along her house for this road. Upper right: Federation leader Mr Banda showing one of the planned roads. Lower right: A road that is being worked on by the church and its neighbours: Source: Author. Permissions to print names granted.

> The road benefits almost everybody. If someone is sick or with funerals.
> Also, when it comes to development, materials can pass by (Mrs Kawundu, 29 January 2014).

The Senti initiative shows that community members can mobilize their own resources towards settlement development. However, Senti still faces larger-scale challenges that require a continued engagement with other actors, such as Lilongwe City Council. Examples include bridges, health clinics, schools, larger roads, and affordable water and electricity services. At the time of the study, community representatives in Senti had formed committees that were to engage with stakeholders such as the city council, donors, NGOs and others. However, they found it difficult both to access city council processes and to mobilize resources for larger-scale developments in their settlements.

Despite the emphasis on community participation in urban planning and slum upgrading and examples such as that in Senti above, interviews, observations and discussions conducted in connection with this thesis revealed that current participatory spaces had little impact on the status of urban dwellers, their access to resources and their inclusion as full members of the city (Articles I and II). At the time of the study, community groups, the Federation and CCODE were increasingly frustrated with this situation, and for many it seemed as though they had reached a glass ceiling in terms of what they were able to achieve within the existing frameworks. This realization formed the basis for the collaboration with CCODE, the Federation and a number of informal settlement groups that will be described further in Chapter 6.

This chapter has described and unpacked some of the dynamics that distinguish what is urban in Malawi. It thus establishes a basis from which the process of action research presented in this thesis and the multiple actors engaged in it can be understood. Furthermore, the chapter has provided an overview of the interplay between formality and informality, overlapping policies, and a grassroots consisting of several layers of governance that makes it possible to better understand the conditions for and potential of the participatory spaces discussed later in the thesis.

This thesis has been informed by a number of theoretical perspectives, mainly within political and feminist geography, development studies, and urban studies with a focus on participatory planning and citizenship. The theoretical underpinnings of the thesis are thus eclectic. Furthermore, as the inquiry progressed, the focus of the study changed from a very actor-oriented approach to a more discursive and systemic analysis. There are, however, some general observations that can be made.

The perspectives in this thesis draw partly on an ontological and epistemological stance located within the poststructuralist tradition in geography. Poststructuralism offers a number of strategies for calling into question taken-for-granted truths and dominant practices. Through the deconstruction of discourses, power relations can be made visible and spaces for alternative forms of practice can emerge (Said, 1978; Escobar, 1995). The thesis adopts a poststructuralist approach by drawing on critical scholarship in analysing dominant participatory planning spaces and practices in Malawi.

In broad terms, critical scholarship aims to explore, expose and question hegemonies and traditional assumptions about power in the pursuit of social change (Blomley, 2006; Fraser, 1985; Kemmis, 2006). It encompasses a variety of ontological, epistemological and methodological stands, but has been criticized within poststructuralist and postcolonial scholarship for generating 'grand' and 'totalizing' theories and thus reproducing certain hegemonies (Bohmann, 2016; Blomley, 2006; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). In this critique, critical scholars are accused of presupposing that there is *one* preferred mode of critical explanation and *one* preferred goal of social criticism (Bohmann, 2016). These types of presumptions have been problematized by feminist scholars, who show how supposedly neutral or impartial norms have built-in biases with respect to, for example, race, gender, culture and disability (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986; Smith, 1987; Spivak 1988). If one accepts these scholars' premise that we are all situated and positioned, and that our positionality influences what we see, then *'who'* identifies what is wrong with society matters (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). This study therefore emphasizes how knowledge is situated (Harding, 1986; Smith, 1987) and how

some 'truths' are positioned as more true than others depending on how, and from where in the knowledge hierarchy, they are produced. This is a postcolonial view on knowledge production that emphasizes interpretations as partial and context bound rather than universal and detached (bell hooks, 1990; Spivak, 1988).

Much of the thesis is positioned in this interface between feminist postcolonial geography and critical theory. It engages with discussions on the distinctions between relativism and situated knowledge and attempts to reconcile partial perspectives with commitments to political action and social change to create research that is at the same time critical and rooted, explanatory and actionable (Blomley, 2006; Johnston et al., 2000; Vasstrøm, 2013). The challenges involved in the pursuit of these multiple imperatives are not completely resolved in the thesis, but the thesis work can be a contribution into the debate, offering some specific examples on how critical theory and situated knowledge can be integrated in an action research process (see Article IV in particular).

Drawing on discussions within development studies, political geography and urban scholarship, the next part of the present chapter will attempt to unpack four of the concepts that have been central to all of the articles for this thesis: political agency, transformative participation, participatory spaces and urban citizenship. Individual sections explain how these concepts have been used in the thesis and add to the theoretical positions set out in Articles I and II.

4.1   Political agency

Discussions around agency, which in broad terms means people's capabilities to change their own circumstances, have been going on for centuries within philosophy and the social sciences. Two central axes, however, can be identified. The Marxist perspective emphasizes structures, with individuals being viewed as passive recipients (Althusser, 2005), whereas rationalists and humanists argue (albeit in different ways) that we are knowledgeable agents producing social life through intentional actions (Hodgson, 2004). The first approach has been accused of being too deterministic, and it has been argued that such a perspective is proved wrong by the occurrence of social change (Calhoun,

1988). The second approach explains social change but has been criticized for putting too much emphasis on the agent's capacity to act (Morselli, 2014):

> The difficulty in constructing a workable theory of action is to avoid on the one hand the determinism of the structural view, and on the other the idealism and hyper individualism of some non-structural approaches (Duncan, 1985: 178).

In 1984, Anthony Giddens introduced the alternative *structuration theory,* focusing on the mutual dependency between structure and agency. He defined structures as rules and resources produced and reproduced through the choices that agents make during social interaction. His approach became, and remains, immensely popular within the social sciences and has dominated theorizing within geography for many years.

The poststructuralist turn introduced a more discursive approach to agency than Giddens's structuration theory. Discourses in the Foucauldian sense are seen as systems of rules that state who can say what, where and how (Caldwell, 2007). Discourse also refers to 'practices', which form the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1976). With critical feminist and poststructuralist theory, deconstruction of discourses therefore became an important method for understanding agency and power relations. In these traditions, the notion of an autonomous rational individual is questioned, and agency is considered to be shaped within and by discourse. Kesby (2005: 2042), for example, argues that 'the discourses and practices of participation powerfully govern the possibilities of behavior, reflection, representation, and action within a given area of research or intervention'. To understand the transformative potential of, for example, participation in urban planning, it is therefore important, as this thesis aims to do, to explore the contextual dynamics that influence what strategies and practices are available to informal settlement groups.

In the thesis, and in Article I specifically, my co-author and I make a distinction between a general notion of agency, based in routinized practices, and what we define as 'political agency' in the context of urban planning in Malawi. Here we emphasize that political agency can be performed in many ways, both individually and collectively, through everyday practices and actions or in formal fora (Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011;

Millstein, 2013; Robins et al., 2008). However, inspired by Isin (2008) and Rancière (1992, 2001, 2009, 2011), we limit our definition of political agency to activities that are oriented towards addressing exclusionary politics and unequal resource distribution.

For the purpose of identifying and analysing participatory spaces in urban Malawi, this definition of political agency proved useful, as it made visible different dimensions of participation and some of the constraints inherent in current participatory planning practices. However, the definition is a very narrow one. As described in Article IV, it is not always radical change that is perceived to be at stake in the everyday practice of urban governance in low-income neighbourhoods (Millstein, 2017; Bénit-Gbaffou, 2012). The definition of political agency therefore had to be opened up and broadened both in Article II and in this foundation to account for the multiple practices and strategies people employ to improve their situations in informal settlements outside of and within different spaces of participation.

4.2   Transformative participation

Since the 1990s, participatory development discourse and practices have focused on improving people's capabilities to change their own circumstances through community organization, participatory planning and improved governance (Chambers, 1995, 1997). However, processes have often been unsuccessful because spaces of participation repeatedly become passive arenas in which people have few possibilities to influence actual outcomes. Moreover, participatory processes are accused of being 'cosmetic', used both by agencies to legitimize their own agendas and by elites in communities to maintain existing power relations. Participation has thus famously been termed the 'New Tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), since participatory approaches often fail to consider constraints related to structures, institutions and social practice:

> Concepts of individual action underlying participatory approaches swing
> widely between 'rational choice' and 'social being' models. The former
> attributes individual behavior to calculative self-interest, the latter to culture
> and social norms. Social structure is variously perceived as opportunity and
> constraint but little analyzed; the linkages between the individual and the

structures and institutions of the social world they inhabit are ill modeled (Cleaver 2001: 39).

Early studies of participation, as the above quotation from Cleaver suggests, to a large extent did not question *how* people exercise agency and what institutional and discursive constraints they faced. In an attempt to account for limitations related to structures, institutions and social practice that affect who participates, in what ways and with what degree of success, the focus has therefore shifted to how one can achieve *'transformative'* participation.

Transformative participation goes beyond increasing the influence of marginalized groups in local decision-making to confront the forces that cause social exclusion to begin with (Cornwall, 2002, 2004, 2008; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Millstein, 2007; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Rancière (1992, 2001, 2009, 2011) suggests that only limited change may come from acting within existing frameworks and scripts (Isin, 2008). *Transformative* participation, he argues, takes place when people challenge the existing discourses, a form of behaviour that will initially be interpreted as 'noise' by those in power (Marchart, 2007; Swyngedouw, 2014; Article I). Transformative participation in this understanding is thus oriented towards making 'noise', questioning unequal power relations and distribution of resources and challenging the institutional order of which they are part.

The understanding of political agency and transformative participation described above shaped much of the initial work in the PhD project. However, as described in article IV, the researchers did not succeed in creating a model for transformative participation that resonated fully with the participants through such an approach. As researchers, we had, for example, conceptualized 'noise' as a necessary component for change. However, the opposite of 'noise' is not necessarily 'silence' or 'passiveness'. As Scott (1985) famously describes as 'Weapons of the Weak', people often engage in a variety of everyday forms of resistance. This is, however, typically overlooked by academics and practitioners who are more interested in the visible symbols, outcomes and rhetoric emphasized in most social mobilization literature (Robins et al., 2008).

The people involved in our study, both as partners and as participants, were actively pursuing a variety of strategies. Sometimes the lack of 'noise' was a strategic choice. By

not drawing attention to their areas, people were able to continue a range of informal practices related to housing and planning without the government's interference (Mwathunga, 2014). For many people, it also made more sense to try to negotiate their individual place within the system than to challenge the system in a collective way (Cammack, 2007). Resistance was rather found in the ways in which people settled in informal settlements and organized themselves directly with service providers (Case Studies 3 and 4), or in how community groups organized services for themselves (Case Study 1). This is more in line with what Bayat (2010) describes as the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' and represents a type of 'tolerated encroachment' on the part of the state (Rao, 2013) – a 'tolerated encroachment' that could be jeopardized if people made too much 'noise'. People also exploited bureaucratic slippages and connections and made use of a multitude of subject positions to negotiate their state or client relationships (Millstein, 2017). During the project, the understanding of transformative participation was therefore broadened to take into account some of what Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield describe as the balancing people do between 'the complex negotiation of local clientelist linkages that render daily lives bearable' and 'the generally more external, ephemeral, and oppositional politics of rights, which often discard, expose, or confront clientelist links, at the risk of losing resources, if the new mobilization network does not last or succeed' (Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2014: 286).

4.3 Participatory spaces

Reforms in governance have created a number of new spaces for citizen engagement. Some are situated in the interface between state and society, while others are constructed outside of formal frameworks. They can be one-off short-lived engagements or more regularized and institutionalized features of the societal landscape (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). Cornwall (2004) and Gaventa (2006) have made a useful distinction between 'invited' and 'claimed' spaces of participation. Invited spaces are facilitated by decision-makers, and participants are invited to join. Claimed spaces, on the other hand, are opened up and shaped by relatively powerless actors themselves. Such spaces can be created through social movements, organizations or community groups, or just be general spaces

where people meet to discuss and interact outside of formal institutional frameworks. Both spaces may be relatively institutionalized, and they tend to operate within existing participation and planning discourses. Miraftab (2005) adds a third category of space: 'invented' space. 'Claimed' and 'invented' spaces are often used as synonyms in the urban literature, but as we elaborate on in Article I, my co-author Cathrine Brun and I found it necessary to distinguish between the two in the Malawian context. Compared to claimed space, we understood invented spaces as more confrontational and less institutionalized, where participants may directly oppose authorities and the status quo. The 'invented' space is thus more agonistic than the 'claimed'. This distinction is relevant because, while a number of 'claimed' spaces were identified in Malawi, 'invented' ones were few and far between (Article I).

To understand the transformative potential of participatory spaces in Malawi, a framework of 'trialectics' was developed (Article I), inspired by the literature on participatory spaces mentioned above and recent debates in political and cultural geography (Dikeç 2005, 2007, 2012; Davidson and Iveson, 2014; Isin, 2008; Kallio, 2012; Mouffe, 1999, 2000; Pieterse, 2008; Purcell, 2013, 2014; Rancière, 2001, 2009, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2014). Here, the potential for transformation was found in the ways in which the 'claimed', 'invited' and 'invented' dimensions of participation connected, overlapped and opened up for ways in which actors could meet. This 'trialectics' of participation represented a useful framework for understanding what type of agency different participatory spaces enabled.

The 'political agency' explored in Article I, for example, referred to activities challenging unequal power relations and redistribution of resources. 'Invented' spaces in which such activities typically occurred were largely absent in participatory planning in Malawi. Insurgency and resistance carried out to instigate change tended rather to be found outside of and disconnected from the participatory framework, through land invasions, squatting, ignoring planning regulations or public protests (Mwathunga, 2014). Participatory spaces, on the other hand, were typically depoliticized, technicalized and area based, focusing on consensus and 'constructive engagement'. In Article I, we explore how this participatory script limits the space for voicing noise. At the same time, the lack of agonism was also an expression of the types of change participants were willing to engage in. The article

therefore concludes that even though a repoliticization of participatory planning in Malawi might be necessary, it needs to be done in a way that is sensitive to local context. It thus suggests exploring a third way between a programme of insurgent radical action and the more pragmatic consensus-based participation model practised in Malawi today. Article II picks up where Article I leaves off and tries to develop a more grounded approach to understanding participatory planning and urban citizenship in Malawi that transcends both the neoliberal critique in radical planning theory and notions of incremental inclusive urban citizenship promoted by networks such as Slum Dwellers International.

4.4   Urban citizenship

As part of the transformative turn referred to in the sections above, participatory urban planning discourses have in recent years increasingly merged with discourses on urban citizenship. Examples from Latin America, India and South Africa have modelled this conversation, which connects processes such as slum upgrading firmly to discussions around justice, redistribution of resources and 'the right to the city' in terms of empowering the urban poor and achieving socio-economic rights (Parnell and Oldfield, 2014; Holston, 2008; Pieterse, 2008; Miraftab, 2005). This imbrication of citizenship and participatory planning discourses emphasizes how through collective mobilization and critical engagement the urban poor can have a voice, raise claims and thus achieve rights to services and housing – with different modes of participatory planning being promoted as the main solution for addressing inequalities in the city (Holston; 2008, 2011; Miraftab, 2012; Rossi and Vanolo, 2012).

An example that is frequently referred to in this debate is Slum Dwellers International (SDI).[12] SDI has become a global movement of citizenship-building from below, based on a shared framing and methodology promoted through national affiliates working closely with grassroots organizations. The organization promotes 'a "pro-poor" citizen driven approach' (Mitlin and Patel, 2014: 299) and has been praised for its ability both to

---

[12] See, for example, issues 13(2), 16(1), 19(2), 20(2), 21(2), 24(1), 24(2) and 27(1) of *Environment and Urbanization*.

develop community-based strategies for poverty reduction and to challenge conventional development thinking (Boonyabancha and Mitlin, 2012; Satterthwaite, 2001; Patel et al., 2001). SDI's approach forms part of the contemporary discussions referred to above that (re)link debates about democratization and rights specifically to the city as a terrain of political agency and mobilization. They also link debates over urban citizenship closely to participatory urban planning, which becomes a key field and space through which citizenship is to be achieved – both as a process of political inclusion and as a result in terms of substantiating urban rights (Mitlin and Patel, 2014; Satterthwaite, 2001; Patel et al., 2001; Article II).

In Article II of the thesis, together with my co-author, Marianne Millstein, I make visible how global ideas of rights and urban citizenship are constrained by local conditions that challenge what, for example, can be achieved by the SDI model in a Malawian context (Robins, 2010). We identify how factors such as limited national and local resources, disconnections from national and urban policies of redistribution, and a local politics shaped by the dynamics of both clientelism and democratic reforms create a glass ceiling for what local groups are able to achieve. On this basis, we ask whether participatory discourses, when framed in terms of realizing rights-based claims through participatory planning, simply promise too much, and we advocate for a more locally grounded understanding of the potential of participatory planning in substantiating urban citizenship claims in Malawi that is adapted to the country's particular social, economic and political context.

This chapter describes the methodology of the study and the methods used in the thesis work. As mentioned in the acknowledgements and prologue, the study employs a critical action research approach, where the aim is to produce relevant knowledge in a collaborative way that can feed into people's change strategies. As is reflected in the research questions and the quote below, the methodology in action research is both process and substance, and while the theoretical underpinnings are described here in this chapter, they need to be seen in connection with the discussion of the research process in Chapter 6.

> The core of action research is the constant confrontation of reflection and action, theory and method, theory and practice aimed at producing understanding and effective action…. The theory and concepts determine the research approach. The approach in turn, yields the data and the experiences that between them generate or modify the theory and concepts (Dick and Greenwood, 2015: 194-195).

5.1   Critical action research

While Article IV discusses critical action research as an approach in detail, what I want to address here are the ways in which I arrived at my version of critical action research via a discussion of the various potentials of action research.

In its broadest sense, action research involves 'collaborative research, education, and action oriented towards social change' (Kindon et al., 2007: i). Action research approaches question the notion of the 'expert researcher' and argue that it is only by opening up the process of knowledge construction to allow for alternative voices to be heard that hegemonies can be challenged (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Researchers are

therefore urged not just to step outside their 'ivory towers' to engage with issues of oppression and injustice, but also to democratize the production of knowledge by letting more people, especially the people affected by the topic, in on the research process (Kindon et al., 2007). As signalled by its name, action research also transgresses the boundaries between theory and practice. Knowledge is produced and made use of in the interplay between action and research. Action research therefore has a closeness both to the people affected by the research and to processes of practice.

The practice of action research is very diverse and encompasses everything from organizational and business development to community group empowerment and work with social movements. The approach has been challenged over its normativity, and has in addition been subject to much criticism largely organized around three themes: One concerns the relationship between theory and practice, where action research is viewed as being too caught up with practical results at the expense of academic theoretical contributions (Greenwood, 2002; Levin, 2012).[13] Another concerns the alleged failure of action research to engage with systemic issues at scale (Greenwood, 2002; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). And the third is the general critique against participatory approaches in relation to questions of representation, power relations, depoliticization and modes of participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Cornwall, 2002).

In comparison with, for example, activist research, action research is typically guided by a pragmatic, problem-solving approach, and is not necessarily underpinned by radical politics. Yet, in most cases, people's everyday lives cannot be improved without systemic, discursive and structural change (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Action research has in this context been heavily criticized for pacifying local communities with local, apolitical and oftentimes technical interventions (Chatterton et al., 2007; Ferguson, 1994; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Williams, 2004; Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Jordan and Kapoor, 2016). Action research does, for example, often play out at the local level with relatively small groups of participants. Projects are also traditionally framed in cycles of action, reflection and learning over relatively short periods of time. Most action

---

[13] Much the same way as action research criticizes other types of research for being too caught up in academic theoretical contributions at the expense of action and practical results.

research approaches are therefore ill equipped to work with structural change at scale or with longer-term perspectives where a full turn in the project cycle may not be achievable. The result is that many action research projects tend to deal with symptoms rather than with the processes that produce and maintain inequalities in the first place (Greenwood, 2002).

One strand of action research that attempts to address the above-mentioned critique is critical action research. Critical action research draws on a wide array of theoretical traditions within the social sciences, including critical scholarship in the form of neo-Marxism, feminist theory, Freirian pedagogy, postcolonial critiques, postmodernism and political ecology (Jordan and Kapoor, 2016; Nielsen and Nielsen, 2005). Critical action research acts as a validation and extension of action research processes by combining critical scholarship with the action research paradigm (Davis, 2008: 2; Depoy et al., 1999; Johansson and Lindhult, 2008; Kemmis, 2006; Nielsen and Nielsen, 2010). Spearheaded by scholars such as Freire (1970), Fals Borda (1979), Hall (1981), and Carr and Kemmis (1986), critical action research argues that action research should unveil suppressing power structures, raise consciousness through reflection and help people find ways to resist structural inequalities (Davis, 2008: 2; Depoy et al., 1999; Johansson and Lindhult, 2008; Kemmis, 2006). Critical action research has thus been praised for its attempts to bring action research to scale, but more pragmatic strands within action research accuse critical action research of being too removed from people's everyday understandings. As one of the authors of the article 'Emancipation or Workability? Critical Versus Pragmatic Scientific Orientations in Action Research' puts it:

> You critics seem to start with the assumption that people are fooled by 'the system', by dominant interests, or are generally snared by unrecognized restrictions that they think are inevitable. And therefore there is a need for emancipatory AR [action research], and action researchers, to contribute to their liberation. We pragmatists start, instead, from the actual situation that people find themselves in and the resources they have. The focus is on mobilizing and developing practical, useful knowledge and local theories of practitioners or people concerned so that they are better able to solve their

problems and transcend the situation by themselves (Johansson and Lindhult, 2008: 106–107).

As will be shown, and as described in Article IV, the action research project that makes up this thesis developed an integrated approach to action research that connected with the transformative potential of critical scholarship while at the same time staying rooted in the everyday experiences of the participants. It thus builds on a tradition of critical action research with roots in both educational studies, communicative planning, and literature engaged with social imagination and 'utopian' action research (Kemmis et al., 2014; Nielsen and Nielsen, 2010, 2006).

5.2   Methods

The critical action research approach that forms the basis of the thesis was a combination of traditional fieldwork, continuous dialogue between partners and participants, the development of a case study series geared towards decision makers, and the organization of events such as meetings, a larger workshop and an interactive radio debate between February 2013 and May 2015. The work consisted of participatory observation over 9 months, 20 group discussions, and 120 interviews with community members and other urban actors in Malawi,[14] along with the events mentioned above. I also reviewed a number of project documents, reports and urban policies.

Much of the analysis focuses on how community groups interact with the Federation, CCODE, their local and national governments, and service providers. Observation has therefore typically taken place in these interactions. This means that I participated in transect walks, mobilization meetings, mapping exercises, community plan development meetings, participatory budgeting and project implementation. In these activities, I participated, observed, took notes and asked questions. I also often

---

[14] Urban poor networks, NGOs, national and local government representatives, service providers, donors and other development partners. For more details, see lists of interviewees in Appendix I.

organized interviews after the meetings, in which I would refer to some of the processes that were taking place.

I was clearly an outsider to the Malawian context in terms of culture, experience and appearance. Some of these differences can be mediated over time. As researchers engage with partners and participants, they get more involved with them and their realities (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). The researcher position thus tends to move back and forth on the continuum of insider and outsider status. One important barrier, however, is that of language. Together with Mbembe (2001: 7–9), Englund (2006) bemoans the linguistic inadequacy in studies of African countries and argues that the monolingual reliance on English limits the scope of researchers' understanding. The most commonly used language in Malawi, for example, is Chichewa. While I tried to learn some Chichewa basics through weekly lessons while I was in Lilongwe, I never managed to get beyond the typical introductory phrases and pleasantries. I was therefore fully dependent on my research assistants when conducting interviews in informal settlements where the majority spoke Chichewa.[15] While I had some experience with using translators in interviews and group discussions from previous research, the meanings of specific words, nuanced ways of expressing things and the more relational dynamics developed through direct engagement was restricted, if not lost. At the same time, participatory action research also functions as a dialogue. The process therefore gives some opportunities to discuss outsider and insider perspectives, make visible different interpretations, and clear up misunderstandings (Article III). The research partnership, which was made up of Malawian actors, also helped in grounding and nuancing the research findings.

As a result of the participatory and action-oriented nature of the project, most of the methods used became co-productive. Interviews, for example, were quite open and gave the participants the opportunity to focus on what they regarded as relevant and important (Dunn, 2005). Furthermore, I always ended interviews by asking the interviewees what they thought would be a relevant research focus for the project (see interview guides in Appendices II and III). Initial findings from the interviews were also discussed and analysed in group discussions with informal settlement dwellers. Here I would present

---

[15] With the exception of Salisburyline in Mzuzu in northern Malawi, where the majority spoke Tumbuka.

snippets from the interviews with community members and other actors in the form of statements – for example, 'we cannot participate in projects without getting allowances' (from an interview with a community member) or 'people living in informal settlements should pay city rates' (from an interview with a local government representative). In some of these discussions, I also presented initial findings and conclusions that were then discussed by the participants. This facilitated reflection and provided both corrections to the understandings made by me as the researcher and a rich material in itself. I also had semi-regular meetings with Federation representatives and CCODE staff to discuss initial findings, conclusions and what to do next in the project.

The case studies in the case study series also provided a platform for discussion. Each draft was taken back to the community groups, either by myself or by a CCODE staff member, to be discussed. In this process, details were corrected, and the studies often gave rise to new discussions in the groups. CCODE staff also had the opportunity to comment on the drafts of the case studies, as they were shared widely in the organization. The drafts were also sent to others who had been interviewed in connection with the studies, such as local and national government representatives, service providers or urban experts from the universities (for more on the research process, see Chapter 6).

The interviews and group discussions that were conducted both in the exploratory phase and in connection with the case studies provided a rich material. So did all the information coming out of the meetings, the workshop and the radio debate. The interviews and observation notes were transcribed, and I used the qualitative analysis software NVIVO to code and categorize them. I ended up doing three different types of coding with a hierarchy of nodes throughout the project. I started out with a thematic coding that mapped different topics that interviewees deemed important. Here I also mapped what was said about the different actors. Together with secondary sources and discussions, this formed the basis for the actor mapping in Section 3.2. This first set of coding comprised an important step in scoping out the potential for an action research project (see Article III). The second round of coding focused on various perspectives on participatory planning and community mobilization, as well as opportunities and barriers for transformative participation. The last round of coding was done at the very end to confirm that the observations discussed in the thesis were firmly linked to the information that had

been collected and produced. I also kept a research diary throughout the project, in which I noted down thoughts around the project, interviews and observations, theoretical concepts, and ideas and information I wanted to follow up on. While the entries into the diary were somewhat irregular, I kept the diary throughout the project, both in Malawi and some of the time in Norway.

The analysis in the PhD project can be described as iterative and multilayered (Silverman and Patterson, 2015). One layer was the process itself, as it facilitated learning based on an evolving inquiry. A second layer was when I organized the interviews into NVIVO and probed the material as parts and wholes. This, however, was happening in tandem with a more collective analysis taking place with the partners in Malawi. A third layer involved the research diary that reflected on the developments in the project as they were happening. The thesis is thus a product of a number of processes into which a variety of people have given their input.

It is challenging to represent a co-productive knowledge process in writing (Herr and Anderson, 2015). In this foundation, 'research participants' refers to people who were interviewed and took part in discussion groups; 'project partners' refers to community representatives, the Federation, CCODE, their Research Institute and the university researchers; while 'the researcher' or 'the researchers' refers to me, in some cases together with my supervisors. A more complex issue is the use of 'I', 'we', 'us' and 'they' in various stages of the research process and in different sections of the foundation. To address this I have tried, as far as possible, to specify in the sections the meaning of different pronouns in each specific context. The co-productive knowledge process is also discussed in Articles III and IV.

5.3   The case study approach

To use a case study approach means to explore a phenomenon in a specific context (Yin, 2003). A 'case' can be anything from a very concrete and bounded entity, such as an individual, to larger entities such as communities, relationships or country contexts, which are more difficult to demarcate. The PhD project explores four layers of cases.

One is focusing on Malawi's urban context, another the geographical selection of four cities, and the third is zooming in on specific planning processes gathered in a case study series. The fourth is the focus on community groups organized through the Federation and CCODE in particular.

Finding and defining cases is an important part of any project and expresses some of the theoretical and empirical constructions being made (Ragin, 1992). Articles III and IV describe this process of 'casing' in the PhD project. They show how the thesis ended up focusing on particular planning processes in informal settlements in four of the major cities in Malawi, and who the collaborating partners were in this process. They also show how the research moved from a focus on agency in general to one on political agency more specifically in order to understand how citizenship rights may be achieved through participatory planning in the Malawian context.

The case study approach makes analytical and theoretical claims illustrated through empiricism (Yin, 2013; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The aim of the case-based research is thus to produce new knowledge that develops theoretical and empirical understandings and may be relevant to a broader class of phenomena or contexts (Yin, 2003). Case-based research, especially when applied with qualitative methods, does not aim to generalize knowledge as statistical or universal. It is, however, still important to reflect upon how the casing and layers of cases might have led to different emphases (Byrne, 2009). One obvious example in this PhD project is the collaboration with CCODE and the Federation. The collaboration largely determined how the study focused on and engaged with organized informal settlement groups involved in planning and slum upgrading. Robins et al. (2008) show how normative studies typically engage with collective forms of agency rather than more everyday practices that have less symbolic and rhetorical visibility. This may create certain blind spots in terms of what types and forms of agency are recognized. At the same time, an action research approach requires engagement with some sort of collective, and, as discussed in Article III, it was important for me as an outsider to the Malawian context to make sure the research was anchored in a strong partnership that would continue independently of the researcher. To a large degree, the thesis thus focuses on the interface between

community groups and actors such as CCODE and the Federation and the ways in which they engage with service providers, local and national government, and donors.

The global network of Slum Dwellers International has rejected insurgent rights-based approaches that seek to confront the state. They argue that achieving rights from 'below' requires urban poor groups to work *with* the state using a type of 'negotiated development' as a strategy to substantiate citizenship rights (Mitlin and Patel, 2014). When partners and participants in the research insisted on being included into existing participatory frameworks rather than challenge them, this could thus be interpreted as being a form of 'civic governmentality' (Roy, 2009) that simply reflected the SDI approach.[16] However, the engagements with and observations of other urban poor networks and actors suggested that the emphasis on consensus-based deliberation (Englund, 2006; Cammack, 2007) and covert resistance is not unique to the community groups organized by the Malawian SDI affiliates. As is shown in Articles I and II, there are rather a number of contextual dynamics that influence how community groups operate in Malawi. The lack of conclusive insurgence found in Malawian planning spaces can therefore not be attributed to the use of SDI affiliates as a case alone.

One main unit of study was the community groups that organized themselves to participate in, and in some instances lead, participatory planning. It was at this level that the majority of the interviews and focus group discussions took place. In the interviews, people typically referred to themselves as 'the community'. Such terms tend to gloss over active contradictions that are typically present in neighbourhoods (Cornwall, 2002). Nevertheless, I have chosen to use the term 'community groups' or 'informal settlement groups' in the thesis to refer to a wide range of ways in which people organize themselves to address informal settlement development; through the Federation, through chiefs and block leaders, through the church, in women's groups, or through community representatives generally participating in collectively organized activities. This does not mean that I do not recognize the multiplicity of internal dynamics shaping mobilization

---

[16] At the same time, in practice, SDI affiliates tend to move between negotiation-based and contestation-based strategies, negotiating different levels of insurgence in their practices in diverse ways depending on national and local conditions (Butcher and Frediani, 2014; McFarlane, 2009; Robins, 2010, Millstein et al., 2003).

and organization in informal settlements, but the term 'community or informal settlement group' represents for me a midway between how people presented themselves and the fact that the study engaged with just one component of the people living in the settlements (Staeheli, 2016).

The focus on CCODE, the Federation and organized community groups did not mean that the wider landscape of actors and practices in Malawi was ignored. The exploratory phase of the research was dedicated to interviewing a wide range of residents in informal settlements, including people who were not engaged in any specific community activities. Interviews were also conducted with a variety of urban stakeholders. These included local and national government representatives, service providers, university researchers, NGO representatives, international organizations and donor representatives. They also included local government associations and other networks of informal settlement groups besides the Federation (see list of interviews and meetings in Appendix I). In addition to this, policy documents, project documents and previous studies were reviewed. The study culminated with the workshop and the radio debate, where many of these sources converged in discussion. In doing so, the project transcended the community scale to situate the debate among actors at different levels in Malawi.

Despite the wider pool of interviewees and sources described above, I acknowledge that this thesis first and foremost says something about urban theorizing and practice on the basis of examples and illustrations from the Malawian setting that are focused on community groups engaged with the Federation and CCODE in particular. However, I loan support from Flyvbjerg (2006: 10), who argues that even if knowledge cannot be formally generalized, this 'does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society'. Roy (2015b) and Chatterjee (2012) takes this further in their defence of postcolonial theory and show how studies immersed in particular contexts can open up and expand important theoretical debates, especially in fields that are shaped by certain dominant narratives and recirculated cases (Robinson, 2014). I therefore hope that the cases presented in this thesis can contribute to widening the range of urban experiences that urban theorization can build upon.

PART II – RESEARCH PROCESS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Chapter 6   The research process

As has been mentioned several times, the action research process forms an important part not just of the methodology but also of the analysis presented in this study. The research process itself helped to understand participation as concrete measures were taken to act on the findings as the project developed. This chapter aims to describe the research process: how the action research was incrementally built, the co-production of knowledge, and how the process functioned as an evolving analysis.

The research process can roughly be divided into four phases, which will each be discussed in this chapter: an exploratory phase; a more action research–oriented phase in which a case study series was developed; a discussion and dissemination phase; and a writing phase with additional elements of reflection.
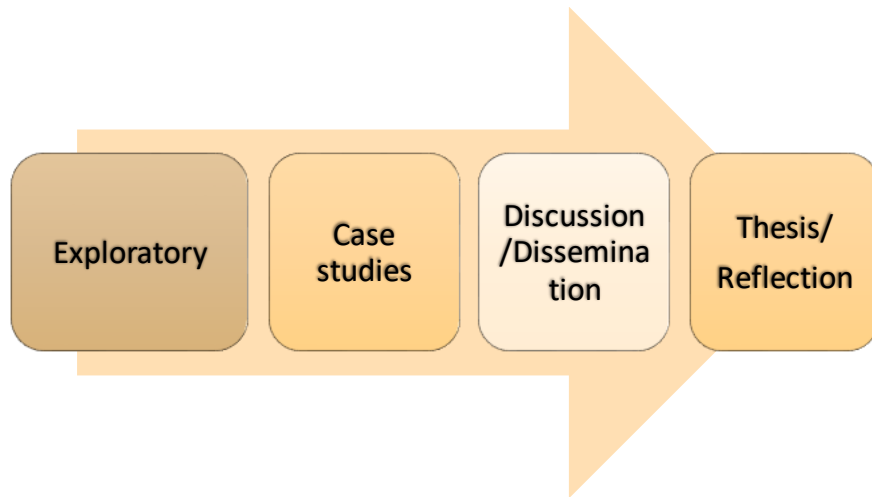
Figure 4. Approximate phases in the action research project. Source: Author

6.1   The exploratory phase: Building a partnership

The exploratory phase of the project consisted of preparations and a four-month visit (January 2013–May 2013) to explore spaces, actors and power relations in play in various

informal settlements in Malawi. The overall aim of this first phase was to establish what the research should emphasize, and to assess the potential for collaborative action research. Article III, 'The Beginning is never the beginning: How to co-produce a space for action research' describes this phase and analyses how spaces for action research are co-produced. In the article, I use a narrative autobiographical approach to explore the initial phase of the research process and analyse how it developed into a collaborative action research project. I discuss how the research topic emerged, the process of identifying entry points, and how negotiations among participants, partners, researchers and institutions at different scales influenced how the space for action research was formed. I argue that a reflection on the multiple beginnings of a project could be a way to make research more transparent and accountable as it situates knowledge and makes power relations visible.

I was a complete foreigner to the Malawian context when I started out. To carry out the planned research, I thus needed an access point. After I was accepted into the PhD programme at my university, I therefore contacted CCODE, which I knew was the largest NGO working on informal settlement issues in Malawi. CCODE works, as I have described, in alliance with the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor. The Federation is a grassroots network of poor people working to increase access to land, housing and other resources at the local and national levels. The Federation is also affiliated to Slum Dwellers International, a global network with which I had engaged at my former workplace.

During my first meeting with the director and programme coordinator at CCODE in February 2013, I presented the broad ideas I had for my research. We agreed that I could have a desk space at the organization's office, and that I could follow the work CCODE were doing. They would also introduce me to potential research assistants and people in the Federation. In return I was to help them with some of the work they were doing on developing funding applications, improving reporting mechanisms, and operationalizing monitoring and evaluation frameworks. However, I emphasized that it was important for me that it was explained to the informal settlement groups that while I was associated with CCODE, I was not an employee there:

I can help out with other things as it helps me understand more on how you work. It is important to me, however, that the communities know that I am not working directly for you but am somehow independent. At least in the sense that I keep what they tell me anonymous. That I am affiliated with you, but do not work directly for you. But I could help with writing stuff, for example (Quote from me in meeting with CCODE, 1 March 2013).

When I arrived, CCODE and the Federation had just been informed that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the main funders of a large slum-upgrading project in two settlements in Lilongwe, were pulling out of the project. The reason the donors gave for their disengagement was that there had been too many complications and delays with the project's implementation. The Foundation therefore gave the Lilongwe City Council administration three months (!) to spend the remaining funds (for further details, see case study 7). As project partners, CCODE and the Federation were then pushed to implement all of their smaller infrastructure projects at once. They therefore needed all hands on deck, and since I had experience from similar work in other countries I worked with them. During the first weeks of my stay in Malawi, I therefore worked day and night together with staff, community members and planning students to finish the work for the Gates project in time.

Field note 6: Participatory observation, Chinsapo, Lilongwe 3 March 2012

'This week I have been part of a group of architecture, polytechnic and other students who work with CCODE on slum upgrading. The objective has been to come up with designs for proposals under the Bill and Melinda Gates programme. They have been told they need to spend the money within three months, and mainly on road upgrading and water kiosks. Apparently they made two rounds of proposals before, but they did not correspond to the projects supposed to be covered under the programme.

'We first went to Chinsapo, an informal area a ten-minute drive away from the city centre. We were three CCODE staff, ten students and me. A similar group went to the other informal settlement in the project [Mtandire].

Photo 9 The team that went to Chinsapo. Source: Nevas Chirwa

'We first met in a school with the chief, Federation leaders, six community representatives, and someone from the Districts Commission. I was introduced and got to explain a little bit about the research I would be doing, that I was hosted by, but did not work for CCODE, and that I would be coming back to do interviews with them later if it was ok with them. I was welcomed.

'The group of students and CCODE staff had been to the settlement the day before and the community leaders had taken them around to show them places that needed upgrading. Now the community representatives were asked to prioritize three–four roads and places for intervention. I noticed that of the six representatives three were women, but they did not talk that much. After they had

selected some places, we split in two groups and walked around with the community leaders to measure the roads and where they needed to be improved, where drainage needed to be repaired or built, and to find locations for water kiosks.

Photo 10. Measuring roads and recording priorities for interventions in Chinsapo. Source: Author

'The settlement seemed very peri-urban, in the sense that the houses were relatively far apart and many had access to gardens. I have also been informed that not all have settled illegally either. I guess it is the lack of access to roads, proper drainage and secure water that is the issue.'

The process described above created a working relationship between me and CCODE, the community representatives and the Federation members. The long working nights were referred to on several occasions, and this helped build good rapport. The relationship developed through this initial phase proved very important, and the work increased my understanding of how communities, the Federation and CCODE worked together.

After this first hectic phase, it was time for me to start doing interviews in informal settlements in Lilongwe. Three settlements – Senti, Kauma and Chinsapo – were selected

in discussion with CCODE officials, Federation leaders and representatives from the Lilongwe Urban Poor People's Network (LUPPEN). The settlements were selected on the basis that they all had slum planning and upgrading work going on, but at different stages and with different outcomes. I hired one of the students from Mzuzu University I had worked with during the first weeks to be my interpreter and research assistant, and the Federation facilitated the initial contact with the leaderships in the settlements.

Following the custom in Malawi, my research assistant and I started out interviewing various leaders (traditional chiefs, community development committee chairs, block leaders, church leaders and leaders of women's groups) before we began moving around doing interviews in a more randomized pattern. In parallel, we also conducted interviews with a number of actors such as representatives from local and national government, NGOs, service providers, municipal associations, donors, researchers, development partners, etc. After this initial round of interviews, we organized a focus group discussion in each of the three settlements to discuss emerging issues and initial findings. Similar group discussions were also held with Federation leaders, and with the CCODE staff.

A number of issues came up from the interviews, observations and participatory analysis in this first phase, and I started to get an idea of how I could contribute as a researcher and how an action research project could be developed. I therefore made a list of potential topics that could be pursued in collaboration with CCODE and the Federation.

The topics I had identified from the interviews and observations were as follows:

1. How people who are renting participate in participatory slum upgrading and how they are affected by slum-upgrading initiatives.
2. The motivations people had for participating in projects and planning initiatives and how they preferred to participate. How can participation in slum upgrading best be organized?
3. A comparison between the cities of Lilongwe and Blantyre on how informal settlement communities work with their city council administrations to come up with recommendations for how they can better work together.
4. How donors and development partners can best support grassroots initiatives in the communities.

5. Who participates in slum-upgrading processes? Is participation 'governed' by the better off?

6. Refugees in informal settlements and their participation in planning initiatives and projects.

The CCODE and Federation representatives thought all the topics I had included were relevant but were both most eager to go deeper into how informal settlement communities work with their city council administrations. The Federation representatives also wanted to include the three next-largest cities after Lilongwe – Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba – in the study. Originally, I was not very thrilled about this suggestion, since I felt that it was difficult enough to cover the settlements in which I was already conducting interviews. However, they argued that by using different cities we could show how the city council administrations were working differently with their settlements, and again use that to push the city council administrations that were completely ignoring their informal-settlement populations into action. The scaling up of the project also resonated with some of the questions I had been mulling over from previous experiences on how to move action research beyond the immediate local community context (Article III). We therefore agreed that during my next field stay I would travel to Mzuzu, Zomba and Blantyre to link up with community groups there, and document and discuss initiatives that were going on.

6.2   Case study series: Moving into action

The next phase, which lasted from June 2013 until August 2015 (with February–June 2014 being spent in Malawi), consisted of interviews, meetings, participatory observation and write-ups from the slum areas of Senti, Kauma and Chinsapo in Lilongwe; Ndirande Makata and Nancholi Chimiire in Blantyre; Chikanda in Zomba; and Salisburyline in Mzuzu. These were all areas with ongoing community planning and slum-upgrading processes. Early findings were then discussed in focus groups and in meetings with community members, and drafts of the studies were shared with the community groups, who then commented and proposed changes.

The case studies (Appendix IV) were used both for learning and evaluation, and as a tool to inform and engage decision-makers. They were translated into Chichewa, which is the national language that is most widely spoken in Malawi besides English. The Mzuzu study was translated into Tumbuka, the most widely spoken language in the northern region. The case studies were also shared in various NGO and university networks and at events organized by CCODE, and were sent to everyone who had participated in the studies.

Figure 5. Case study series.

Together with the interviews, observations and group discussions from the exploratory phase, the case studies provided a basis for discussing the transformative potential of participatory planning practices in Malawi. One of the recurring themes in the case studies was frustrations around funding and implementation of slum-upgrading projects. Project and community leaders promised grand things in the initial mobilization, but projects rarely lived up to expectations. This did not mean that informal settlement groups were not able to do small projects on their own (see case studies 1-3), but they struggled with getting broader infrastructure projects related to such things as drainage systems, roads, water and electricity implemented. Good plans were developed, but the plans were not followed up by resource allocations. The people interviewed were also unable to secure

for themselves the same services that were offered in the wealthier areas of the city or to achieve complete security of tenure. When slum-upgrading projects were initiated, they were also typically too ambitious in terms of what could be achieved with the often limited resources set aside for the project (see, for example, case studies 2, 5 and 7), or, as in the example below, resources were not fully secured before implementation of the project commenced.

Field note 7: Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP)

The PSUP was launched by UN-Habitat in Malawi in 2010. The aim was to upgrade a number of informal settlements distributed across the four largest cities in Malawi. Four city profiles were developed, but it was later realized that the funds set aside for the first phase of the PSUP were insufficient to enable its implementation in all of the cities. The informal settlement of Salisburyline in Mzuzu, the third-largest city in Malawi, was therefore chosen as a pilot.

Photo 11 Salisburyline. Source: Author

As mentioned in Field Note 4, community representatives and planning students successfully worked together to prepare maps and plans for interventions in anticipation of the project. The partners were therefore surprised when the project was stopped after the initial planning stage. The main funder of the PSUP, the European Union (EU), refused to release more funds because the Malawian government had not paid its agreed co-contribution. The community representatives were therefore 'left hanging', having contributed time and resources to the planning process without any concrete projects coming out of it (Case Study 5):

> It is very disheartening to see things happening like this. Because what we want to see is the project implemented. We have a feeling still of eagerness, but it has been 3–4 years. People are now fighting because the money has not come through, and people think us leaders have eaten the money (Interview, community leader, Salisburyline, 23 April 2014).

The only way the community groups could get a substantial part of their plans implemented seemed to be if they got the projects included into the city budget. That budget was already stretched, however, and the community representatives had no counterpart at the city council administration to engage with. Furthermore, the city council administration was arguing that since people in informal settlements do not pay city rates (taxes), they are not eligible for services. For their part, informal settlement representatives argued that the rates were unaffordable, and also that they did not trust that they would get any services in exchange:

> Even if we pay money, nothing will happen. If you look at places where they made plots, the situation is still very bad. So I would argue that if we did it [paid], it would be like that (Group discussion, Salisburyline, Mzuzu, 23 April 2014).

> There was also never any mention of the possibility that richer areas might subsidize poorer areas:
>
>> City rates do not go from one area to another. So social justice and affirmative action is not discussed. Most revenue goes in any case to staff costs at the City Council (Interview, lecturer, Mzuzu University, 24 April 2014).

One of the findings from the interviews, group discussions and observations, as illustrated above, was that resource distribution, social justice and belonging in the city were rarely discussed in the participatory slum-upgrading processes, which tended to rather be technical, depoliticized and area based (Article I). One conclusion was therefore that the participatory planning processes studied were not transformative. The processes did in some instances increase the influence of marginalized groups in decision-making, but they did not confront the forces that were causing the social exclusion to begin with. Following the theoretical framing of transformative participation, this meant that agency by and of itself was partly realized through participatory planning, but political agency – defined as the capacity and ability to oppose unjust and inegalitarian practices – was not (Article I). A recurring observation was that groups typically continued to work within frameworks given by the city council administrations, planning institutions or NGOs regardless of whether they gave results or not. Protest and dissatisfaction were also seldom voiced in a direct way. In a participatory planning process in Blantyre, for example, community representatives expressed their dissatisfaction with the process in interviews, but they did not raise their voice in the actual budgeting process.

Field note 8: 'Silence' in participatory budgeting, Blantyre

Photo 12. Participatory budget meeting Blantyre. Source: Author

In 2013, the National Local Governance Finance Committee produced guidelines on participatory budgeting for local authorities, and Blantyre was the first city out to initiate a 'participatory budgeting exercise'.

The idea behind participatory budgeting is to enable citizens to present demands and priorities for their areas and through negotiations influence the city's budget allocation (Baiocchi, 2005). This did not occur in Blantyre, where the budgeting process was more a meeting called by the city council administration at which participants were informed of the council's plans for the coming year.

The plans presented in the meeting were developed by the administration without consultation with the affected communities. The meeting was announced in the newspapers only, and local representatives such as chiefs, heads of community development committees, church leaders and leaders of community-based organizations were not invited to represent their areas. Participants received no materials or information in advance, which made it difficult for them to engage in negotiations over budget allocations. Furthermore, even though several settlements had developed their own priorities and plans for their areas, there was no space for presenting or discussing these at the meeting. The meeting was a one-off event, and no process or measures for following up on the administration's proposals were outlined.

At the meeting, the different budget posts for community development and infrastructure projects were presented without reference to the distribution of resources in the city as a whole. The activities were described in a technical manner, and there was little room for discussion. When the questions of more funds for slum upgrading was raised during the meeting, the city administration emphasized how it was struggling with limited resources and suggested that the citizens themselves should take more responsibility for creating orderly development in their areas. There was no mention of how the city council administration delivers services to wealthier areas but not to the informal settlements.

Interviews with people who had attended the meeting and with non-participants revealed that they were not happy with the planning process and their lack of influence on the actual budget. Nevertheless, instead of making noise, the representatives seemed to conform to the format of being receivers of information in what was framed as a technical planning exercise.

My supervisor and I were puzzled by what people seemed to accept, both as exemplified in the budgeting process above and in other negotiations with local and national government (Case Studies 2 and 5), especially since the lack of 'noise' meant that the community groups were not able to reach their stated goals. In our article, we therefore argued that if participatory planning in Malawi were to be transformative, it would be necessary to strengthen the more agonistic dimension of participation and ensure that the various planning spaces connected and overlapped (Article I).

CCODE and Federation representatives agreed with this overall conclusion but pointed out that most of the participants in the study wished to be included into existing frameworks rather than to challenge them. This also became visible in workshop discussions at which the understandings expressed in the article were presented. It was thus important for us as researchers to understand that 'the political' – defined as challenging unequal power and resource distribution – was not necessarily the prime motivation that drove people to participate in planning processes (Kapoor, 2002). The participants also stressed that it was crucial to work with strategies that were familiar to community representatives and acceptable for them and community members to engage in. This divergence in understanding between the researchers, partners and participants and how it was dealt with is discussed further in Article IV and Chapter 8.

6.3   Dissemination/discussion

CCODE and its Research Institute (TRI) had at the time of the study started a series of public radio meetings to discuss various issues related to urbanization and urban development. As a next step in the project after the case studies, the collaboration therefore decided to hold a discussion workshop and a radio debate both to discuss the findings described above (the articles were still only in draft form) and to act on them by bringing some of the wider development issues that had to do with resource distribution and mechanisms of exclusion into the participatory urban planning and slum-upgrading discussions. Through a joint application, we managed to secure funds from the Department of Geography and the Faculty of Social Science and Technology Management at NTNU to organize the events. In addition, CCODE, The Research Institute, the Federation, my supervisor and I contributed with in-kind work.

The workshop took place on 9 May 2016 at Bridgeview Hotel in Lilongwe. Among questions raised at the workshop were how we might:

1. Establish self-organized and invited spaces of participatory planning?[17]
2. Make sure self-organized and invited spaces connect and overlap?
3. Mobilize resources for slum upgrading and planning?

The workshop was a success in the sense that most of the relevant stakeholders were represented among the 42 participants. However, the so-called urban experts – researchers and local and national government planning representatives – heavily dominated the discussions. One of the participants, for example, was a member of parliament and used the discussion to focus on issues from his constituency and the rampant corruption he observed in the government in relation to how land was allocated. A university researcher

---

[17] At this time, we had not yet engaged with the concept of 'invented' spaces, but we used a figure where we described the claimed (we called these 'self-mobilized' at this time) and invited spaces, and how they were both relatively depoliticized and not connected to the resources needed to implement slum-upgrading plans.

and former city planner, on the other hand, actively advocated that 'free riders' should not be allowed into the city, referring to the numbers of people in informal settlements who do not pay city rates. The informal settlement groups were not very well represented and struggled with participating actively in this debate. The women's groups who had participated in the preparatory meeting for the workshop prioritized helping a member who had experienced an emergency to top up her savings instead of coming to the meeting. There were therefore only seven community members participating at the workshop, and because of the researcher network meeting the next day they drowned in the active discussions driven by the large proportion of urban researchers and planners at the meeting. Luckily, these dynamics changed somewhat in the radio debate the next day (Article I).

Field note 9: Radio debate

Photo 13. The radio debate organized as part of the project. Source: Author

'And right here, I have with me the panelists who will take us through in this discussion. Leading the panel we have the following panelists: I have first and foremost Madam Juliana Lunguzi. She is a member of parliament for Dedza East. Welcome to the panel, podium here please. A big hand for Lunguzi! (Audience applauds.)

'Joining Madam Lunguzi is the commissioner for physical planning in the Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development. Welcome to the table Mr Tukula. Take the second seat. And then joining Madam Lunguzi and Mr Tukula is Mr Christopher Namakhwa. He is the councilor for Chinsapo 2 Ward in Lilongwe. Thank you. And then joining the team there is Mr Lackson Phiri. He is the national coordinator for the Federation of Rural and Urban Poor. Mr Phiri – a big hand for him please!

'Then number five we have Mr Wonderful Hunga. I hope you are indeed going to give us wonderful issues.... Wonderful Hunga is policy and advocacy manager for the Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE). A big hand for him please! (Audience applauds.)

For those that are following the discussion on radio since we are live on Zodiak Broadcasting Station, please you are most welcome to send your text messages using this number 0991420758. Do not call me. Rather, simply send text a message – it could be a comment, it could be a question – using this number: 0991420758.'

(Veteran journalist and moderator Owen Lupeska, Zodiak Broadcasting 10.05.2015).

The topic for the radio debate was 'Addressing Urban Growth in Creating a Resilient Malawi'.[18] In addition to the panel described above, participants from a number of informal settlements in Lilongwe, Zomba and Blantyre were physically present in the studio. Listeners could also, as mentioned above, send in comments and questions by SMS.

Over 40 representatives from the informal settlements showed up, including some of the women's groups that had been absent from the workshop the day before. A CCODE staff member told me later that they had heard about how the workshop had gone and had been provoked by some of the statements that had come from the planning and government side. They had therefore mobilized and were ready to make themselves and their views heard.

The discussions ranged from why policies were delayed to how resources were distributed at the national and city level, the costs of formalization, and the general lack of attention paid to informal settlements. The format of the debate made it difficult for both the politicians and the planners to resort to their regular argument of unpaid city rates or policies already underway as a justification for not engaging with informal settlements:

> *National Federation Leader:* Perhaps as we are scrutinizing policies we should also be strengthening relations with informal settlement residents so that we get started, for this would mitigate slum proliferation. It is indeed worrisome to see government officials knowledgeable of the town planning laws are queuing to buy land from the same area labelled informal. Others are stuck into politics this evening, but this just derails our efforts. Tonight let's think of why there is no piped water in many informal areas, why there is no primary school in Senti [informal area in Lilongwe]. Should we indeed make Senti residents illiterate under the guise of waiting for policy while your children are in good schools like Polytechnic?

---

[18] The Facebook page of the UrbanTalks/Public Square series is available at
https://www.facebook.com/pages/Urban-Talks/543646862395117.

Facilitator: Thank you very much. That is understood. Would you pass the microphone to the Commissioner? On some issues you have been referred you may need to respond. But before doing so, allow me to ask this question: Why are informal settlements not prioritized for planning when the majority of people in the city live in those areas? Would you start with this question? Then you may tackle the rest, Mr Commissioner!

The skills of the journalist who chaired the discussion, combined with the questions that had been prepared in advance by the partners helped to concentrate the discussion around politically contentious themes, and people from the informal settlements were able to enjoy more speaking time than they would normally get in participatory planning spaces. Comments and questions also ticked in via SMS and were read out loud by the journalist, being greeted by cheers or boos from the audience depending on the content.

The aim of the debate was not to reach agreement but rather to make visible some of the more contentious issues that have to be resolved if slum upgrading is to happen:

University planner: Yes, I also teach about town planning. I have a problem on the policies or laws and informality and that urban is a regulated space, as my colleague said. But when you consider those people building in Area 49, Baghdad or Dubai [areas in Lilongwe], and these mansions in our cities – many are sitting in informal areas. Why do these go scot free? These in my opinion are thieves not different from those of Mtandire [informal settlement in Lilongwe]. Instead you treat them with kid gloves and bring appropriate English terms like 'formalization' to safeguard them. As for our brothers in Mtandire, this language is not applicable. Why do we have selective application of the law?

Facilitator: What a question! Why is it that we have a selective approach? There is another hand over there. Let us listen to other views. I can see my mother over there. Please don't ignore her.

Community member: Mine is a plea to the government, as we realized that we have settled in a wrong place. Realizing this, we took an initiative to seek counsel from other authorities on how best we can be assisted. Sadly, we

have been referred from one office to the other with no solution. What we request is guidance on what to do, because these are our permanent settlements now and that is why we are trying to develop these places through self-help projects. Where cars couldn't pass previously now is history. In the past, toilets were placed in front of a house, but now that's history. These are our places. What you need to do is simply help us with other plans to better our areas. Thank you.

National Federation leader: Another thing is why should you prioritize servicing other areas where population is very small and neglect others where there many people reside. Is it true to have government officers working 15 years and more with planning, and I can challenge you that at no point will you see a city council lorry collecting refuse in Mtandire but in Area 10 [rich area in Lilongwe], which means informal dwellers are not captured in budgets.

The nature of the discussion became very different from what had been observed in the other participatory spaces, even though many of the actors were the same and the space was somewhat directed. What would often count as noise in other spaces was accepted as voice in this context. What we had failed to facilitate in the workshop had therefore to a certain degree materialized in the radio debate (for more information about the debate, see Article I).

6.4   Article writing

The three research phases discussed above were all highly interactive, with discussions among the partners and participants happening on a daily basis. In the periods between the fieldwork visits, there was also a lot of communication via email and Skype. The academic article-writing phase, however, was different, as it was mainly handled by the researchers.[19] While the partners were invited to comment on drafts, it was the researchers

---

[19] With the exception of the first article, where the draft conclusions were discussed at the workshop and radio debate.

alone who did the writing. The reason for this was that the partners did not see the academic article format as the most useful. For them, the case studies represented the main knowledge base. Participating in article writing would also be time consuming and complicated to administer when the researchers and the partners were staying in different countries. Furthermore, the academic articles were to form part of my PhD thesis. They therefore had to respond to a number of requirements outside of the Malawian context.

Participation and representation are two important principles in action research. The academic writing process, however, was not well suited to accommodating them. This in turn raises a number of ethical questions regarding partnership and voice.

6.5   Partnerships and voice in action research

My biggest worry with engaging in research in the global south, and in action research specifically, has been the prospects of becoming yet another researcher imposing research agendas on people that one does not represent (Spivak, 1988; Mohanty, 1984). I have therefore many times wondered whether I should avoid doing ethnographic research in unfamiliar contexts completely. At the same time, I have relied on scholars such as Richa Nagar (2002), who argues that we cannot let the reflexive focus on positionality and identity paralyze us. Researchers, she argues, cannot choose to remain silent on other people's marginalization just because there is a messy politics of power involved in the fieldwork encounter. One rather has to find ways of assisting and playing a role without aiding neocolonial practices (Brun, 2009).

Action research is participatory in nature and aims to tune in on the research interests and needs of the research participants. It is therefore less extractive than many other forms of research and for me represented the best approach for doing research in an unfamiliar context. For Kapoor (2009), the only way of ensuring that action research is truly participatory is for the researcher to become a 'willing hostage' in a process in which participants take control. However, I found such an approach problematic in our case because my initial understanding was that many of the project partners and participants were somehow 'trapped' in a specific participatory planning discourse. This did not mean that I thought we as researchers sat with the answers, nor that we were not equally

'trapped' in our own discursive thinking, but I believed that the action research process held the potential to disrupt existing thinking on participatory planning in Malawi by asking some critical questions about implementation, resource distribution and the limits of consensus-based planning (Friedman and Rogers, 2009; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). The role of the researcher in this more critical approach to action research is to act as a 'critical friend' taking into consideration participant knowledge while at the same time challenging taken-for-granted truths (Freire, 1970; Fals Borda, 1979; Hall, 1982; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis 2006). Critical action research thus leaves more power in the hands of the researcher than is advocated in more facilitative approaches to action research. My fears have therefore not been extinguished, as the core of my anxiety lies in what is so eloquently summed up by bell hooks below:

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can
> speak about yourself.
> No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain.
> I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way.
> Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own.
> Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority.
> I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my
> talk.
>
> (bell hooks, 1990: 208).

Bishop and Glynn (1999) identify five key elements for evaluating power relations in a research project. These are: initiation, benefits, representation, legitimacy and accountability. As described in this chapter, and in Article III, the initiation of this project was to a large extent driven by the researcher. It was based on interviews, group discussions, participatory analysis and meetings with the project partners, but the aggregation of information and the very first delimitations were done by the researcher. Despite this, the development of the project was a negotiation, and there are several examples of how participants and partners influenced both the scope and the direction of the research. One was the focus on slum upgrading and city council relations. Another was the expansion of the study to cover informal settlements in four cities. A third, and

perhaps the most significant one, was the broadened definition of transformative participation that drove much of the research and the action part of the project. Together, these examples show that the researchers did not sit with the defining power alone.

When it comes to benefits from the project, there were some concrete practical benefits for the participants (see Chapter 8). However, these were perhaps less than what would have been achieved with a more traditional practice-focused action research project with smaller groups of participants. The integrated approach, where one works at various scales with shorter- and longer-term change simultaneously, has its challenges, especially when it comes to representation and accountability. Since we worked with a large number of groups in several cities at different times rather than with a fixed smaller group, it became difficult for participants to develop ownership, to keep track of the research process and to keep us as researchers accountable to them. When the researchers are the only people who are in *all* the research spaces, they are the ones who have the overview, synthesize information between levels and actors, and – while these may be based on consultations – make decisions (Burns, 2014). This research-centrism is particularly visible in the academic articles of the thesis, where the participants and project partners have little direct voice and the research is mainly presented from the researcher perspective. While drafts were sent to the partners to comment upon, things did not work the same way as they had when we were interacting on a daily basis. As described in Articles III and IV, the research is therefore subject to some of the general critique made against participatory approaches in terms of voice and representation (Jordan and Kapoor, 2016; Choudry, 2014; Spivak, 1988).

Co-writing does not necessarily solve problems of representation and unequal power relations in research. Sometimes it can even help conceal them (Ahmed, 2000). This does not mean, however, that more measures could not have been taken. Involving more of the informal settlement participants as co-researchers, for example, could have been a way to strengthen the representation of the research participants in the final products. A more thorough use of the empirical material in terms of direct quotes is another. While quotes were not used extensively in the articles, I have tried to remedy this in the foundation. If an evaluation visit had been possible, this could also have presented an opportunity to collectively reflect on the research process, its outcomes and how participants were

represented and presented in the project. This was not possible because of the time and funding constraints of the PhD. However, in an attempt to include more partner reflections, I conducted three Skype conversations with the partners when I was writing up Article IV. This helped broaden the reflective exercise at that stage of the research, and snippets from the conversations were included into the article.

The lack of direct voicing in the final outputs of the project does bring into question the legitimacy of the research – the final element in Bishop and Glynn's (1999) framework for evaluation. At the same time, the participatory measures taken throughout the research process mediates this to some degree. Both participants and partners were active in terms of initiating the project, shaping it, providing and analysing material, and discussing conclusions. I have also tried, both in the articles and in the foundation, to be transparent about how the process worked and how different choices were made. This hopefully weighs up some for the lack of co-authorship and helps make the research – and the partnership developed – more legitimate:

> In a bigger way it, was not like it was your process. It was as if it was a community process. That made the research study more relevant to us local people. And even with the way the results were shared, it is easier for us to take action based on the fact that we have been involved and know exactly what is happening and how the findings were arrived to (Skype conversation, Federation leader, 12 May 2017).

The participatory spaces created through the research were instrumental for understanding the potential for transformative participation in planning in Malawi. It was the dialogue between research participants, partners and the researchers that enabled the study to move beyond the initial interpretations made by the researchers and into an understanding that took into account everyday practices and perspectives of participation. In that sense, the action research approach proved to be the right choice of methodology, since it is unlikely that a more traditional research approach would have yielded the same insights.

Chapter 7   Articles

I.   Refstie, H. and Brun, C. 2016. Voicing noise: Political agency and the trialectics of participation in urban Malawi. *Geoforum,* 74: 136-146.

II.   Refstie, H. and Millstein, M. (draft). Does participatory planning promise too much? Global discourses and the glass ceiling of participatory urban planning in Malawi.

III.   Refstie, H. (in review) The Beginning is never the beginning: How to co-produce a space for action research. Submitted to *Action Research.*

IV.   Refstie, H. (accepted). Action research in critical scholarship: Negotiating multiple imperatives. *ACME.*

Voicing noise: Political agency and the trialectics of participation in urban Malawi

Hilde Refstie *, Cathrine Brun

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Department of Geography, NO-7491 Trondheim, Norway

ABSTRACT

Participation is promoted as the main engine for transformation in urban planning and slum upgrading in Malawi, despite the fact that most projects never get beyond the planning stage. Serious participation fatigue has been identified in many areas, but little is done to change the dominant script. This article comes out of an action research project with groups of urban poor and their organizations in Malawi. It analyses existing spaces in which participatory planning and slum upgrading take place, and reflects on what combinations of participatory spaces that might serve to enable change. The authors define political agency and locate potential transformation in agonistic spaces that open up for rupture and for people's interest to be accepted as voice rather than noise. At the same time, participants in urban Malawi often wish to be included *into* existing frameworks rather than challenging them. The article therefore explores a third way between a programme of insurgent radical action and the more pragmatic consensus-based participation model practised in Malawi today. Here, the potential for transformation is to be found not within one group or one type of space, but in the ways in which different spaces of participation connect, overlap and partly constitute each other. To better understand the transformative potential of participation in the context of urban planning in Malawi, we thus propose a 'trialectics' of participatory spaces where 'claimed', 'invited' and 'invented' dimensions of participation connect, overlap, and open up for ways in which actors can meet.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction: repoliticizing participatory planning processes

Rather than fulfilling its transformative potential, the participatory turn has over the last two decades largely reduced political planning spaces to a consensual mode of governance that allows for a myriad of opinions *as long as these do not effectively question the current order* (Korf, 2010; Marchart, 2007; Mouffe, 2000; Swyngedouw, 2014). Still, participation in its various forms continues to be the dominant script in development practice and policy, and is understood to hold the potential to connect political agency with collective struggle (Cornwall, 2008; Kesby, 2005; Stokke and Törnquist, 2013).

In this article, we draw on a collaborative action research project with informal settlement groups in Malawi to examine the transformative potential of participatory urban planning. In doing this, we add to existing scholarship on urbanization with a somewhat different story than the narratives of insurgent citizenship in urban planning in South Africa and parts of Latin-America (Holston, 2009; Miraftab, 2005; Pieterse, 2008).

The project's main aim has been to understand why so few slum upgrading initiatives in Malawi are deemed successful.[1] This article contributes towards this aim by analysing some examples that were understood in the project as representative of the prevailing participatory approaches in Malawi. In addition we discuss how realizations from the project helped identify and initiate what was considered a missing link in the existing processes – a more agonistic and confrontational participatory space.

When looking at how political agency was actualized in particular spaces, we discovered that participatory processes in Malawi tend to avoid engaging with 'noisy' issues such as exclusion and resource redistribution. At the same time we found that these were issues that needed to be addressed if the slum upgrading plans developed were to be implemented. As researchers, our first inclination was therefore to argue for a repoliticization of the participa-

---

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: Hilde.refstie@svt.ntnu.no (H. Refstie), Cathrine.brun@svt.ntnu.no (C. Brun).

[1] In this article, slum upgrading refers to an integrated approach, small or large, that aims to improve conditions in a given area. These conditions relate to the legal (e.g. land tenure), the physical (e.g. infrastructure, housing), the social (e.g. crime or education) or the economic.

tory planning discourse through radical resistance (Harvey, 1973, 2012; Holston, 1995) However, participants expressed more interest in being included into existing frameworks and having a voice *within* the system rather than in engaging in insurgency. In the project, we therefore explored an alternative that sought to bridge Harvey's (1973) call for a programme of radical action and the more consensus-based participation model currently practised in Malawi (Pieterse, 2008). In the collaborative project we discuss here, participation was regarded as transformative when its outcome was that participants were included, gained recognition and got their noise accepted as voice (Purcell, 2014). 'Noise' refers to when people raise their voices to challenge existing discourses and the status quo. It is a form of behaviour interpreted as 'noise' by those in power since it tends to be loud, unpleasant, and causing disturbance (Marchart, 2007; Oxford Dictionaries, 2016; Swyngedouw, 2014).

Participation can take place in different spaces and settings. In the case of slum upgrading in Malawi, we show that the potential for transformation is not limited to one particular type of space, but is expressed in the ways in which different spaces of participation connect, overlap and partly constitute each other. To better understand the transformative potential of participation in the context of urban planning in Malawi, we thus propose to engage with a 'trialectics' of participatory spaces (Lefebvre, 1974; Soja, 1996) which helps to explain the relationships between institutionalized – consensus-based – forms of spaces for participation and – and other, more agonistic spaces of participation.

In order to analyse participatory spaces in Malawi, we bring together literature on participatory spaces and recent debates in political and cultural geography. Through our readings of Engin Isin (2008) and Jacques Rancière (2001, 2009, 2011) and the discussions that have emerged from an engagement with Rancière's work within geography (Dikeç, 2005, 2007, 2012; Davidson and Iveson, 2014a,b; Kallio, 2012; Pieterse, 2008; Purcell, 2013, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2014), we do argue for a repoliticization of participatory planning, but in a way that is sensitive to the Malawian context, to enable possibilities for social transformation.

We begin in the next section by presenting the methodological approach for the research before we discuss the existing discourses and spaces of participation in Malawi, and conceptualize the trialectics of participation that we believe is necessary for transformation to take place. This introduces a framework that we apply in the second half of the article to analyse existing and alternative spaces of participation. In conclusion, we show how elements of agonism need to be brought into the participatory planning discourse in order to make visible the links between political transformation and the more concrete material benefits participants seek in community planning and slum upgrading processes.

2. Collaborative research: action research and the academic-practitioner nexus

Methodologically and empirically, the article is based on a three-year-long collaborative action research project with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) facilitated through the Malawi Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor[2] (the Federation), the Center for Community Organization and

Development (CCODE), and The Research Institute (TRI). The role of this article within the wider project is to show how different spaces of participation were documented, what was recognized as a missing link, and how a third space for participation was identified and initiated through the project.

In its broadest sense action research can be defined as collaborative research oriented towards action and social change (Kindon et al., 2007; Reason and Bradbury, 2001). In our project this has meant using participatory methods and discourse analysis to engage with ongoing debates on slum-upgrading in Malawi. The research, that took place between February 2013 and May 2015 consisted of participatory observation over 9 months, 20 group discussions and 120 interviews with community members and other involved actors, as well as workshops, meetings and public radio debates. In the exploratory first phase of the project, from February to June 2013, the lead-researcher interviewed community members and leaders in Senti, Chinsapo, and Kauma, three slum areas in Lilongwe. The first contact with community leaders (chiefs, and Federation, Community Development Committee (CDC), church, and Community-Based Organization (CBO) leaders) was facilitated through the Federation, but interviews with community members were organized through randomized house and business visits and through snowballing. The lead-researcher also spent time at CCODE and with the Federation undertaking participatory observation in various planning and slum upgrading processes in the three settlements. Interviews with officials from the City Council, the national planning department, service providers and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were also conducted. The interviews had an open-ended design and aimed to learn about community mobilization and how people thought about and related to upgrading efforts in their areas.

A recurring theme in the interviews was that despite the many on-going community-mobilizing and planning-projects, few initiatives materialized into actual slum upgrading. Most processes were undocumented, and there were few existing case studies apart from a handful that had been developed to respond to donor-reporting requirements. In discussions with CCODE and the Federation it was therefore decided that the aim of phase two of the research, lasting from June 2013 until August 2015, would be to develop a project that documented and analysed a variety of community slum upgrading processes in the four largest cities of Malawi in order to explore why so few community plans were implemented (see Map 1).

Phase two thus consisted of interviews, meetings, and participatory observation facilitated by the lead-researcher in the slum areas of Senti, Kauma, and Chinsapo in Lilongwe, Ndirande Makata and Nancholi Chimiire in Blantyre, Chikanda in Zomba, and Salisburyline in Mzuzu. These were all areas that had on-going community planning and slum upgrading processes. Officials from the City Council administration, service providers, CDCs, NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) were also interviewed. The interviews and observation notes were coded in themes and analysed using the qualitative analysis software NVivo. Early findings were then discussed in focus groups, and in meetings with community members. Federation leaders and CCODE staff acted in some instances as co-researchers by going back to the communities to follow up on questions that emerged while developing the case studies. At this stage, the lead researcher also brought into the analysis the academic literature on participation and participatory spaces (Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2006) which resonated well with the discussions in the project and helped to analyse the nature of existing participatory spaces.

The results from the research were presented in a case-study series that could be used as a resource for community members

---

[2] The Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor is a network organized through saving groups and activities, mapping of settlements and exchange visits between people in slum areas. It focuses on community mobilization, social awareness and critical engagement with resource-wielding authorities, and is part of the larger umbrella network Slum Dwellers International (see www.sdinet.org). It constitutes a leading network on slum planning and upgrading in Malawi and CCODE is their support NGO.

Map 1. Based on UN Map Malawi No. 3858 Rev. 3 January 2004.

and decision makers.[3] The studies were printed in English and in Chichewa, the largest local language in Malawi (the Mzuzu study was also translated into Tumbuka) and distributed orally and in writing in the settlements, to decision makers, and at a stakeholder workshop organized as part of the project.

---

[3] Case study series: http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources/case-studies.

3. Urban planning and slum upgrading in Malawi

Malawi is only 16% urbanized, but has some of the fastest-growing cities in sub-Saharan Africa (UNDESA, 2014; Manda, 2013). In the cities, 68.9% of the urban population is estimated to live in areas characterized as slums or informal settlements (UN Habitat, 2012). Not all slum-like settlements in Malawi are infor-

mal in terms of their existence, but in this paper we use the wide sense of the concept meaning settlements with limited formal service delivery, land and housing regulation and registration, and planned infrastructure. The term thus covers villages incorporated into city boundaries, squatter areas, and overcrowded traditional housing areas (THAs) (Manda, 2007). Most of the informal settlements in Malawi grow without much planning and regulation, but in recent years there has been an increase in initiatives where both residents and local, national and nongovernmental organizations engage with community planning and slum upgrading (Interviews with NGO, city, and ministry representatives).

'Slum upgrading' may have many meanings, and is often used to describe improved access to water, sanitation, infrastructure, schooling, and health services in addition to land regularization, building of community houses and development of livelihood activities (Ferguson and Navarrete, 2003). Before the 1970s, housing challenges were commonly understood to be solved with large governmental housing schemes targeting low-income groups. However, in Malawi and elsewhere, delivery was slow as governments were not ready to take on the major costs of providing housing for the poorer segment of the population. In the 1970s, 'sites and services schemes' therefore gained popularity, actualized in the case of Malawi as the Traditional Housing Areas (THAs). The idea was to provide a framework with relaxed regulations for recent migrants to build their own houses according to their financial standing while waiting for services to come into place. However, services were seldom provided and the areas often developed into slums (Manda, 2007), followed by attempts of slum clearance and eviction of squatters (Mwathunga, 2014). However, evictions have become a less attractive option for policymakers as community and civil society groups in urban areas have become more organized. In addition, politicians often oppose such measures to rally support for their candidacies during elections. The focus has therefore shifted from moving people to upgrading in-situ, which means slum upgrading where people live, while people live there. Another notable development in Malawi is the discursive shift from top-down expert based planning and slum upgrading to more participatory community-based approaches. As one city official put it:

> We would want to make sure most interventions are owned by the people. It is good for sustainability measures. To be inclusive in nature is a sustainability guarantee, and it also helps for replication.

> [city official, Lilongwe, 22 March 2013]

One of the main challenges in urban Malawi has been how to finance slum upgrading. Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries, ranking 173rd out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2015). At one point land tenure regularization was seen as the solution, at least for housing. If people got land titles it was assumed that they would be able to access loans and at the same time have a stronger incentive to invest in and upgrade their homes (De Soto, 1989, 2000). A land title alone, however, does not necessarily secure someone a loan in Malawi. Most houses and properties in the informal settlements are seen as too small and not valuable enough to be used as collateral with the banks (Mwathunga, 2014). Many people therefore turned to microfinance institutions for housing and home improvement loans. The problem though, was that people were commonly not able to pay them back. Many simply did not have enough money to keep up the payments when the Malawian kwacha was devalued, but the costs of construction materials rose. Others did not prioritize the repayment of loans (Manda, 2007). As a consequence, most housing organizations have stopped offering housing loans to the urban poor.

Slum upgrading generally requires large-scale resources and political will. The majority of the population in Malawi is still overwhelmingly rural and slum upgrading activities are not prioritized by the Government or donors. Many development actors consider slum upgrading as too complex an activity and Local Governments tend to avoid working with their informal settlements for fear of legitimizing squatting. Most recent projects in Malawi are therefore small-scale and community-based (Refstie, 2014a,b,c,d,e).

As mentioned above, a main concern for the action research project, was the realization that slum-upgrading projects generally do not achieve their aims. In some cases the middle classes end up settling in the upgraded areas, pushing the existing inhabitants, particularly renters, further out on the margins (Manda, 2007; Mwathunga, 2014). In other cases, plans lack financing and are simply just not implemented, creating serious participation and planning fatigue in many areas (Refstie, 2014a,b,c,d,e, 2015; Refstie and Hunga, 2015). Nevertheless, in urban Malawi, participatory planning continues to be advocated uncritically and in unison by civil society groups, local leaders, aid organizations and donors as *the* strategy for communities to address problems in their settlements.

4. Discourses of participation in Malawi

The ways in which the participatory planning discourse plays out in urban Malawi must be understood in light of the country's history and the intricate web of actors that operate at various levels. Malawi has a rich tradition of community participation, and even under colonial rule (1891–1963) and the subsequent repressive regime of Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1963–1994), some modes of participation were in place. However, during this period, participation was limited to the implementation of projects while the government prevented civil society actors from engaging in rights-based work (Mwalubunju, 2007). In Banda's Malawi, all forms of criticism, including any complaint against the leader or the party, were considered subversive and brutally dealt with (Chirambo, 2009).

The largest wave of participation came leading up to and following the re-establishment of the multiparty system in 1993.[4] The churches and unions had mobilized towards this transition, and Malawi experienced a massive influx of NGOs that had previously been barred from operating in the country. National and local civil society institutions and organizations also mushroomed in this transition period, and community participation has since been an important part of the development discourse advocated by civil society (Chinsinga, 2003).

Grassroots participation in development projects and formulation of policies was formally enshrined in the 1998 Local Government Act (LGA), which established town and city assemblies as the unit of local government. However, local council elections were not organized until the Malawi Decentralization Policy came into place in 2000. A range of functions related to planning and development were delegated to the local councils, but not accompanied with resources to match the new responsibilities. At the same time, there were strong tensions at the local level between Councillors, District Commissioners, Members of Parliaments (MPs) and Chiefs. Furthermore, President Bingu wa Mutharika (2004–2012) feared, as President Muluzi (1994–2004) before him, that the local government elections would win support for the opposition (Cammack, 2012a). The assemblies were therefore dissolved in 2005 and local government elections were postponed for a decade until it was successfully organized on the initiative of President Joyce Banda

---

[4] Banda was pushed to hold a national referendum in 1993 regarding the continuation of his single-party rule. He lost the multiparty general elections in 1994.

(2012–2014) in 2015. In the meantime, local governments were run by technocrats who – without councils – were directly answerable to the central authority (Chasukwa and Chinsinga, 2013).

During this period, the elected representatives for people in informal settlements in Malawi were the Members of Parliament. MPs are involved in local development through their Constituency Development Funds (CDF), a central Government transfer to Local Governments, but these are typically used to buy votes and cement political backing (Cammack, 2012b). In Malawi, leaders at all levels and spheres are traditionally required to share their wealth. The intermingling of private and public funds is therefore not necessarily viewed as misconduct, and many constituents prefer to negotiate their relationships with leaders instead of trying to challenge the neo-patrimonial system upon which the relations are built (Cammack, 2007):

'In other words, staying locked-into the patronage system benefits those at the bottom as well as the top and helps explain why civil society in many countries remain "weak" and silent, not easily roused to civic action, or demanding of government, even after years of "strengthening"'.

[Cammack, 2007: 601]

MPs are in theory held accountable through elections. The fact that only one third are re-elected testifies to this. However, instead of fostering a culture of accountability it has led to short-term thinking where politicians focus on their own gains while they are in position rather than on engaging with their constituencies (Cammack, 2011). Consequently, it is not surprising that many people in informal settlements prefer to organize their development efforts in what they term a non-political manner. 'Non-political' typically refers to liaising with the chiefs who are expected to operate somewhat outside of quarrelsome election games and party politics. Chiefs are numerous and play an important role in community development, even though their legal status is ambiguous, and they are, according to authorities, not supposed to operate in urban areas. Chiefs preside over funerals, oversee land transactions, hold traditional courts, and generally act as gatekeepers to the communities. Due to their history, chiefs in Malawi continue to hold more power than in many other African countries (Cammack et al., 2009). As the colonialists before him, President Hastings Banda exploited the functions of the chiefs to stay in control. Chiefs headed the local development committees and were indispensable to the state as the final link from the President to the people. After 1994, in the multiparty era, the chieftaincies were resurgent and gained further power. While their formal mandates had been reduced (they were for example no longer to be chairs of development committees), their influence in community matters increased in the absence of alternative local government structures (Eggen, 2011). Additionally, the emphasis on ownership, community participation, and demand-driven service provision in development has made civil servants and NGO workers dependent on the approval and assistance of chiefs (Eggen, 2011; Chinsinga, 2007). Legitimacy for political candidates is also gained through chiefs, as they control which candidates are allowed to hold rallies in their areas. Still, chiefs are generally expected to stay independent as a unifying force, and in contrast to 'disruptive party politics' chiefly rule is perceived to be founded on local knowledge, pragmatism, consensus-seeking, conflict avoidance, and a judiciary that seeks reconciliation rather than punishment (Eggen, 2011).

Large-scale civic education programmes implemented in the multi-party era further reinforced this culture of consensus. 'Community sensitization' was promoted as a key strategy for addressing development challenges, and the more conflictual links between civil and economic rights were downplayed by the

authorities (Englund, 2006). The history described here may thus help to explain why Malawians – unlike the tales of protest and resistance in other cases of urban development – up until 2011, put up with poverty, hazards, and poor public service delivery in informal settlements in a relatively peaceful manner (Englund, 2002; Booth et al., 2006). Cammack et al. (2009: 30) argue that people in Malawi tend to work for themselves and their families rather than engaging in movements that span social divisions, creating a "notoriously passive citizenry that rarely drives its own reforms" (p. 30). However, people have recently taken to the streets to hold their Government to account. In July 2011, civic activists organized nationwide demonstrations in response to economic hardships and deepening governance problems, such as postponed local elections, stricter censorship measures, and heavy corruption (Cammack, 2012a). The demonstrations were violently shut down, and the negotiations came to a standstill until President Joyce Banda came to power after President Bingu-wa Mutharika suffered a sudden heart attack in 2012. A more common form of resistance in Malawi, though, is the covert ways in which vendors refuse to pay market fees in protest over lack of public services, people settle in informal settlements and organize themselves directly with service providers (Refstie, 2014a), or, as we show later, community groups organize services for themselves. When it comes to participatory urban planning processes, however, the script largely resembles the Habermasian notion of 'communicative action', defined as communication with the objective of reaching a common understanding (Habermas, 1984). As we will show this is problematic in several ways. Upgrading of informal settlements is a complex matter, with high human and economic costs, and it often involves demolishing houses and moving people. Deliberations in such contexts are usually directly linked to resource distribution, which is difficult to address within a consensus framework at the local level (Kapoor, 2002; Hanson, 2012). Furthermore, the communicative approach has a tendency to ignore power relations and therefore runs the risk of depoliticizing planning processes, despite those processes being dependent on addressing highly political issues (Mouffe, 1999). The result in Malawi, as we explain, is the inability to implement plans.

5. Political agency in spaces of participation for planning and slum upgrading in Malawi

In the development literature, it is often argued that we need to shift from participation to citizen participation in order to achieve transformation that goes beyond increasing the influence of marginalized groups in local decision-making and confronts the forces that cause social exclusion (Cornwall, 2002, 2008; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Millstein, 2007; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Our understanding of transformation is inspired by Isin (2008) and Rancière (1992, 2001, 2009, 2011) and we introduce a distinction between a general notion of agency, based in routinized practices, and what we define as 'political agency' in the context of urban planning in Malawi. Rancière suggests that within a hegemonic discourse people can talk, be visible and have a voice as long as they keep within the accepted understandings and frameworks for participation. However, only limited change may come from acting within the existing script (Isin, 2008). *Transformative* participation takes place when people challenge the existing discourses, a form of behaviour that will initially be interpreted as 'noise' by those in power (Marchart, 2007; Swyngedouw, 2014). According to Rancière, politics is the logic of equality, and 'the political' emerges through the embodied decision to act on inequality (Rancière, 1992; Swyngedouw, 2014). Following on from this, we do not define 'the political' along the axes of the formal and informal, through its nature of being conducted with a big or small p, or

according to level. We rather define 'the political' as any activities oriented towards challenging unequal power relations and redistribution of resources at all levels, be it formal or informal, party political or civic, and any shades in-between. It is this intricate web of actors, agendas and hierarchies, coupled with blurred distinctions between the formal and the informal that characterises informal settlements in Malawi.

Political agency can be performed in many ways, both individually and collectively, through everyday practices and action or in formal fora (Bènit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011; Millstein, 2013; Robbins et al., 2008). In our case, we explore agency performed as participation and the transformative potential of political agency expressed this way. We therefore embed the notion of transformation into our definition of agency. Together with Caldwell (2007: 771), we argue that the concept of 'agency must include not only the capacity to resist or to "act otherwise", but also the possibility of "making a difference"'. Political agency is thus – in this article – defined as *the capacity and ability to reach certain goals, particularly those related to opposing unjust and inegalitarian practices*. Transformative participation is in this context political agency expressed and achieved through participation. The key question we ask is how – and in what participatory spaces – such political agency can be actualized – where the aim is to be included, to gain recognition and to get noise accepted as voice (Purcell, 2014).

There is an abundance of participatory spaces in Malawi's urban areas. However, the nature of these spaces does not necessarily transform the position of urban dwellers, their access to resources, and their inclusion as full members of the city (Mwathunga, 2014; Refstie, 2014a,b,c,d,e, 2015; Refstie and Hunga, 2015). Cornwall (2004) and Gaventa (2006) have made a useful distinction between 'invited' and 'claimed' spaces of participation. Invited spaces are facilitated by decision-makers, and participants are invited to join. Claimed spaces, on the other hand, are opened up and shaped by relatively powerless actors themselves. Such spaces can be created through social movements, organizations or community groups, or just be general spaces where people meet to discuss and interact outside of the formal institutional frameworks. Both spaces may be relatively institutionalized, and they tend to operate within existing participation and planning discourses. Miraftab (2005) adds a third category of space, 'invented' space. While some tend to use claimed and invented spaces as synonyms, in the case of Malawi, we find it necessary to separate between the two. Compared to claimed space, we understand invented space as more confrontational, and less institutionalized, where participants may directly oppose authorities and the status quo. The invented space is thus more agonistic than the 'claimed'.

In the following subsections, we analyse two participatory spaces that were identified as the most common type in our research in Malawi; an invited space through participatory budgeting in Blantyre and a claimed space, through a community-planning project in the informal settlement of Senti in Lilongwe. In addition, we reflect on the potential of a third, more 'inventive' space organized as a result of the collaborative analysis in the project. In our analysis, we see the claimed, invited and invented as interrelated dimensions of participation, and argue that the potential for transformation is expressed in the ways in which the spaces connect, overlap and partly constitute each other. Our proposed framework for understanding the transformative potential of participation in the context of urban planning and upgrading in Malawi is thus a 'trialectics' of participatory spaces. Inspired by Lefebvre (1974) and Soja's (1996) reading of Lefebvre's work, we do not see these spaces as a dialectic in which one space builds upon another to create the ultimate transformative space. Rather, on the basis of our interviews and collaborative research in Malawi, we suggest a starting point where the three spaces

identified are recognized, connected, and influence each other, and where one is always a transcending inclusion of the other two.

5.1. Participatory budgeting in Blantyre

According to the 2000 Malawi Decentralization Policy, constituents are to be involved in planning of their areas, and people have increasingly been invited to give their ideas on how to develop their settlements (Refstie, 2015; Refstie and Hunga, 2015). Budgeting represents an important component of the planning initiatives, and in 2013, the National Local Governance Finance Committee produced guidelines on participatory budgeting for local authorities (NLGFC, 2013). Blantyre, the commercial capital of Malawi was the first city initiating a 'participatory budgeting exercise' funded by German Development Cooperation to address some of the development challenges faced by the city.

The idea behind participatory budgeting is to enable citizens to present demands and priorities for their areas, and through negotiations influence the city's budget allocation (Baiocchi, 2005). However, the process in Blantyre turned out to be more like a meeting called by the city council administration at which participants were informed of the council's plans for the coming year. The plans presented were developed by the administration without consultation with the affected communities. The meeting was announced in the newspapers only, and local representatives such as chiefs, heads of Community Development Committees, church leaders and CBO leaders were not invited to represent their areas. The few participants present were mainly connected to the city council administration or had been mobilized through some of the NGOs that were operating in informal settlements. Participants received no materials or information in advance, which made it difficult for them to engage in negotiations over budget allocations. Furthermore, even though several settlements had developed their own priorities and plans for their areas, there was no space for presenting or discussing these at the meeting. The meeting was a one-off event, and no process or measures for following up on the administration's proposals were outlined. After the meeting some of the participants went to the City Council administration to criticise the way in which the meeting had been set up and organized. The administration promised to take some of this criticism into account in the following year's participatory budgeting, but the 2014 process was organized in exactly the same way. Some civil society networks considered boycotting the meeting, but decided to participate in the hope that some of their views would still be heard. Given the absence of local councillors, the City Council administration held a meeting with Members of Parliament prior to the budgeting exercise. This meeting was closed to the public and no minutes were released. It was therefore difficult for the participants to know what had been decided by the administration, and what had been decided by the politicians.

> MPs just do things themselves without asking the people. We came to the [participatory budgeting] meeting but we were just invited to hear what was already done. I don't think MPs can know what is going on in the villages. They only talk to people from their party. They can give us a shirt when we want trousers. The MPs cannot contribute anything, because they cannot know what needs to be done without approaching people.
> [interview community representative Nancholi Blantyre, 2 April 2014]

The same representatives argued it would have been better to use the area-based networks and established structures in the local communities as a basis for the participatory budgeting exercise. The City Council administration on the other hand, argued that these structures were not official, and they therefore had to go

through the nearest political level which was the MPs. At the meeting, the different budget posts for community development and infrastructure projects were presented without reference to the distribution of resources in the city as a whole. The activities were described in a technical manner, and there was little room for discussion. When the questions of more funds for slum upgrading was raised during the meeting, the city administration emphasized how they were struggling with limited resources and suggested that the citizens themselves should take more responsibility for creating orderly development in their areas. There was no mention of how the city council administration delivers services to wealthier areas, but not to the informal settlements.

Interviews with people who had attended the meeting and with non-participants revealed that they were not happy with the planning-process and their lack of influence on the actual budget. Nevertheless, instead of making noise, the representatives conformed to the format of being receivers of information in what was framed as a technical planning exercise.

In addition to the historical and cultural explanations described above, the lack of opposition can be partly attributed to how the participatory space was formed: by invitation and entirely defined by the authorities. The absence of information and the predefined agenda made it hard for the participants to expand the frame in which the budget allocations were discussed. This was further reinforced by how people became participants and what mandate they were given in relation to the people they represented. The decade-long gap in local government representation combined with the refusal to recognize chiefs and other community leaders as legitimate representatives made it difficult for the participants to make demands.

The observable decision making by officials took place in parallel with more hidden influence enacted by the agenda-setting of the City Council administration. The invisible power shaped the historical and ideological boundaries defining what actions were acceptable behaviour within the participatory space (Lukes, 2005; Gaventa, 2006; Veneklasen and Miller, 2002). As such, the Blantyre process is a typical example of an 'invited' space, controlled and facilitated by decision-makers, where participants – treated as one homogenous group – are invited to join. This type of space is increasingly common in urban Malawi, but so are more 'claimed' spaces opened up and shaped by community groups and their support NGOs, which we will describe in the next section.

5.2. 'Communitization' of services in Senti, Lilongwe

There is loss of confidence in the system. Less people look for handouts and rather say 'What can I do myself?' The government can do nothing for us. We can do something.
[interview with representative of international organization, 11 March 2013]

People residing in informal settlements are to a large extent excluded from contributing to urban planning through formal channels, but the settlements are homes for a myriad of community and NGO networks and organizations. These networks and organizations work on everything from livelihoods activities, planning initiatives, construction, health and education, sensitization trainings, to savings and microfinance schemes. Many organizations are dormant, coming to life only when donor funding is available (Chinsinga, 2007), while others mobilize on a more regular basis. Common for most groups are that they tend to use area-based networks as a basis of organization, and that they work through representatives based on various leaderships. For several organizations and networks, a popular way to engage with participatory planning is to formulate community development plans. Our second case explores an example in Senti, a settlement in

Lilongwe, Malawi's capital. The settlement houses about 15,000 people (CCODE and MHPF, 2012). In 2011, with support from the Federation and CCODE, community leaders in Senti, consisting mainly of Federation members that had the support and endorsement of the chiefs in the area, decided to undertake a planning exercise. The initiative did not go through the Community Development Committee (CDC), which was accused of being 'overtaken by party politics'.

To avoid conflicts we have the first meeting with the chiefs. The second we have with the church leaders. The third we have with different organizations.... Lastly we have a meeting together and committees are formed for people to meet like a horizontal community. We formed them from different leaderships to avoid party leaders to come and destroy. So we can go from community to municipality to government with issues from the community.
[interview national Federation leader, 12 March 2013]

When asked if it was problematic that parallel structures to the CDC was created, the Federation members argued that it was not, because this initiative was for 'all the people in the settlement', not just those engaging with the CDC. Furthermore, the head of the CDC was present in the meetings where the initiative was discussed.

The planning process consisted of information gathering, mapping, numbering of structures, and project prioritization. Most of the participants were mobilized through the chiefs and the Federation, and participants received a small sum as a lunch allowance for their participation in the process. The trainings were organized by CCODE, but the instructors were Federation members who had gone through similar exercises elsewhere. The outcome of the training were a settlement profile, identification and numbering of all built structures, a detailed map of the settlement, and a community development strategy with prioritized projects. The meetings were heavily dominated by Federation members, and the process followed a script where the main discussions evolved around which projects to prioritize in the settlement. As in the Blantyre case, little attention was given to how one could work with addressing the general marginalization and exclusion of informal settlements from planning processes.

Knowing that access to funds through the government, donors or NGOs might not be an option, the representatives suggested that people in Senti could use their own finances to realize some of the prioritized plans. This was brought to the chief who asked each household to contribute some money (100 MK) every month. Many community members had previous experience with savings groups organized by civil society organizations, and most people already contributed some money to funeral funds and to the neighbourhood watch that functioned as community police. The money collected for the development plans was used to hire jobless community members to work on identified priorities such as waste collection and maintenance or opening of roads. In an attempt to address larger-scale problems, the community representatives also formed committees on themes such as infrastructure, water and sanitation, health, and education. The committees were tasked with developing partnerships with other actors to seek funding and more operational support (Refstie, 2014a). Most recently, the committee on education had identified some land it wished to buy in order that it might be set aside for the construction of a school in the future. While it was able to raise enough money to buy the land, the committee continues to struggle with land politics and bureaucracy at the city level. When the representatives approached the city council administration, they were told the land belongs to the Malawi Housing Corporation. When they approached the corporation, they were sent to the Ministry of

Lands, Housing and Urban Development, who again sent them back to the City Council administration, where the process is now stuck. The other committees also struggled with achieving results above and beyond what was accomplished through the collection of community contributions and dealt with internally in the settlement. Larger scale projects such as construction of roads, bridges, schools and clinics that required support from authorities and external funding remained out of reach in the participatory planning process.

5.3. Dynamics of depoliticization in participatory spaces

The two examples from Blantyre and Lilongwe differ in several ways. First of all, participatory budgeting in Blantyre seems to represent an obvious case of participatory failure, while the planning in Senti offers a good example of how people can mobilize local resources and achieve improvements in their living conditions. However, we argue that both cases are examples of depoliticized planning processes that contribute to reinforcing, rather than changing unequal power relations. The participatory budgeting process was framed as a technical exercise, ignoring the political nature of resource distribution. The participants were expected to appreciate the council's lack of resources and to come with input on already prioritized projects and allocations. They were not supposed to question why the poorest were not prioritized or the reasons for this. Such questions would have been perceived as noise. Similarly, even though claimed spaces are often regarded as inherently radical and transformative, they operated in our context within a framework legitimized by donors and government interventions and focused mainly on coping mechanisms and survival within the existing system.

An important finding from our research is thus that *both* invited and claimed spaces in Malawi tend to be area-based, technicalized, and disconnected from larger discussions on resource distribution. In this context it does not help that community groups are well organized, because they are not able to influence resource distribution at the city and national level. They struggle to find a voice, and their agency is not actualized when they follow scripts and 'participate in scenes already created' (Isin, 2008: 38). Gradual transformations in which the relationship between participants change, may take place when new actors – such as the local councillors – are introduced. The main challenge identified in the action research project, however, is the ways in which existing spaces operate in isolation and scripts are not rewritten because rupture seldom takes place and, consequently, *political* agency is seldom actualized. Missing from the participatory urban planning spaces in Malawi was thus the invented, more agonistic, dimension of participation understood as more open and less institutionalized spaces in which participants directly confront the authorities and the status quo. Insurgency and resistance to instigate change tended to be found outside of and disconnected from the participatory framework, through land invasions, squatting, ignoring planning regulations or public protests (Mwathunga, 2014). Our case study series and the discussions that followed the publications of the studies, indicated that there is a need for the more agonistic discussions from the invented spaces to be brought into the planning processes if transformation is to take place. At the same time, 'the political' – defined as challenging unequal power and resource distribution – is not necessarily the prime motivation that drives people to participate in planning processes (Kapoor, 2002). In a number of Malawi's informal settlements, participation has become professionalized and participation in meetings a routinized practice with a fixed script. For many, participation has become an 'occupation' in which they hold considerable expertise. The realization that the majority is not interested in challenging the established scripts of participation may help to understand the failed participatory spaces of Blantyre and Senti discussed above. Sometimes, the lack of 'noise' in participatory planning might even result from strategic choice. By not drawing attention to their areas, people are able to continue a range of informal practices related to housing and planning without the government's interference (Mwathunga, 2014). People may also prefer to place their energy into more localized participatory community processes that promise concrete and visible results rather than engaging in 'more talk', or in 'disruptive politics' as discussed above. Nevertheless, many of the benefits participants seek at both individual and community levels require political transformation, as the current participatory spaces have little impact on the status of urban dwellers, their access to resources and their inclusion as full members of the city.

6. Invited, claimed and invented: repoliticizing participatory planning spaces in Malawi

Rancière (2001, 2009, 2011) argues that in order to make change happen, existing discourses – or what counts as voice – need to be challenged. Such challenges will be perceived as noise, but to repoliticize the planning discourse means to enable that noise to take place, and for noise to be included as voice. Through our analyses in the collaborative research project, here exemplified by the cases in Blantyre and Lilongwe, it became clear that a more confrontational space where actors could willingly come together to raise concerns and disagreements was missing. We therefore made an attempt in the research project to facilitate a space where people's concerns, understood as noise in other spaces, could be accepted as voice. This would be a participatory space with a less predictable outcome that aimed to enable participants to challenge unjust practices and the instituted order. In a collaboration between CCODE, the Federation, community leaders (chiefs, CDC members, and CBO leaders) and The Research Institute in Malawi, a radio debate with the topic 'Addressing Urban Growth in Creating a Resilient Malawi' was organized in May 2015.[5] The panel consisted of a Member of Parliament, the Commissioner for physical planning from the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, a recently elected local councillor, a leader of the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor and a representative from the research collaboration. The panel was confronted by a wide audience physically present in the studio with participants from a number of informal settlements in Lilongwe, Zomba and Blantyre, along with comments and questions sent in by SMS from listeners all over the country. In some ways, the debate may be understood as hierarchical: the discussion was chaired by a journalist, along with a panel of the more powerful actors representing different levels of the urban planning process. The journalist had prepared for the debate together with the organizing partners. Most of the speaking time was given to the audience, and there was little control of who could say what. The aim was not to reach agreement, but rather that those in power should be held to account and act upon the claims of the people. Accordingly, the nature of the discussion became very different from what had been observed in the other participatory spaces, even though many of the actors were the same and the space was somewhat directed.

The programme leader, a well-known veteran journalist in Malawi, expeditiously got into the more tense issues around exclusion and unjust resource distribution. This made it difficult for the panel members to revert to their regular talk about lack of resources or policies underway. The debate quickly got into a discussion in which contentious issues were brought into the open

---

[5] The Facebook page of the UrbanTalks/Public Square series is available at https://www.facebook.com/pages/Urban-Talks/543646862395117.

instead of, as had been observed in other participatory spaces, being avoided. A conversation relevant to, but absent in the participatory planning process in Blantyre, was for example the discussion on the role of city rates in promoting equity. Some of the panellists claimed rather confrontationally that since people in informal settlements did not pay city rates, they could not expect to get services, and that it was therefore only natural that the city was focusing on the areas where the better-off lived. Several people in the audience protested and some highlighted the fact that people in informal settlements do pay taxes, as they are integrated into transport prices and other commodities that slum dwellers already pay for. Furthermore, many work in the better-off areas and thereby provide cheap labour. Some also pointed out that many of the wealthier people find ways of avoiding paying city rates and taxes, and that city councils should focus on these people first before putting the burden on those who already have less. Others expressed distrust in the city council's willingness and ability to provide services in return for paid city rates. The rates amount to a fairly small amount when compared to the huge demand for services in the settlements. Furthermore, most of the city's budget goes to salaries for its officials. The suggestion that income from city rates in the informal settlements would be a game-changer for planning and the provision of services was therefore regarded with considerable scepticism by the participants.

Another issue that came up – relevant for the Senti community-planning process – concerned how it is impossible for people to access land through formal arrangements. Residential areas have multiple landlords, the bureaucracy is cumbersome, and formalized land is costly. The only way for most people to settle in the cities is therefore through semi-formal arrangements with traditional chiefs in the high-density zoned peri-urban areas surrounding the cities. At the same time, large areas of land are lying idle in the city centers, especially in Lilongwe and Zomba. People in the audience criticized how business developers and politicians were able to find ways of accessing land in a corrupt fashion, while they were prevented access.

Furthermore, in more general terms, planners and politicians often prescribe formalization of informal settlements as a development solution. During the debate, the audience confronted this view, and argued that formalization was unrealistic and resulted in poorer people getting pushed out as a reaction to higher costs (see Mwathunga, 2014).

The format of the debate made it difficult for both the politicians and the planners to resort to their regular argument of unpaid city rates or policies already underway as a justification for not engaging with informal settlements. It was a space where all parties could meet, and where the setting enabled more confrontation. Accordingly, it represented a more agonistic space than that of the more established and consensus oriented processes in Senti and Blantyre described previously. The script had changed, and there was no aim to finalize a particular plan. The skills of the journalist who chaired the discussion combined with the political agenda that had been prepared by involved organizations helped to concentrate the discussion around politically contentious themes, and people from the informal settlements were able to enjoy more speaking time than they would normally get in invited spaces. Still, there were clear limitations to how much could be achieved in the radio debate as an invented space. The space was not entirely open, and in the audience were many of the 'usual suspects' who regularly participate in the invited and claimed spaces described above. Furthermore, the debate was held at a hotel and in the evening, which may have prevented some people, especially from informal settlements joining. As a measure to address this accessibility challenge, transport was organized for community members and leaders from several of the settlements. However,

transport was facilitated through the Federation and CCODE, indicating that most participants from the informal settlements had a connection with these organizations. Nevertheless, the radio listeners and their SMS activity represented a widening of the space, and what would often count as noise in other spaces was accepted as voice in this context. In some ways, therefore, the space enabled 'a political moment' in its encounter between the instituted order and people living in informal settlements, one that resulted in a reconfigured relationship between the participants (see Dikeç, 2005: 184).

7. The space for political agency and transformative participation

Participatory spaces are produced by representations, material conditions, spatial practices and lived experiences that help to constitute participants in these spaces in a relational dynamics (Cornwall, 2004; Miraftab, 2004; Shrestha and Aranya, 2014). Much of the knowledge on urban processes and participation comes out of research in South Africa and Latin America. Urban research sensitive to contexts such as in Malawi therefore requires further attention. In the contexts studied here, elements of 'claimedness' might develop in invited spaces, as participants may mobilize from more claimed spaces, as for example the neighbourhood groups presented in our case studies. The inviters do not always have full control over who participates or with what agendas. Similarly, elements of 'invitedness' will almost always exist in claimed spaces, as they are commonly initiated by organizations, networks, and community leaders. As for the radio debate, it was partly invited while drawing on both the claimed and the invented by involving established community groups and focusing strongly on questioning unjust and inegalitarian practices. To make visible conflicting interests by bringing more contentious questions into the participatory planning debate might not solve immediate problems related to failed planning projects. However, it does provide a different departure point for addressing slum upgrading. At the radio debate, some concrete promises were made, and a partner in the action research project currently (as of May 2016) works with the Member of Parliament who participated in the debate to table a private bill for the creation of a national urban development and human settlement committee. Establishing a committee signals some importance to the topic, but it does not necessarily mean that more will be done. During the debate, the MP emphasized that many committees existed, but most did not even meet to discuss during the year. The main impact of the radio debate was therefore rather to make visible some of the discussions that need to take place in order for slum upgrading to happen, by unsettling some of the hidden power relations and unwritten scripts that people follow in their more familiar participatory spaces.

The insights from the radio debate supports the conclusion derived from the analyses of the action research process: none of the three spaces analysed in this article are able to create transformation on their own. Instead we argue based on our examples and our theoretical framework (Isin, 2008; Rancière, 2001, 2009, 2011; Mouffe, 1999, 2000; Stokke and Törnquist, 2013) that the invited, claimed and invented spaces have to connect and overlap to enable political agency and thus transformative participation. For example, if planning practices in neighbourhoods were able to connect with and secure resources through a participatory budgeting exercise, this could be one avenue through which actual slum upgrading could be achieved (Baiocchi, 2005). Transformative participation is conditioned by having (1) inclusive city and national level fora for people from the informal settlements to participate in; (2) strong, strategic community groups; and (3) discussions on slum upgrading that engages 'the political' defined as

addressing unjust practices of resource distribution and exclusion. In Malawi, all three components need to be strengthened, but, as identified in the collaborative research project, the third agonistic dimension is the least recognized and accepted. In order to bring elements of agonism into the participatory planning discourse, invented spaces must be recognized and the links between political transformation and the more material benefits participants seek in community planning and slum upgrading processes acknowledged.

By analysing the power dynamics in existing spaces, the action research project made visible some of the connections between the depoliticized planning discourse and the failure to implement slum upgrading projects, and through the radio debate it illustrated what a participatory space with a stronger invented dimension might look like. While this is not transformation in and of itself, the process constitutes a necessary starting point for changing the discourse and practice of participatory urban planning in Malawi.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the 'trialectics of participation' accommodates a middle way between radical democracy, redistributive justice and a more pragmatic consensus-based participation model, because the aim is here not to overturn the instituted order, but to be included, to gain recognition and to get noise accepted as voice (Purcell, 2014). Herein lies both a practical and theoretical contribution because we are not primarily concerned with transformative participation as revolution, but agree with our research participants as much as with Rancière, for an inclusion of excluded groups into an existing system.

A wider diversity of voices and discourses within the public does not alone lead to change unless it creates insights that are transferred into concrete planning and policy processes. The action research project contributed towards such insights, but it did not work to develop the firm linkages between the three types of spaces that would be necessary in order to influence policy and practice. More research is needed into this area, to explore how the different spaces we have discussed here can be connected in order to turn noise into voice and bring out the potential for transformation where participants are included, gain recognition and have their voices accepted. In a low-resource context such as Malawi, it is not always clear how much community groups can actually gain through inclusion and better redistribution of resources. However, it is our argument that with the massive urban growth currently taking place in Malawi, this is the moment to address the continuous production of unequal access to resources in urban areas. Only with more emphasis on such unjust practices may the society avoid spiraling costs as urbanization continues to change the urban areas.

Acknowledgements

References

Baiocchi, G., 2005. Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre. Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Bènit-Gbaffou, C., Oldfield, S., 2011. Accessing the state: everyday practices and politics in cities of the south. J. Asian Afr. Stud. 46 (5), 445–452. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0021909611403703.

Booth, D., Cammack, D., Harrigan, J., Kanyongolo, E., Mataure, M., Ngwira, N., 2006. Drivers of Change and Development in Malawi Working Paper No. 261. Overseas Development Institute, London.

Caldwell, R., 2007. Agency and change: re-evaluating Foucault's legacy. Organization 14 (6), 769–791. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1350508407082262.

Cammack, D., 2007. The logic of african neopatrimonialism: what role for donors? Dev. Policy Rev. 25 (5), 599–614.

Cammack, D., 2011. Malawi's Political Settlement in Crisis, 2011. Background Paper Africa Power and Politics Programme. Overseas Development Institute, London.

Cammack, D., 2012a. Peri-urban Governance and the Delivery of Public Goods in Malawi 2009–2011. Report Africa Power and Politics Programme, Overseas Development Institute, London.

Cammack, D., 2012b. Malawi in crisis, 2011–2012. Rev. Afr. Polit. Econ. 39 (132), 375–388. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2012.688651.

Cammack, D., Kanyongolo, E., O'Neill, T., 2009. Town Chiefs in Malawi Working Paper No. 3, June 2009. Overseas Development Institute.

Center for Community Organization and Development and Malawi Homeless People's Federation (CCODE and MHPF), 2012. Senti Community Profile. CCODE, Lilongwe.

Chasukwa, M., Chinsinga, B., 2013. Slapping accountability in the face: observance of accountability in Malawi's local governments in the absence of councillors. Int. J. Publ. Admin. 36 (5), 354–366.

Chinsinga, B., 2003. Lack of alternative leadership in Democratic Malawi: some reflections ahead of the 2004 general elections. Nordic J. Afr. Stud. 12 (1), 1–22.

Chinsinga, B., 2007. District assemblies in a fix: the perils of self-seeking tendencies in decentralisation policy reform in Malawi. Afr. Develop. XXXII 1, 89–111.

Chirambo, R.M., 2009. Democracy as a limiting factor for politicised cultural populism in Malawi. Afr. Spect. 44 (2), 77–94.

Cornwall, A., 2002. Making Spaces Changing Places: Situating Participation in Development. IDS Working Paper 170. Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

Cornwall, A., 2004. Spaces for transformation? Reflections on issues of power and difference in participation in development. In: Hickey, S., Mohan, G. (Eds.), Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development. Zed, London, pp. 75–91.

Cornwall, A., 2008. Unpacking 'participation': models, meanings, and practices. Commun. Develop. J. 43 (3), 269–283. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010.

Davidson, M., Iveson, K., 2014a. Occupations, mediations, subjectifications: fabricating politics. Space Polity 18 (2), 137–152. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2013.879775.

Davidson, M., Iveson, K., 2014b. Recovering the politics of the city: from the 'post-political city' to a 'method of equality' for critical urban geography. Prog. Hum. Geogr. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0309132514535284.

De Soto, H., 1989. The Other Path. Basic Books, New York, NY.

De Soto, H., 2000. The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else. Basic Books, New York, NY.

Dikeç, M., 2005. Space, politics and the political. Environ. Plan. D: Soc. Space 23 (2), 171–188. http://dx.doi.org/10.1068/d364t.

Dikeç, M., 2007. Badlands of the Republic: Space, Politics and Urban Policy. Blackwells, London.

Dikeç, M., 2012. Space as a mode of political thinking. Geoforum 43 (4), 669–676. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.01.008.

Eggen, Ø., 2011. Chiefs and everyday governance: parallel state organisations in Malawi. J. South. Afr. Stud. 37 (2), 313–331.

Englund, H., 2002. A Democracy of Chameleons – Politics and Culture in the New Malawi. Christian Literature Association in Malawi (CLAIM/MABUKU), Blantyre, and Elanders Gotab, Stockholm.

Englund, H., 2006. Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Ferguson, B., Navarrete, J., 2003. A financial framework for reducing slums: lessons from experience in Latin-America. Environ. Urbanizat. 15 (2), 201–216. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/095624780301500210.

Gaventa, J., 2006. Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis. IDS Bull. 36 (6), 23–33.

Harvey, D., 1973. Social Justice and the City. Edward Arnold, London.

Harvey, D., 2012. Rebel Cities – From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution. Verso, New York.

Habermas, J., 1984. Theory of Communicative Action. Reason and the Rationalization of Society, vol. 1. Beacon Press, Boston (originally published in German in 1981).

Hanson, P.W., 2012. Toward a more transformative participation in the conservation of Madagascar's natural resources. Geoforum 43 (6), 1182–1193. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.03.005.

Hickey, S., Mohan, G. (Eds.), 2004. Participation – From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development. Zed, London.

Holston, J., 1995. Spaces of insurgent citizenship. Plan. Theory 13, 35–51.

Holston, J., 2009. Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil. Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

Isin, E.F., 2008. Theorizing acts of citizenship. In: Isin, E.F., Nielsen, G.M. (Eds.), Acts of Citizenship. Zed, London, pp. 15–43.

Kallio, K.P., 2012. Political presence and the politics of noise. Space Polity 16 (3), 287–302. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2012.733569.

Kapoor, I., 2002. Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? The relevance of the Habermas–Mouffe debate for third world politics. Alternat.: Glob. Local Polit. 27 (4), 459–487.

Kesby, M., 2005. Retheorizing empowerment-through-participation as a performance in space: beyond tyranny to transformation. Signs 30 (4), 2037–2065. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/428422.

Kindon, S., Pain, R., Kesby, M., 2007. Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation, and Place. Routledge, New York.

Korf, B., 2010. The geography of participation. Third World Quart. 31 (5), 709–720. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.502691.

Lefebvre, H., 1974. The Production of Space. Blackwells, Oxford.

Lukes, S., 2005. Power: A Radical View, second edition first published in 1974. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Manda, M.A.Z., 2007. Grassroots-led urban development: potentials, achievements, limitations – experiences in Malawi. Paper presented at the 8th N-AERIUS Conference, London.

Manda, M.A.Z., 2013. Reflections on urban planning education in Malawi. Educ. Soc. South. Afr. 1 (1), 58–74.

Marchart, O., 2007. Post-Foundational Political Thought. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Millstein, M., 2007. Challenges to Substantive Democracy in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Politics of Urban Governance Transformations and Community Organizing in Delft Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Oslo.

Millstein, M., 2013. The state of urban agendas in Norwegian development research and policy. Forum Develop. Stud. 40 (3), 373–392. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2013.809382.

Miraftab, F., 2004. Invited and invented spaces of participation: neoliberal citizenship and feminists' expanded notions of politics. Wagadu 1 (Spring), 1–7.

Miraftab, F., 2005. Insurgency and spaces of active citizenship – the story of Western Cape anti-eviction campaign in South Africa. J. Plan. Educ. Res. 25 (2), 200–217. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0739456X05282182.

Mohan, G., Stokke, K., 2000. Participatory development and empowerment: the dangers of localism. Third World Quart. 21 (2), 247–268.

Mouffe, C., 1999. Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? Soc. Res. 66 (3), 745–758.

Mouffe, C., 2000. The Democratic Paradox. Verso, London.

Mwalubunju, O., 2007. Civil society. In: Government and Politics in Malawi. Centre for Social Research, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, pp. 267–295.

Mwathunga, E., 2014. Contesting Spaces in Urban Malawi: A Lefebvrian Analysis. Stellenbosch University <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/86660>.

National Local Government Finance Committee, 2013. Guidelines on Participatory Budgeting for Local Authorities in Malawi – Companion to the Local Government Budget Manual, Lilongwe.

Oxford Dictionaries, 2016. Noise, Oxford University Press Dictionaries <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/noise> (accessed 02.05.2016).

Pieterse, E., 2008. City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development. Zed, London.

Purcell, M., 2013. The Down-Deep Delight of Democracy. Wiley-Blackwell, UK.

Purcell, M., 2014. Rancière and revolution. Space Polity 18 (2), 168–181. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2014.911591.

Rancière, J., 1992. Politics, identification, and subjectivization. October 61 (Summer), 58–64. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/778785.

Rancière, J., 2001. Ten theses on politics. Theory Event 5 (2).

Rancière, J., 2009. The Emancipated Spectator. Translated by G. Elliott, Verso, London.

Rancière, J., 2011. The thinking of dissensus: politics and aesthetic. In: Bowman, P., Stam, R. (Eds.), Reading Rancière. Continuum, London, pp. 1–17.

Reason, P., Bradbury, H., 2001. Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice. Sage Publications, London.

Refstie, H., 2014a. Doing it Ourselves – Community Mobilization and Strategic Planning in Senti Settlement. NTNU, CCODE, and URI, Lilongwe <http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/27-case-study-1-senti accessed 02.05.2016>.

Refstie, H., 2014b. Building Representation and Partnerships – Chikanda Zomba. NTNU, CCODE, and URI, Lilongwe <http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/47-case-study-2-zomba-chikanda> (accessed 04.05.2016).

Refstie, H., 2014c. From Plans to Action: Mobilizing Funds and Credits for Slum Upgrading in Nancholi Blantyre. NTNU, CCODE, and URI, Lilongwe <http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/50-case-study-3-nancholi-chiimire> (accessed 04.04.2016).

Refstie, H., 2014d. Negotiating Services through Community Committees – Ndirande Makata Blantyre. NTNU, CCODE, and URI, Lilongwe <http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/48-case-study-4-ndirande-makata> (accessed 04.05.2016).

Refstie, H., 2014e. Left Hanging? Participatory Slum Upgrading and Studio Planning in Salisburyline. NTNU, CCODE, and URI, Lilongwe <http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/49-case-study-5-salisburyline> (accessed 04.05.2016).

Refstie, H., 2015. Is This Participatory Budgeting? The Blantyre Process. NTNU, CCODE, and URI, Lilongwe.

Refstie, H., Hunga, W., 2015. Some Lessons to Be Learned – Informal Settlement Upgrading Project in Chinsapo and Mtandire. NTNU, CCODE, and URI, Lilongwe.

Robbins, S., Cornwall, A., Von Lieres, B., 2008. Rethinking 'citizenship' in the postcolony. Third World Quart. 29 (6), 1069–1086. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436590802305195.

Shrestha, P., Aranya, R., 2014. Claiming invited and invented spaces: contingencies for insurgent planning practices. Int. Plan. Stud. 20 (4), 424–443. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2015.1028909.

Soja, E., 1996. Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real- and-Imagined Places. Blackwell, Cambridge, Mass.

Stokke, K., Törnquist, O., 2013. Democratization in the Global South: The Importance of Transformative Politics. Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke.

Swyngedouw, E., 2011. Interrogating post-democratization: reclaiming egalitarian political spaces. Polit. Geogr. 30 (7), 370–380. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.08.001.

Swyngedouw, E., 2014. Where is the political? Insurgent mobilisations and the incipient 'return of the political'. Space Polity 18 (2), 122–136. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2013.879774.

UNDP, 2015. Human Development Report 2015, New York <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2015_statistical_annex.pdf> (accessed 02.03.2016).

UN Habitat, 2012. State of the World's Cities 2012/2013 – Prosperity of Cities. UN Habitat, Nairobi.

UNDESA, 2014. World Urbanization Prospects – Highlights: 2014 Revision. Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (UNDESA), New York.

VeneKlasen, L, Miller, V., 2002. A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation. World Neighbors, Oklahoma City.

Does participatory planning promise too much? Global discourses and the glass ceiling of participation in urban Malawi

Hilde Refstie and Marianne Millstein

Introduction

Discourses on participatory urban planning have increasingly merged with those on urban citizenship, framing participation as a key field and space through which citizenship is to be achieved, both as a process of political inclusion and as a result in terms of substantive urban rights (Miraftab, 2012a; Rossi & Vanolo, 2012). Examples from Latin America, India and South Africa have modelled this conversation, connecting processes such as slum upgrading[1] firmly to discussions around justice, redistribution of resources and citizenship built from below (Appadurai, 2001, 2004; Holston, 2008, 2011; Miraftab, 2005; 2009; Mitlin & Patel, 2014; Pieterse, 2008; Satterthwaite, 2001).

In this article, we draw on a collaborative research project with residents in informal settlements[2] and their partner organizations to explore how global practices on participatory planning and citizenship play out in the Malawian context. We focus in on one particular global network, Slum Dwellers International (SDI), and the ways in which it works with national affiliates through a shared framing and methodology to organize and promote urban inclusion (Mitlin & Patel, 2014; Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013; Watson, 2014). We show how, in Malawi, factors such as limited national and local resources, disconnections from national and urban policies of redistribution, and a local politics shaped by the dynamics of both clientelism and democratic reforms creates a glass ceiling for what local groups are able to

---

[1] In this article, "slum upgrading" refers to an integrated approach, small or large, that aims to improve conditions in a given area. Such conditions may involve the legal (e.g. land tenure), the physical (e.g. infrastructure, housing), the social (e.g. health, crime or education) or the economic arenas.

[2] By "informal settlements", we mean villages incorporated into city boundaries, squatter areas and overcrowded traditional housing areas (THAs), where housing and sanitation are poor and the status of land tenure is unclear (Manda, 2007).

achieve through participatory spaces. We therefore ask whether participatory discourses, when framed in terms of realizing rights-based claims through participatory planning, simply promise too much.

The promises of participatory planning discourses are conceptualised and promoted from very different theoretical and ideological perspectives (Mohan and Stokke 2000). Miraftab (2009), for instance, provides a critique of current modes of participatory planning that link community groups closely to NGOs. She argues that such linkages reinforce the hegemonic legitimacy of neoliberalism. In contrast to such approaches, she suggests that insurgent planning promises a more transformative framing, in which counter-hegemonic, transgressive and imaginative practices are integral to planning.

The Malawian case discussed in this article problematizes the promise of participatory governance. At the same time, we also contend that Malawian cities and settlements do not fit neatly into a simplistic critique of neoliberalism within radical planning theory that dismiss the emphasis networks such as SDI puts on inclusion. This is not to say that Malawian urban development is de-linked from neo-liberal forces that shape urban development, but we need to better understand how such forces are mediated and imbricated with local conditions, shaping the political spaces of movements such as the SDI in different cities and settlements (Oldfield and Stokke 2007, Robins 2010). Rather than assuming a priori what the SDI framework and model can achieve or not, a nuanced analysis helps us unpack some of the opportunities and constraints for SDI-inspired participatory planning practices in Malawian settlements as part of a contested field of urban citizenship (Hammett 2017). Thus, we reinforce the message of the emergent postcolonial literature about the importance of unpacking 'the urban' in different contexts to give way to locally embedded approaches for understanding urban practices (Chatterjee, 2012; Robinson & Roy, 2016; Roy, 2009a, 2015a, 2015b).

The research for the present article took place between February 2013 and May 2017, and consisted of participatory observation over 9 months, 20 group discussions, and 120 interviews with community members and other involved actors, as well as workshops, meetings and public radio debates. After an exploratory phase, the research developed into a collaborative project with the SDI affiliates Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE) and the Federation of the Urban and the Rural Poor (hereafter, 'the Federation'), together with community representatives in four cities: Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba.[3] The main aim of the collaboration was to follow up on some of the frustrations that interviewees had expressed in the exploratory phase of the research about why so many slum-upgrading projects in Malawi failed to be implemented. This lack of progress was explored through a number of case studies, and the findings were used to facilitate discussions on what was perceived as a glass ceiling in terms of what the SDI model was able to achieve in Malawi.

Community mobilization and transformative participation

The 'transformative turn' in the participation literature links participatory approaches closely to citizenship and governance (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Transformative participation focuses on building political capabilities, confidence and critical consciousness among marginalized groups so that they can claim rights and demand accountability from government and other actors (Cornwall, 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). In the urban literature, this shift has corresponded with an increasing body of work that emphasizes how through collective mobilization and critical engagement the urban poor can have a voice, raise claims and thus achieve rights to services and housing through various participatory planning practices (Appadurai, 2001; Beard, 2012; Holston; 2008, 2011; Miraftab, 2012a; Rossi & Vanolo,

---

[3] For more on the research process and findings, see Refstie and Brun (2016) and Refstie (forthcoming). The case-study series developed as part of the project can be accessed at: https://actmalawi.com/

2012).

Slum Dwellers International is one of the much-referred-to global models on 'citizenship built from below' (Appadurai, 2001; Watson, 2014). The network facilitates community-driven initiatives to upgrade informal and squatter settlements, improve tenure security, and offer residents new development opportunities (Mitlin & Patel, 2014). The organization has had a major impact upon global discourses and policies on housing and slum upgrading within global institutions such as Cities Alliance and UN-Habitat, and is frequently featured in academic work.[4]

SDI's approach is based on a shared framing and methodology that is promoted through national affiliates working closely with grassroots organizations. The organization advocates a particular set and sequence of practices (rituals) that can be seen as a mode of active citizenship through which residents are empowered to make claims and critically engage the state and other actors from below (Kabeer, 2005). SDI's insistence on a "politics of patience" (Appadurai, 2001) through seeking inclusion in decision-making and critical engagement with those in power has not been without its critics, whose voices have only increased as the network has gained a powerful position as the voice of slum dwellers in global discourses of urban development. One line of critique relates to how the engagement/empowerment approach – in which active citizenship is embedded in neoliberal urban inclusion – does not sufficiently challenge hegemonic power relations (Huchzermeyer, 2011; Miraftab, 2009; Roy, 2009b). However, research has shown that local affiliates can be both conformist and insurgent at the same time, thus challenging the assumption that local practices are either cooperative or conflictual (Butcher & Frediani, 2014; Millstein, Oldfield & Stokke, 2003; Miraftab, 2012b). In Malawi, Butcher and Frediani's (2014) inclusion of

---

[4] See, for example, issues 13(2), 16(1), 19(2), 20(2), 21(2), 24(1), 24(2), and 27(1) of *Environment and Urbanization.*

both confrontational and negotiation-based practices in the notion of insurgency seems to offer a better way of grasping the dynamics on the ground than a notion of insurgency that works either in opposition to or beyond 'the state'. The interesting question when 'evaluating' to what extent movements such as SDI play a role in transformative urban politics thus becomes how contextual dynamics influence the range of strategies and practices available to local groups who seek to realize their citizenship rights through participatory spaces. This requires an unpacking of 'the urban' in the Malawian context.

Urban growth and slum upgrading in Malawi

Malawi is only 20% urbanized, but it is home to some of the fastest growing cities in sub-Saharan Africa. Almost 70% of the existing urban population lives in areas with slum-like conditions, and settlements are growing at an alarming rate (UN-Habitat, 2013). This represents a major challenge for city and national authorities, who have limited technical and political capacities to tackle increasing inequality and informality (Manda, 2013). The government of Malawi's approach to urban growth has mainly been to focus on rural development in order to stop rural-to-urban migration. Thus, preventing urbanization has been promoted over (and sometimes at the cost of) managing urban growth.[5] Slum upgrading does not feature high on the development agenda, and the few projects that have been initiated have had little success (Manda, 2013; Refstie & Brun, 2016). Very often, plans are not followed up by resources for implementation. Where slum upgrading *has* happened, the areas typically fall victim to 'downward raiding', where the middle class benefits and the original renters are displaced further out at the city margins (Manda, 2013; Interview, Federation leader 12 March 2013; Interview, Commissioner for Physical Planning, Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, 4 March 2013). Some of the challenges with

---

[5] Malawi's attempt to ensure a regionally balanced urban development has yielded some results (Manda, 2013), but it has not prevented rapid urbanization and city growth.

slum upgrading have been attributed to a lack of participation by informal settlement dwellers in planning and project processes. Mirroring global shifts, recent slum-upgrading projects have therefore involved civil society more actively, promoting participatory planning as an avenue through which informal settlement members can raise and achieve socioeconomic claims (Kruse, 2005).

Since attention to urban issues is fairly recent in Malawi, few groups and organizations work with informal settlements. The largest group is the Federation, which mobilizes informal settlement groups to participate in community planning and policymaking processes, with 100,000 members covering 26 districts in Malawi. The network is supported by the nongovernmental organization CCODE, which provides technical assistance, works with local settlement leaderships, and facilitates learning through exchange visits locally, nationally and internationally. Through its affiliation to SDI, the Federation works with many of the tools used by SDI affiliates in other countries. This means mobilizing through savings groups; profiling, mapping and enumerations of settlements; and horizontal learning exchanges (McFarlane, 2004). The Federation and CCODE have had some accomplishments with these instruments (see e.g. Mitlin, 2014a, Refstie, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). Yet, at the time of this study, there was a growing sense of frustration within CCODE, the Federation and community groups over the lack of tangible results, particularly in relation to the implementation of slum-upgrading plans. For many, it seemed as though they had reached a glass ceiling in terms of what they were able to achieve within the existing frameworks. This again created a motivational gap that threatened long-term mobilization. In the next two sections, we will explore some of the reasons for this lack of progress by unpacking specific urban dynamics that influence what the SDI model is able to achieve in the Malawian context.

Contextual dynamics influencing community mobilization and participatory planning

A number of factors make cities in Malawi suitable for community mobilization. While there are clear differences between informal settlements in the commercial city of Blantyre and in the capital, Lilongwe, slum areas in Malawi are typically less congested and crowded than in many other countries. The informal settlements tend to have more of a 'rural' feel (Englund, 2002).[6] Many settlements have grown on village land, and rural governance structures are still active. Traditional chiefs[7] are important drivers in community mobilizing, as they are expected to remain independent and refrain from engaging in what are often perceived as disruptive party politics and competitive electoral games (Cammack, 2011). Community members also feel relatively secure of their tenure when they have an ownership document signed by the chief. In many cases, this forms a favourable environment for community organizing and implementation of small-scale projects.

Another favourable condition for community organizing in Malawi is that evictions are relatively few and far between. Malawian authorities have in some cases resorted to slum clearance and eviction of squatters (Mwathunga, 2014). However, evictions from customary managed land are rare (Kruse, 2005). The participatory turn in global development discourses and a more organized civil society have resulted in less legitimacy for evictions. Politicians also often oppose such measures as a strategic move to rally support for their candidacies during elections (Cammack, Kanyongolo & O'Neill, 2009). Together with the unresolved status of chiefs as custodians of customary land[8], this means that the local and national government have adopted a *laissez faire* policy towards areas that have been zoned for high-

---

[6] At a workshop organized in Lilongwe as part of the research project, Professor Wiseman C. Chirwa from Chancellor College, University of Malawi, asked the interesting question: "Are we seeing an urbanization of villages, or a villagization of urban areas in Malawi?"

[7] "Chief" is here used in a general sense and covers the paramount chief, senior chief, chief, group village headman or village.

[8] For a discussion on the ambiguous legal status of chiefs in urban areas, see Cammack et al. (2009).

density housing (Kruse, 2005). Thus, a majority of informal settlements in Malawi resemble what Yiftachel (2009: 88–89) describes as "grey spaces", "those positioned between the 'whiteness' of legality/approval/safety, and the 'blackness' of eviction/destruction/death". As we will see later, this means that local governments engage very little with informal settlements in terms of development, but it also gives organized community groups space to form their own initiatives and projects.

The Federation and CCODE have achieved a number of things in Malawi. In some settlements, community groups collect money from households to organize waste management, community police and minor infrastructure projects such as footbridges, roads and renovations of community buildings (Refstie, 2013, 2014a,b,d). In other settlements, community representatives have formed committees to negotiate for services directly with service providers such as the parastatal water boards and electricity company (Refstie, 2014c). Community groups also engage actively in participatory planning exercises that gather information, prioritize topics for intervention and design projects (Refstie, 2014 a,b,d; Refstie & Hunga, 2015). While financing such plans is challenging, some groups have been able to exploit client relationships with politicians to get certain elements implemented:

> Politicians may make promises now, but after elections they may not keep them. We therefore decided to take advantage of the current stage. With the mapping in Nancholi we gave the plans to a shadow Member of Parliament who had approached the chief. The chief said that instead of himself pocketing the money, the shadow MP could do a bridge. Three bridges were then constructed (Group discussion, Federation district leaders, Blantyre, 28 March 2014).

In addition to the examples described above, the Federation has also been successful with savings activities oriented towards small-scale business investments and funeral funds, and with collective savings through which loans are made for building water taps and ecosan toilets. This illustrates that communities are able to do quite a bit – either on their

own or in collaboration with NGOs and other partners. However, the strategies employed by the Federation in Malawi have been unable to address housing, larger-scale infrastructure or sufficient service provision in the informal settlements. Informal settlement groups also typically fail to achieve complete security of tenure, and they continue to have little influence on how resources are distributed in the city. While this is a common situation for informal settlement groups in a number of contexts, the specific dynamics in Malawi render the limitations of current models of community mobilization and participatory planning particularly visible. Furthermore, the lack of progress has a significant influence on the prospects for longer-term mobilization.

> It is very disheartening to see things happening like this. Because what we want to see is the project implemented. We have a feeling still of eagerness, but it has been 3–4 years.... People will now not participate unless they are paid allowances (Interview, community leader, Salisburyline, Mzuzu, 23 April 2014).

SDI has been praised for their ability to both develop community-based strategies for poverty reduction and challenge conventional development thinking (Boonyabancha & Mitlin, 2012; Satterthwaite 2001; Patel et al., 2001). In Uganda, local savings in citywide housing and slum upgrading funds were connected with the government's 150 million USD municipal support programme, as well as resources from the World Bank, Comic Aid, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Cities Alliance, 2012). In India, an alliance between the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) and Mahila Milan used enumerations and collection of data about themselves and their settlements to get into a dialogue with city officials. By the end of 2005, the alliance had secured land from the government and managed to self-construct homes for over 50,000 households (Chen, Jhabvala, Kanbur & Richards, 2007). Similar initiatives have taken hold in South Africa, where the South African Federation influenced key aspects of national housing

policies (Manda, Nkhoma & Mitlin, 2011; Millstein et al., 2003; Satterthwaite, 2001). An important SDI strategy is thus to engage in co-production activities as a way for informal settlement groups to consolidate their base politically and extract gains from the state (Mitlin, 2008). In Malawi, this has proved difficult, and below we explore three influencing factors as to why: limited national and local resources, a local politics shaped by the dynamics of both clientelism and democratic reforms, and disconnections from national and urban policies of redistribution.

Limited national and local resources

Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries, ranking 173rd out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2015). It is landlocked, with a high population density, and has few natural resources such as oil and minerals. Malawi is also dependent upon foreign aid, which has constituted up to 37% of its national budget (Government of Malawi, 2011).[9] Since urban development and slum upgrading is not prioritized by the government or donors, few resources therefore exist for development initiatives in informal settlements.

As described above, the Federation and CCODE have successfully worked with community groups to develop community plans both as individual processes and in connection with larger slum-upgrading projects. However, accessing finances for implementing plans has proved to be a significant challenge in both cases. In projects at the national or city level, it is typically assumed that funds would be raised during the project or that the approach itself "would spread" and later be scaled up. Sometimes it is also believed that financing will be secured via abstract notions of public–private partnerships that rarely materialize (Refstie & Hunga, 2015; Refstie, 2015). In other cases, budgeting is outright unrealistic (Refstie, 2014d):

---

[9] This has decreased in recent years as donors have withheld funds in response to various corruption scandals (Dionne & Horowitz, 2016).

> In retrospect, we realize that 1 million euros cannot do much in improving people's
> lives.[10] It would have to focus on software as capacity building rather than physical work
> as water, sanitation and drains (Interview, UN-Habitat programme manager, 28 April
> 2014).

SDI has developed several fundraising tools that focus on the capacities of slum dwellers themselves. The most important of these is the pooling of community funds through saving groups. Saving groups function better than microfinance loans in low-resource settings since the amounts are smaller, people are able to save daily or weekly, and there are no middle-level institutions to be paid (Satterthwaite, 2001). Saving groups can also be used both as a basis for organization and as a platform for mobilizing larger pools of funds for slum upgrading (Watson, 2014). In Uganda, South Africa, India, Vietnam and the Philippines, among other countries, SDI affiliates have managed to develop citywide funds for housing or wider slum upgrading. They also leverage additional resources from international organizations and national governments into the funds, expanding their resource base (Chen et al., 2007; Manda et al., 2011; Mitlin, 2013).

Citywide saving funds have not been very successful in Malawi owing to low repayment rates. The Federation's Mchenga urban poor fund, a revolving loan fund for housing, was put on hold at the time of the study because of loan defaults (Manda et al., 2011; Interview, CCODE fund manager, 20 March 2013). In addition to housing funds, it has also been difficult to establish saving schemes for services and infrastructure upgrading. Savings organized through the Federation rather focus on smaller business loans, minor home improvements or family related events such as weddings or funerals:[11]

---

[10] The 1 million euros was initially planned to cover slum upgrading in the four largest cities in Malawi. In the end, the money was not even released. The main funder, the European Union, refused to release more funds as the Malawian government had not paid its agreed 25% contribution (Refstie, 2014d).

[11] As described previously in the article, there are some exceptions where community members pool money to pay for waste collection and gravelling of roads (Refstie, 2013).

It is difficult to get people to save for public goods. Nobody owns it, so why should I do it they say – this is why we have the government. Saving towards public goods is a challenge, as it does not target households (Interview, CCODE fund manager, 20 March 2013).

Since saving activities fail to reach their full potential and government or donors do not prioritize informal settlements, there are few ways in which neighbourhood or citywide funds for slum upgrading can be established. This limits, as promoted by SDI, the options for "an inclusive urban future with the co-production of basic services providing the basis for the political autonomy of a network of residents' groups, enabling them to negotiate for continuing reforms and redistribution" (Mitlin & Patel, 2014: 296). In other words, while the SDI processes and practices might be key to engaging residents and constructing active citizens, there are structural limitations to what can be achieved in terms of material gains (Miraftab, 2012b). As we shall see below, local political dynamics also inform citizens' strategies and practices, with implications for how participatory planning plays out in the Malawian context.

A local politics shaped by the dynamics of both clientelism and democratic reforms

In 1998, the Local Government Act established town and city assemblies as the unit of local government in urban Malawi. Local council elections, however, were not organized until the Malawi Decentralization Policy came into place in 2000. A range of functions related to planning and development were delegated to the local councils, but the resources provided failed to match the new responsibilities. There were also strong tensions at the local level between councillors, district commissioners, members of parliament and traditional chiefs. Sitting presidents also feared local opposition. As a result, the local government assemblies were dissolved in 2005 and new elections were postponed for almost a decade. At the time of this research, local governments were therefore run by technocrats without councils, as a

result not merely of neoliberal depoliticization, even though initial state reforms were informed by global good governance agendas, but also of the politics of centralization in postcolonial Malawi. This meant that informal settlement groups had no elective representatives within city planning processes, the closest political representatives being their members of parliament (Chasukwa & Chinsinga, 2013).

Politicians in Malawi are in theory held accountable through elections, and the fact that only one-third are re-elected testifies to this. However, since few politicians are able to live up to their grandiose election promises, politicians tend to think short term while they are in office, focusing more on their own gains than on engaging with their constituencies (Cammack, 2011):

> What I want to explain is that as people from informal settlements we encounter challenges that our government is not helping us with. For example, we had political campaigns last year and various leaders promised us that when we empower them they should assist us accordingly. However, when we take them to task they are full of scapegoats and say they are not able to develop our areas because we are not within the laws, and yet during their campaign the same people did not warn us of this. We are only told when they are in power (Community member from the informal settlement Mtandire in Lilongwe at radio debate, 10 May 2015).

Malawi's local authorities are responsible for providing infrastructure and services to all areas of the country's cities, including informal settlements. They are to provide policy and technical guidance on planning, enforce bylaws, and source funding for urban and community development programmes (Chinsinga, 2015). However, informal settlement groups such as those mobilized through the Federation often struggle with creating constructive partnerships with city authorities:

> In Ndirande and Ntopwa [informal settlements in Blantyre], local government representatives even came to meetings. They appreciated that there were problems, but nothing happened. In Ntopwa, the chief is very hard working; she got people to collect

waste and bring to areas, but the city council never showed up to collect it. We also have the example of Chiwembe [another informal settlement in Blantyre]. They even told the city council that they have a place for waste dumping, so it was just for the city council to go there, but it did not happen (Group discussion, national, regional and district Federation leaders, 28 March 2014).

As in most other countries, city authorities in Malawi prioritize settlements that are well off (Mwathunga, 2014; Refstie & Brun, 2016). At the same time, there is also a serious lack of both capacity and funds at the local government level (Chinsinga, 2015; Manda, 2013; Kruse, 2005).

There are not enough resources at the city councils. There was a time when we were holding a meeting with the Lilongwe City Council. We asked why there was uncontrolled garbage in markets and townships. They said they did an assessment: on average, each person in Lilongwe produced 0.5 kg litter per day. With its 700,000 residents, that is 350,000 kg litter per day. They say they simply do not have the capacity to collect and dispose of this, which I think is true (Interview, Member of Parliament, 28 May 2013).

Along with the relative centralization of resources, the gap in political representation has made it difficult for organized community groups to get their views heard and their plans included into city budgets. Following the tripartite election of 2014, local councils were re-established, giving people more decentralized political representation. However, the reintroduction of elected local governments has created a serious leadership challenge at the community level in urban areas, and tensions have been reported between councillors, chiefs, block leaders and community development committee members over jurisdictions and mandates related to community planning and development (Chinsinga, 2015). The ways in which informal settlement groups can influence resource distribution through the representative elective system therefore remain limited.

Disconnections from national and urban policies of redistribution

As noted earlier, income levels are generally low in Malawi. The potential for redistributing wealth and power towards the poor is therefore less than in many other contexts (Harvey, 1973; Mwathunga, 2014). Furthermore, in line with the global push for neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s the Malawian government implemented a series of reforms to remove subsidies and privatize services. (Mwathunga, 2014). This reduced the distributive funding pot for housing and services targeting the urban poor and pushed costs over to the citizens themselves.

The status of informal settlements is ambiguous, particularly in the case of those that have developed on customary land, and they are not necessarily identified as illegal. City councils therefore do not dismiss demands from informal settlement groups entirely. They do, however, typically argue that they have too few resources to engage with informal settlements since most inhabitants in informal areas do not pay city rates (taxes). Several planners, urban experts and community members described this as a 'chicken and egg' situation. Community members refuse to pay city rates on the basis that the city authorities do not provide services to their settlements. The city council administrations, on the other hand, argue that they do deliver some services but are unable to provide full services because they lack sufficient funds. Since the community members do not trust the councils to manage their money, the situation remains stuck in a deadlock:

> Even if we pay money, nothing will happen. If you look at places where they made plots, the situation is still very bad. So, I would argue that if we did it [paid], it would be like that (Group discussion, community members, Salisburyline, Mzuzu, 23 April 2014).

While there is a certain logic to the argument of the city council administrations, the community members' concerns are not unfounded. The purpose of taxes and revenues is commonly to contribute to a redistribution of resources whereby the better off support the

15

poorest and most vulnerable in the city. This, however, has not been part of the conversation in Malawi, where participatory urban planning has a more confined area-based approach:

> City rates do not go from one area to another. So social justice and affirmative action is not discussed (Interview, lecturer, Mzuzu University, 24 April 2014).

The income from city rates in informal settlements would also be very small in comparison with the settlements' huge demand for services, and the bulk of city budgets tends to go to salaries for city officials (Manda, 2013). The suggestion that income from city rates in the informal settlements would be a game-changer for the provision of services in the same settlements thus seems highly improbable.

The manner in which participatory planning processes are disconnected from national and urban policies of redistribution also impacts the usefulness of information-gathering exercises. In India, where SDI's methodology was first developed, information gathering – enumerations in particular – served the specific purpose of providing documentation that could be used in legal cases against evictions (McFarlane, 2004). However, as described above, a majority of informal settlements in Malawi are built on land zoned for high-density housing, and house-ownership documents signed by the chiefs give households some sense of tenure security (Silungwe, 2009). Even when tenure is not secure, existing legal frameworks provide few options for demanding or obtaining such security. This means that documented dwelling does not hold the same value in Malawi as in many other contexts:

> The land is owned by those people. What the literature focuses on is where communities do not own the land (Interview, lecturer, Mzuzu University, 24 April 2014).

Lengthy enumeration exercises are therefore not necessarily the best use of resources, especially since the city authorities lack corresponding systems whereby the information could be translated into planning data and few resources are available for redirection (Refstie

& Hunga, 2015).

Do participatory planning discourses promise too much?

As we have illustrated above, community groups can achieve some socioeconomic rights
through self-mobilization supported by networks such as SDI. Activities such as building
minor infrastructure, opening up of roads, digging drains, waste management and
negotiations for services are examples of this (Refstie, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). However,
housing, mainstream service provision or larger-scale infrastructure seem to be out of reach
as they require a whole other level of resources and strategic negotiations with local and
national government institutions (Refstie & Brun, 2016; Watson, 2009). Given the social,
economic and political barriers described in this article, we therefore ask whether
participatory urban planning discourses – when framed in terms of realizing rights-based
claims through participatory planning – simply promise too much?

Urban scholarship has experienced a 'Northern' centrism in which grand theories are
developed on the basis of a narrow selection of cities (Chatterjee, 2012; Robinson & Roy,
2016; Roy, 2009a, 2015a, 2015b; Sheppard, Leitner & Maringanti, 2013; Watson, 2009,
2011). However, Southern urban scholarship is also shaped by certain dominant narratives.
While important contributions have been made from other contexts (on Malawi, see, for
example, Chinsinga, 2015; Chome & McCall, 2005; Manda et al., 2011; Potts, 1985), much
of the literature on participatory planning and citizenship focuses on major cities in Latin
America, India and South Africa (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2012; Chatterjee, 2004; Holston, 2008;
Miraftab, 2005; Parnell & Oldfield, 2014; Pieterse, 2008; Roy, 2003). In many of these cities,
the state has played a significant role in service provision and housing, and – although
perhaps insufficient – these are contexts in which some resources are available for
redistribution, and where stark inequalities and a sense of injustice shape claims to rights and
social justice from "the urban margins" (Holston, 2008). When practices developed in these

17

contexts are transferred to other urban vocabularies, it is not surprising that they yield different results.

As we have shown in this article, several factors limit the range of strategies and practices available to local groups seeking to realize their citizenship rights through participatory spaces in Malawi – challenging what the SDI model of strategic engagement and locally embedded mobilizing practices can achieve in terms of substantiating rights. At the same time, people use numerous strategies outside of participatory planning frameworks to engage in everyday politics (Robins, Cornwall & Von Lieres, 2008). In Malawi, mass protest is less common, while the growth of slum areas is more akin to a process of quiet and tolerated encroachments, to some extent accepted, even if not formally legal, by city and national authorities (Bayat, 2010; Rao, 2013). As we have noted, people also exploit bureaucratic slippages and connections and make use of a multitude of subject positions to negotiate their state or client relationships (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield, 2014; Millstein, 2017; Robins et al., 2008). In that sense, what may be insurgent practices in a Malawian context may be less visible and mundane, seldom transformed into the broader collective insurgencies and claims-making that shape protest politics and insurgent planning practices in, for instance, Brazilian and South African cities (Miraftab, 2012b). At the same time, the spaces and networks provided through the Federation and its alliances are important resources for community groups, helping them to build some capabilities to make use of the limited spaces available for their efforts to improve their living conditions. In this context, SDI strategies would benefit from basing themselves on more locally grounded understandings of the multiple formal and informal practices that underlie citizenship processes that keep contextual barriers in mind.

While the present article highlights the difficulties involved in transferring mobilization practices and strategies between contexts, we do not aim to either discredit or

romanticize the various SDI approaches pursued nationally or internationally. Longer-term

mobilization with a focus on people's capabilities may be exactly what is needed to influence

resource distribution and capacities for inclusion in Malawian cities. Furthermore, as shown

by the recent Know Your City campaign, SDI affiliates can produce visibility and voice in

innovative knowledge-production practices (McFarlane, 2017). Yet, in a low-resource setting

such as Malawi, where slum-upgrading processes are disconnected from discussions on

citywide and nationwide resource distribution, such strategies have not produced tangible

results. Instead, a combination of overly ambitious slum-upgrading proposals and enthusiastic

community mobilizers all too often produces expectations that are impossible to meet within

the existing frameworks, threatening the longer-term mobilization that SDI seeks (Refstie &

Brun, 2016).

The practices of active citizenship within the SDI-affiliated network are

simultaneously individual and collective, conformist and insurgent. Community groups in

Malawi, as elsewhere, are both engaging in formal participatory spaces and negotiating a

range of informal relations. They are also capable of mobilizing some resources for self-

managing smaller improvements in their settlements. Yet, a major challenge in Malawi is the

missing link to broader structural questions of redistribution and injustice. This is a key

aspect in theories of insurgent planning, which propose a more radical critique and

transformative agenda than planning practices that seek to work within the boundaries of

existing institutional setups. Yet radical resistance is not necessarily what motivates people to

participate in planning processes (Mitlin & Patel, 2014). Most of the participants interviewed

in this study expressed a wish to be included *into* practices and frameworks. For them, it was

therefore more important to create spaces in which participants were included, gained

recognition and got their voices accepted than to create 'noise' that challenged existing

structures and frameworks (Refstie & Brun, 2016). While this could be read as a form of

'civic governmentality' (Roy, 2009b), people were actively pursuing a variety of strategies in which this lack of 'noise' was a strategic choice. By not drawing attention to their areas, people were able to continue a range of informal practices related to housing and planning without the government's interference (Mwathunga, 2014). For many, it also made more sense to try to negotiate their own individual place within the system than to challenge it in a collective way (Cammack, 2007). Resistance was rather found, as discussed above, in the ways in which people settled in informal settlements and organized themselves directly with service providers through bureaucratic slippages and client relationships, or in how community groups organized services for themselves. A balancing therefore has to be considered between "the complex negotiation of local clientelist linkages that render daily lives bearable" and "the generally more external, ephemeral, and oppositional politics of rights, which often discard, expose, or confront clientelist links, at the risk of losing resources, if the new mobilization network does not last or succeed" (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield, 2014: 286).

Considering this balance, a first and perhaps pragmatic step for the Federation to take might be – as discussed in the collaboration that made up this research project – to establish more clearly what can be achieved with participatory planning at different scales, by whom, and in what timeframes, on the basis of the local social, political, economic and cultural dynamics in Malawian settlements. This means identifying what can be done by community groups themselves through strategies of self-transformation, what can be achieved with some funds and more connections to actors such as city councils and their administrations, and what requires more systemic change at the national level and beyond in terms of prioritization, resource distribution and recognition of informal settlements. Strategies also have to take into consideration different land-ownership schemes, dynamics of local governance and resource availability in various cityscapes. The understandings listed above

are important indicators for how slum upgrading can be implemented and need to be openly communicated in participatory projects and processes. In concrete terms, this would mean being realistic in costings, timeframes and scope. In some cases, it also means to "plan as if there are no money" (Interview, Director of Physical Planning, Zomba, 24 March 2014). Most importantly, it means acknowledging that the solution is not necessarily to be found with participatory planning at all, even when it transcends scale. As such, mobilizing in a low-resource context may call for a more modest link between participatory planning and the substantiation of citizenship rights.

In Malawi, CCODE and the Federation have taken measures to change their practices. In 2015, the Federation changed its name from the Malawi Homeless People's Federation to the Federation for the Rural and Urban Poor. This was to reflect how challenges facing urban communities were connected to those of the rural, as well as to include a wider segment of people. CCODE and the Federation have also initiated a number of activities to promote a more self-sufficient form of mobilization in terms of funding. Their work related to housing construction, brick production, economic administration and research has been separated out to a holding company owned by CCODE and the Federation. The latter company now offers these services to the wider market, while any economic surplus is channelled back into CCODE and Federation projects. While it remains to be seen whether this constitutes a viable economic strategy, it is an attempt to create a more stable financial base that can support long-term mobilization. CCODE and the Federation have also begun to place more emphasis on community strategies, not just plans. These strategies identify what can be achieved at different levels, with what resources, in the short, medium and long terms, and combine elements of self-implementation with more targeted advocacy and the formation of relationships between community committees and service providers. Lastly, the relationship between community planning and governance processes at the local and national level has

been taken up more actively in funding applications, advocacy work and the creation of a "Public Square" radio debate format.[12] These adaptations constitute some important steps towards more locally grounded strategies to substantiate urban citizenship claims.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that a nuanced and contextual analysis of participatory planning in a city at the margins of Southern urbanism defies simplistic binaries between neoliberal urban inclusion through civil society and insurgent planning as the solution to realizing urban citizenship. We have analysed drivers of and barriers to community mobilizing and participatory planning in Malawi, identifying three factors that inform what informal settlement groups can achieve in terms of citizenship rights in that context. One is the limited nature of the resources available for slum upgrading in Malawi, as the country is financially poor and urbanization is not prioritized. Another is the way in which community participation is delinked from national and urban policies on distribution owing to the history of the postcolonial state in Malawi, where centralization, coupled with neoliberal influences, has continued to be a dominant feature of political society. The local dynamics of clientelism and democratization are the third factor that influences the strategies and practices available to informal settlement groups. The 'rural' presence and role of chiefs is here identified as an opportunity in terms of community mobilizing and implementation of small-scale projects, but at the same time as a limitation when seen in connection with the lack of elective structures in which informal settlement groups can access local and national policy processes.

In the context described above, we ask if global discourses and strategies of participatory planning – whether integral to hegemonic ideas of neoliberal urban inclusion in

---

[12] The Public Squares are national interactive live debates that cover a number of topics related to development in Malawi. The debates are led by a veteran journalist, with panels mostly consisting of decision-makers and community representatives. There is also a live audience, and people can send comments and questions via SMS or Facebook (see https://www.facebook.com/Public-Square-543646862395117/).

global policies or scholarly critique and calls for insurgent planning – perhaps overestimate what participatory planning can achieve in terms of realizing citizenship rights and/or contributing to a more transformative urban politics. To move towards a more grounded approach to community mobilizing and participatory planning in Malawi, we therefore suggest a pragmatic approach that takes into account the balancing people have to make between the potential for systemic change and the resources they are able to access either by advancing their own positions within existing frameworks or by 'flying under the radar'. We thus lend our support to the observation made by Roy (2009: 827) that

> this is perhaps the point, the Africanist debates about agency, subjectivity, and politics defy the easy categorizations of power and resistance. Under conditions of crisis, the subaltern subject is simultaneously strategic and self-exploitative, simultaneously a political agent and a subject of the neoliberal grand slam.

This entanglement and overlap of inclusive and insurgent citizenship is well acknowledged by SDI (McFarlane, 2011; Mitlin & Patel, 2014). Nevertheless, as shown in this article, there remains some way to go in terms of adapting strategies to various local social, economic and cultural dynamics to expand the range of strategies and practices available to local groups.

References

Appadurai, A. (2001). Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon for politics. *Environment and Urbanization*, *13*(2), 23-43.

Appadurai, A. (2004). The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition. In V. Rao & M. Walton (Eds.). *Culture and Public Action* (pp. 59-84). Palo Alto, California, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bayat, A. (2010). *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East, 1st edition*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Beard, V.A. (2012). Citizen Planners: From Self-Help to Political Transformation. In R. Weber & R. Crane (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Planning* (pp. 706-721). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bènit-Gbaffou, C. (2012). Party politics, civil society and local democracy – Reflections from Johannesburg, *Geoforum, 43*(2), 178-189.

Bènit-Gbaffou, C. & Oldfield, S. (2014). Claiming 'rights' in the African city: popular mobilization and the politics of informality. In S. Parnell & S. Oldfield (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 281-296), London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Boonyabancha. S. & Mitlin, D. 2012. Urban poverty reduction: learning by doing in Asia. *Environment and Urbanization*, *24*(403), 403-421.

Butcher, S. and Frediani, A.A. (2014). Insurgent citizenship practices: the case of Muungano wa Wanavijiji in Nairobi, Kenya. *City, 18*(2), 119-133.

Cammack, D., Kanyongolo, E. & O'Neill, T. (2009). *Town chiefs in Malawi*. (Working paper no. 3, June 2009). London: Overseas Development Institute.

Cammack, D. (2007). The logic of African neopatrimonialism: What role for donors? *Development Policy Review, 25*(5), 599–614.

Cammack, D. (2011). *Malawi´s political settlement in crisis, 2011*. (Background Paper Africa Power and Politics Programme). London: Overseas Development Institute.

Chasukwa, M. & Chinsinga, B. (2013). Slapping Accountability in the Face: Observance of Accountability in Malawi's Local Governments in the Absence of Councillors. *International Journal of Public Administration, 36*(5), 354-366.

Chatterjee, P. (2004). *The politics of the governed in most of the world.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Chatterjee, P. (2012). After subaltern studies. *Economic and Political Weekly, 47*(35), 44–9.

Chen, M., Jhabvala, R., Kanbur, R. & Richards, C. (Eds.). (2007). *Membership Based Organizations of the Poor.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Chinsinga, B. (2015). *The Political Economy Analysis of Urban Governance and Management in Malawi.* (Report Tilitonse Fund November 2015). Lilongwe: Tilitonse

Fund. Retrieved at: http://tilitonsefund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/PEA-on-Urban-Governance-PV-111215.pdf

Chome, J. & McCall, M. K. (2005). Neo-customary title registration in informal settlements: The case of Blantyre. *International Development Planning Review, 77*(4), 385-411.

Cities Alliance (2012). *Cities Alliance Annual Report 2012.* (Annual report 2012). Washington DC, DC: Cities Alliance.

Cornwall, A. (2004). Spaces for transformation? Reflections on issues of power and difference in participation in development. In S. Hickey & G.Mohan (Eds.). *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development* (pp. 75-91). London: Zed.

Dionne, K.Y. & Horowitz, J. (2016). The Political Effects of Agricultural Subsidies in Africa: Evidence from Malawi. *World Development, 87*, 215-226.

Englund, H. (Ed.). (2002). *Democracy of Chameleons: Politics and Culture in the New Malawi.* Blantyre: Christian Literature Association.

Hammett, D. (2017). Introduction: Exploring the Contested Terrain of Urban Citizenship. *International Development Planning Review*, 39(1), 1-13.

Harvey, D. (1973). *Social Justice and the City.* London: Edward Arnold.

Hickey, S & Mohan, G. (Eds.). (2004). *Participation - From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development.* London: Zed Books.

Holston, J. (2008). *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil.* New Jersey, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Holston, J. (2011). Contesting privilege with right: the transformation of differentiated citizenship in Brazil. *Citizenship Studies, 15*(3-4), 335-352.

Huchzermeyer, M. (2011). *Cities with 'slums': From Informal Settlement Eradication to a Right to the City in Africa.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Kabeer, N. (Ed.). (2005). *Inclusive citizenship: Meanings and expressions.* London: Zed Books.

Kruse, C. (2005). Grassroots Participation in Urban Environments - Involving the People in the Development Planning Process in Towns and Cities. In C. Kruse & M.A.Z. Manda

(Eds.). *Lessons in Urban Management - Experiences in Malawi 2000-2005*. Lilongwe: Malawi-German Programme for Democracy and Decentralization.

Manda, M.A.Z. (2009). *Water and sanitation in urban Malawi: Can the Millennium Development Goals be met? A study of informal settlements in three cities.* (Human Settlements Working Paper Series, IIED). London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

Manda, M.A.Z . (2013). *Situation of Urbanization in Malawi Report*. (Report for Ministry of Lands and Housing). Lilongwe: Ministry of Lands and Housing, Lilongwe.

Manda, M.A.Z., Nkhoma, S. & Mitlin, D. (2011). *Understanding pro-poor housing finance in Malawi*. (Human Settlement Working Paper Series, Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas – 32, IIED). London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

McFarlane, C. (2004). Geographical Imaginations and Spaces of Political Engagement: Examples from the Indian Alliance. *Antipode, 36*(5), 890-916.

McFarlane, C. (2011). *Learning the city. Knowledge and translocal assemblage.* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

McFarlane, C. & Söderström, O. (2017). On alternative smart cities – From a technology-intensive to a knowledge-intensive smart urbanism. *City*, 21(3-4), 312-328.

Millstein, M. (2017). Rights, identities and belongings: Reflections on the everyday politics of urban citizenship in Delft, Cape Town. *Norwegian Journal of Geography, 71*(4), 253-267.

Millstein, M., Oldfield, S., & Stokke, K. (2003). uTshani BuyaKhuluma – The Grass Speaks: The Political Space and Capacity of the South African Homeless People`s Federation. *Geoforum, 34*(4), 457-468.

Miraftab, F. (2005). Making Neoliberal Governance: The Disempowering Work of Empowerment. *International Planning Studies, 9*(4): 239-259.

Miraftab, F. (2009). Insurgent Planning: Situating Radical Planning in the Global South. *Planning Theory, 8*(1), 32-50.

Miraftab, F. (2012a). Planning and Citizenship. In R. Weber & and R. Crane (Eds.). *Oxford Handbook of Urban Planning* (pp. 1180-1204). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miraftab, F. (2012b). Right to the City and the Quiet Appropriations of Local Space in the Heartland. In M, Peter Smith & M, McQuarrie (Eds.). *Remaking urban citizenship – Organizations, institutions, and the right to the city. Comparative urban and community research volume 10* (pp. 191-203). New Jersey, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Mitlin, D. (2008). With and beyond the state – co-production as a route to political influence, power and transformation for grassroots organizations. *Environment and Urbanization, 20*(2), 339-360.

Mitlin, D. (2013). *Locally managed funds: a route to pro-poor urban development.* (IIED Briefing May 2013). London: International Institute for Environment and Development. Retrieved at: http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17154IIED.pdf

Mitlin, D. (2014). *Achieving universal sanitation: Sharing the experience of the SDI affiliate in Blantyre, Malawi.* London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

Mitlin, D. & Patel, S. (2014). The urban poor and strategies for a pro-poor politics – Reflections on Shack/slum dwellers International. In S. Parnell & S. Oldfield (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 296-308). London & New York: Routledge.

Mitlin, D. & Satterthwaite, D. (2013). *Urban poverty in the global South: Scale and nature.* London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Mohan, G. & Stokke, K. 2000. Participatory development and empowerment: the dangers of localism. *Third World Quarterly, 2*(2), 247-268.

Mwathunga, E. (2014). *Contesting Spaces in Urban Malawi: A Lefebvrian Analysis.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from: http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/86660

Oldfield, S. & K. Stokke. (2007). Political Polemics and Local Practices of Community Organizing and Neoliberal Politics in South Africa. In H. Leitner, J. Peck & E.S. Sheppard (Eds.). *Contesting Neoliberalism. Urban Frontiers.* New York and London: The Guilford Press.

Parnell, S. & Oldfield, S. (Eds.). (2014). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South.* London and New York: Routledge.

Patel, S., Burra, S., & D`Cruz, C. (2001). Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) – foundations to treetops. *Environment and Urbanization, 13*(2), 45-59.

Pieterse, E., (2008). *City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development*. London: Zed Books.

Potts, D. (1985). Capital Relocation in Africa: The Case of Lilongwe in Malawi. *The Geographical Journal, 15*(2), 182-19.

Rao, U. (2013). Tolerated Encroachment: Resettlement Policies and the Negotiation of the Licit/illicit Divide in an Indian Metropolis. *Cultural Anthropology, 28*(4): 760-779.

Refstie, H. (2013). *Doing it ourselves – Community mobilization and strategic planning in Senti settlement.* Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE, and TRI. http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/27-case-study-1-senti

Refstie, H. (2014a). *Building Representation and Partnerships – Chikanda Zomba.* Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE, and TRI. Retrieved at: http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/47-case-study-2-zomba-chikanda

Refstie, H. (2014b). From Plans to Action: Mobilizing Funds and Credits for Slum Upgrading in Nancholi Blantyre. Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE, and TRI. Retrieved at: http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/50-case-study-3-nancholi-chiimire

Refstie, H. (2014c). *Negotiating Services through Community Committees – Ndirande Makata Blantyre.* Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE, and TRI. Retrieved at: http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/48-case-study-4-ndirande-makata

Refstie, H. (2014d). *Left Hanging? Participatory Slum Upgrading and Studio Planning in Salisburyline.* Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE, and TRI. Retrieved at: http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/49-case-study-5-salisburyline

Refstie, H. 2015. *Is this Participatory Budgeting? The Blantyre Process*. Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE, and TRI, Lilongwe. Retrieved at: http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/79-participatory-budgeting-blantyre accessed 09.07.2017

Refstie, H. (forthcoming). Action research in critical scholarship – Negotiating multiple imperatives. Accepted in ACME.

Refstie, H. & C. Brun (2016). Voicing noise: Political agency and the trialectics of participation in urban Malawi. *Geoforum, 74*, 136–146.

Refstie, H. & Hunga, W. (2015). *Some lessons to be learned – Informal Settlement Upgrading Project in Chinsapo and Mtandire.* Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE, and TRI.

Robins, S. (2010). How deep is deep Democracy? Grassroots mobilization from Mumbai to Cape Town. In V. Schattan, P. Coelho & B. Von Lieres (Eds.). *Mobilizing for Democracy: Citizen Action and the Politics of Public Participation* (pp.1-11). London: Zed Books.

Robins, S., Cornwall, A. & von Lieres, B. (2008). Rethinking 'Citizenship' in the Postcolony. *Third World Quarterly, 29*(6), 1069-1086.

Robinson, J. & Roy, A. (2016). Debate on global urbanisms and the nature of urban theory. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 40*(1), 181-186.

Roy, A. (2003). *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Roy, A. (2009a). The 21st-Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory. *Regional Studies, 43*(6), 819-830.

Roy, A. (2009b). Civic Governmentality: The Politics of Inclusion in Beirut and Mumbai. *Antipode, 41*(1), 159-179.

Roy, A. (2015a). What is urban about critical urban theory? *Urban Geography*, *37*(6), 810-823.

Roy. A. (2015b). Who`s afraid of postcolonial theory? *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 40*(1), 200-209.

Rossi, U. & Vanolo, A. (2012). *Urban Political Geographies: A Global Perspective*, *1st edition.* Los Angeles, LA: SAGE.

Satterthwaite, D. (2001). From professionally driven to people-driven poverty reduction: reflections on the role of Shack/Slum Dwellers International. *Environment & Urbanization, 13*(2), 135-138.

Sheppard, E., Leitner, H. & Maringanti, A. (2013). Provincializing Global Urbanism: A Manifesto. *Urban Geography, 34*:7, 893-900.

Silungwe, C. (2009). Customary Land Tenure Reform and Development: A Critique of Customary Land Tenure Reform under Malawi's National Land Policy. *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal 2009,* (1), 1-20.

UN Habitat (2013). *Streets as public spaces and drivers of urban prosperity*. Nairobi: UN Habitat.

Watson, V. (2009). Seeing from the South: Refocusing Urban Planning on the Globe`s Central Urban Issues. *Urban Studies, 46*(11), 2259-2275.

Watson, V. (2011). New Challenges for Theory and Practice Engaging with Citizenship and Urban Struggle Through an Informality Lens. *Planning Theory & Practice, 12*(1), 115-153.

Watson, V. (2014). Co-Production and collaboration in planning – The difference. *Planning Theory & Practice, 15*(1), 62-76.

Yiftachel, O. (2009). Critical theory and 'grey space' – Mobilization of the colonized. *City, 13*(2-2), 240-255.

The Beginning is never the beginning: How to co-produce a space for action research

Hilde Refstie

Abstract

Most action research processes aim to improve living conditions, assist in the development of more effective policies or create spaces for mobilization. The outputs of such research tend to be well documented, but less attention has been given to how spaces for action research are co-produced. This article uses a narrative autobiographical approach to analyse the initial phase of a collaborative action research process with informal settlement groups and their partners in Malawi. It discusses how the research topic emerged, the process of identifying entry points, and how negotiations among participants, partners, researchers and institutions at different levels influenced how the space for action research was formed. The article concludes that interrogating the multiple beginnings that form an action research project can make visible how situated knowledges and power relations are negotiated in the research process. The aim of the article is thus not only to create more consciousness around how action research projects are formed but also to explore how a framework for collaborative action research that pays more attention to the initial phases can help action research be more transparent and accountable.

Encountering action research

❖❖❖

In 2007, I travelled from Norway to Uganda to conduct fieldwork for my master's degree thesis. Like many other development studies scholars, I held a general interest in development practice and issues of social justice. I was therefore excited when I came across the action research literature. For me, the action research approach represented a framework that could link the academic world with problem-solving action. Working with experienced researchers at the Refugee Law Project in Uganda, I therefore jumped at the opportunity to develop the fieldwork into a collaborative research project with urban internally displaced persons (IDPs) who wished to be included into the return and recovery frameworks being developed for Uganda's northern region at the time (Refugee Law Project, 2007). The outputs of our project had an impact well beyond the Ugandan context,[1] and the IDP representatives expressed the view that the process had been fruitful. Nevertheless, the project did not necessarily have immediate effects in terms of the well-being of the participants. The funds for the return and recovery process were limited. The fact that 'urban IDPs' had received increased attention through the project, both

nationally and internationally, therefore did not automatically translate into direct benefits for the community members involved. Furthermore, while I was placed at a Ugandan institution that had considerable experience with action research during the one-and-a-half-year-long period of my fieldwork, the project, which was continued, lost some of its momentum when I left. At the end of the research process, I was therefore left with several unanswered questions regarding how good and sustainable action research might best be developed (for a reflection on this, see Refstie & Brun, 2011). When I applied for a PhD scholarship some years later, my experiences from Uganda remained fresh in my mind. I therefore emphasized in my application that if this PhD project were to develop into action research, the research would have to be built incrementally from a solid partnership with participants and relevant institutions and feed directly into existing activities that could be taken forward independently of the researcher. I was also interested in further exploring the approach we had used in Uganda, where we had moved beyond local small-scale projects and into advocacy and policy work at the national and global level.

<div align="center">❖ ❖ ❖</div>

It is often difficult to identify when a particular research project begins. Action research projects, for example, are often presented as emanating from a group of participants without it necessarily being revealed how a particular research constellation came into existence (Arieli & Friedman, 2009; McArdle, 2002, 2004, 2008; Mehta, 2008; Wicks & Reason, 2009). This is problematic since 'beginnings' are important in shaping power dynamics and thus the formation and trajectory of research projects. It is therefore surprising that while participation is widely discussed in the action research literature, relatively few studies deal with or unpack the process of building the participatory relationship itself (Arieli & Friedman, 2009).

In this article, I will use the example of an action research project with informal settlement groups in Malawi and their partners to explore whether an increased focus on 'beginnings' can help action research become more transparent and accountable. 'Beginnings' are in this context defined as certain meeting points and interfaces between researchers, literature, institutional contexts, participants and actors that led to the research becoming a specific collaborative project. This 'beginnings' approach is inspired by Gillian Rose's (1997) discussion of Donna Haraway's (1991) work on 'situated knowledges', as well as various debates on co-production of knowledge in the participation and action research literature (Arieli & Friedman, 2009; Cornwall, 2008; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; McArdle, 2002, 2004, 2008; Mehta, 2008; Wicks & Reason, 2009).

As illustrated in the opening of the article, I use a narrative autobiographical approach to tease out some of the different categories of beginnings that are characteristic of action research. I analyse how the action research approach was encountered; how research questions were developed; how I gained access to the field; how a collaboration was formed; and how multiple beginnings in the partnership influenced the direction of the research. The article concludes that a focus on positionalities situated in beginnings can make visible how different interests are negotiated in the research process, and thus respond to some of the critique levelled against action research in relation to transparency and accountability (Bradbury-Huang, 2010). However, while the 'beginnings' approach might hold the potential to do so, it does not in our case disrupt the academically centred gaze. As the opening part of this article illustrates, reflexivity still tend to be focused on

the academic voice. This reproduces the unfortunate trend of the researcher as a monological author (Janes, 2016). While some quotes and perspectives from evaluative interviews with research partners are included in the article it is thus important to keep in mind 'whose' beginnings are being conveyed and how subjects are formed in this reflexive process.

Formulating research questions/approach

❖❖❖

After my master's degree project in Uganda, I went to work with an international organization for whom city planning and slum upgrading was an important focus. I was part of a team that developed integrated country programmes and worked closely with international, national and local actors in several countries, including Uganda. Through this work, I became interested in how local communities mobilize and how they achieve change through planning and slum upgrading. I therefore wanted to pursue these topics further in a PhD. Uganda would have been the obvious choice of research context for such a project, but after some consideration I concluded that it would be tricky to 'change hats' after having already engaged with Ugandan civil society and the local and national government from the position of a development partner. I therefore looked at other relevant country-contexts, and Malawi came up as an interesting choice. In Malawi only 20 per cent of the population lives in urban areas, but these areas are growing extremely fast (National Statistical Office, 2010). Planning for urban growth therefore has the potential to make a significant difference to the country's development. Malawi had also recently started developing various urban policies, and I knew through my work with the international development organization that several grass-roots initiatives were active in its informal settlements. I was curious as to what motivated people in informal settlements to mobilize, whether they participated in the different planning and policy processes, and how this all linked together at various levels of governance.

❖❖❖

McArdle (2008) describes the beginning of a research project as when we become visible to others and ourselves in our affiliation with a particular agenda. She argues that this happens when we express our desire to pursue this agenda and seek resources to do so, and uses the example of how an idea develops through discussions with colleagues or friends before it is formalized into a concrete proposal. In an action research project, the Beginning (here indicated by a capital B) is typically perceived to be the formation of communicative spaces where the participants meet (Kemmis, 2006; Wicks & Reason, 2009). However, this is seldom the actual beginning. If we focus on the first part of McArdle's description, where she argues that the beginning of a research project is also

about becoming visible to *ourselves* in how we affiliate with a certain agenda, there is certainly one, if not more beginnings preceding the Beginning. We therefore have to move the discussion beyond the conscious conceptualization of research ideas and take into account the various dimensions of positionality and situatedness that influenced how we got there (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Furthermore, research projects are typically not developed in isolation, but rather in mutually constituted social relations (Rose, 1997). This is especially the case in action research, which has a strong focus on partnerships and co-production of knowledge.

One way of unpacking participatory relationships can be through reflexivity. Reflexivity is the conscious attempt to identify how the research process itself is structured (Mehta, 2008:240). It is also about identifying power relations and how power operates in the research process. At the same time, Gillian Rose (1997) argues that it is presumptuous of us to imagine that we can fully know ourselves, research participants and partners, and the contexts in which we operate. Our knowledge of the world will always be partial and situated (Rose, 1997). She therefore suggests moving away from the traditional conceptualization of researcher positionality and instead focusing on how the researcher, the researched and research connect and how they meet and constitute each other. 'Beginnings' are crucial in this context. They represent meeting points and interfaces; they shape research actors and subjects; and they negotiate relationships through time and space.

Access and meeting points

❖❖❖

I was a complete foreigner to the Malawian context. To carry out the planned research, I therefore needed an access point. Once accepted into the PhD programme at my university, I therefore contacted the Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE), which is the largest NGO working on informal settlement issues in Malawi.[2] CCODE works in alliance with the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor (hereafter 'Federation'), which is a grass-roots network of poor people working to increase access to land, housing and other resources at the local and national levels. The Federation is also affiliated to Slum Dwellers International,[3] a global network with which I had previously engaged while at my former workplace.

During my first meeting with the CCODE director in February 2013, I presented my broad ideas for the research. It was agreed that I could have a desk space at their office and that I could follow the work CCODE were doing. They would also introduce me to potential research assistants and people in the Federation. In return, I was to help them with some of the work they were doing on developing funding applications, improving reporting mechanisms, and operationalizing monitoring and evaluation frameworks. CCODE had worked with both national and international researchers before and saw the collaboration as an opportunity to develop their knowledge base.

> *Researchers add more value to our work. When you have this kind of movement and processes that we support, if people are just talking from the*

4

point of view of their experiences, then the validity of whatever issues that they are raising can easily be challenged if it is not validated by any form of research findings, or indeed if there has not been that kind of critical reflection on the situation. The fact that it is a researcher who seriously works on this makes the documents carry some weight with them. So, in a bigger way, researchers kind of help us in terms of pushing forward for this particular agenda (Interview, Head of Research and Advocacy, CCODE, 12 May 2017).

<div align="center">❖❖❖</div>

Collaborations and partnerships can have several functions and can be defined in a number of ways. Broadly, they involve mutual goals, shared commitments and a type of structural arrangement over time (Jacoby, 2003). Partnerships can be well defined from the outset, formalized in contractual terms, or they can, as in our case, develop more incrementally. They are also ridden with power relations that are deeply contextual, inevitable and uneven. At the same time, knowledge is 'always caught in translation' (Jazeel & McFarlane, 2010 p. 116). Privilege is therefore never total. It works in a complex sociality, where power flows in several directions making room for multiple forms of agency in the knowledge-production process (Janes, 2016). The final product is therefore always a negotiation.

Establishing common aims

<div align="center">❖❖❖</div>

I decided, in consultation with CCODE and the Federation to do interviews in three informal settlements in Lilongwe. The Federation facilitated the initial contact, and following the custom in Malawi, my research assistant and I started out interviewing various community leaders (traditional chiefs, community development committee chairs, block leaders, church leaders and leaders of women's groups) before we began moving around and conducting interviews in a more randomized fashion. The interviews had an open-ended design, where we discussed everything from moving patterns, livelihoods, settlement issues, community mobilization, and how people thought about and related to planning and slum-upgrading efforts in their areas. In the interviews, we pursued topics that were emphasized by the participants,[4] and at the end of each interview we always asked the participants what they thought the research should focus on and whether there were ways in which the research could be made relevant for them. In parallel, we also conducted interviews with a number of actors that included representatives from local and national government, NGOs, service providers, municipal associations, donors and

development partners, as well as other researchers. After this initial round of interviews, we organized a focus group discussion in each of the three settlements to discuss emerging issues and initial findings. Similar group discussions were also held with Federation leaders and with the CCODE staff.

A number of issues came up from the interviews, observations and participatory analysis in this first phase, particularly around how slum upgrading projects in Malawi were seldom implemented. CCODE and Federation representatives were therefore eager to go deeper into how informal settlement communities worked with their city council administrations.[5] The Federation representatives also wanted to expand the study to include not just Lilongwe but also Malawi's three next-largest cities: Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba. At first, I was not particularly thrilled about this suggestion, since I felt that it was difficult enough to cover the settlements in which I was already conducting interviews. However, they argued that by using different cities we could show how the various city council administrations were working with their settlements in different ways, and again use that to push city council administrations that were completely ignoring their informal settlement populations into action. The scaling-up of the project also resonated with some of the questions I had been mulling over from previous experiences on how to move action research beyond the immediate local-community context. We therefore agreed that on my next field stay I would travel to Mzuzu, Zomba and Blantyre to link up with community groups in those places and document and discuss initiatives that were going on.

<div align="center">❖❖❖</div>

Action research comes from a desire to affect change, and change is therefore a sought outcome (Grant, Nelson & Mitchell, 2008). Three forms of action research are typically identified in this context: technical, practical and emancipatory/critical (Kemmis, 2006). Technical action research is oriented towards functional improvements of practice. It is a form of problem-solving in which experts test their theories with the aim of producing more effective practice. Practical action research also seeks to improve practice, but does so through deliberation, where the knowledge of participants guides the project. Emancipatory or critical action research seeks not just to improve practice but also to question the discourses in which these practices are framed. Its goal is to connect the personal with the political and challenge institutionalized exclusion and inequality (Kemmis, 2006; Nielsen and Nielsen, 2010). The emancipatory/critical approach releases the political potential in action research, which is largely to be found in its ability to jump scales. It does this by linking local actions to a larger democratic social-change agenda (Cahill, Sultana & Pain, 2007). However, what constitutes change, and how it can best be achieved, is the subject of continuous negotiation between project partners and participants. Community representatives might, for instance, seek concrete and immediate outcomes, while organizations and researchers might focus more on abstract or longer-term goals. The question often becomes how one can work both pragmatically to achieve practical results within the given policy practices and at the same time more critically to question the status quo of the practices itself (Refstie, forthcoming).

Moving into action

❖❖❖

One thing that came up in the interviews and group discussions with community members in the four cities was that most of their community planning processes were undocumented, and few case studies existed – other than a handful that had been developed to respond to donor-reporting requirements. The representatives therefore argued that one of the roles I could play as a researcher would involve developing some kind of documentation that could be used both for learning purposes and for communicating with decisionmakers. CCODE agreed with this, as they were also under pressure from some of their donors to develop more evaluations and case studies from their work. We therefore decided, as part of the action-oriented approach, to develop a series of case studies that spanned the four cities. Based on the visits in the three cities plus Lilongwe, seven mini–case studies analysing slum planning and upgrading processes were therefore developed.[6] The drafts were shared with the community groups, who got to comment and make changes to the studies, and the final versions of the studies were distributed to the community groups in three languages. They were also shared in various Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and university networks and at events organized by CCODE.

A recurring theme in the case studies developed was that the community groups were able to carry out small projects on their own, but they struggled with broader infrastructure projects, such as drainage systems, roads, water and electricity. They were also unable to secure for themselves the same services that were offered in the wealthier areas or to achieve secure tenure. Part of the reason for this was that slum planning and upgrading tended to be technical, depoliticized and area-based. The processes rarely discussed or addressed resource distribution, social justice or belonging in the city (Refstie & Brun, 2016). The overall funding pot for slum upgrading both nationally and locally was also small, and the majority of participatory slum-upgrading plans therefore lacked resources for implementation (Refstie and Millstein, draft).

Accordingly, one conclusion that was drawn was that the participatory planning processes studied were not transformative. The processes did increase the influence of marginalized groups in decisionmaking in some instances, but they did not confront the forces that were causing the social exclusion to begin with. As researchers, we were inspired by the literature on participatory spaces (Cornwall, 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Miraftab, 2005) and recent debates in political and cultural geography (Davidson & Iveson, 2014; Dikeç, 2005, 2007, 2012; Isin, 2008; Kallio, 2012; Purcell, 2013, 2014; Rancière, 2001, 2009, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2014) that suggest that acting within existing scripts only produces limited change (Isin, 2008). This resonated with the findings from our project, which showed that the existing participatory spaces had little impact on the status of urban dwellers, their access to resources and their inclusion as full members of their cities. We therefore advocated on the basis of the initial analysis for a more agonistic approach to participatory planning in Malawi that aimed to repoliticize it by bringing in discussions on redistribution of resources and the inclusion of slum dwellers as full members into the city (Refstie & Brun, 2016).

CCODE and Federation representatives agreed with the overall conclusion that the participatory processes had not been transformative. However, they pointed out that most of the participants in the study preferred to be included into existing frameworks rather than challenge them. Therefore the call for a more agonistic approach to participatory planning did not entirely resonate with them. This also became visible in the workshop discussions in which the understandings from the first academic article were presented.

<div align="center">❖❖❖</div>

In her book *The Misguided Search for the Political,* McNay (2014) shows how political theorizing has a tendency to remove itself from the everyday understandings and practices of people. When critical theory aims to speak more directly to strategies of change, it therefore runs the risk of becoming 'socially weightless'. Participatory approaches and action research were originally developed to avoid this problem, as the researchers would be held accountable by the participants, at least to some extent. However, as research and researchers move in time and space, the distance between fieldwork and academic writing makes the question of accountability more challenging. Academic writing often starts after a period of fieldwork and analysis, when the researcher has more or less 'left' the field. Initial findings have been discussed and developed together with participants and partners, but the continuing developments in understandings now often, as in our case, begin more as a dialogue between the researchers and the academy. Article writing, for example, is a process of its own, in which findings are reanalysed and understood in relation to new and developing theory. Comments from reviewers and conference panels are influencing elements here, replacing some of the close initial contact between researchers, participants and partners.

> Because you move elsewhere to write from afar [Norway], you do not get the same amount of input. You have the analysis at the level of case studies, but it is also important to test if the conception of the argument would be as you have conceived it at the abstract level in the academic articles too. Because those arguments are from the knowledge that you have collected from these people (Interview, Head of Research and Advocacy, CCODE, 12 May 2017).

Mechanisms therefore have to be put in place so that the research, also in its more final form as academic writing, is shared and opened up for participant influence. In our case, such mechanisms took the form of meetings, a stakeholder workshop and an interactive radio debate. Partners also commented on article drafts and, as mentioned earlier in the article, some evaluative interviews with partners were conducted in parallel with the writing up of the articles. These encounters led to a change in direction for the research (Refstie, forthcoming).

Changing direction

❖❖❖

Our framework for change did not resonate fully with the partners and participants. It was thus important for us as researchers to understand that 'the political' – defined as challenging unequal power and resource distribution – was not necessarily the prime motivation that drove people to participate in planning processes (Refstie, forthcoming). For many, it made more sense to try to negotiate their individual place within the system than to challenge it in a collective way (Cammack, 2007). Resistance was rather found in the ways in which people settled in informal settlements and organized themselves directly with service providers (Refstie, 2014) or in how community groups organized services for themselves (Refstie, 2013). This is more in line with what Bayat describes as the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' (Bayat, 1997, p. 57) and represents a type of 'tolerated encroachment' (Rao, 2013) from the side of the state – a 'tolerated encroachment' that could be jeopardized if people made too much 'noise'. People also exploited bureaucratic slippages and connections and made use of a multitude of subject positions to negotiate their state or client relationships (Millstein, 2017). Our initial analysis therefore had to be modified, and we as researchers had to dig deeper in terms of academic theorizing to better understand people's everyday aspirations and strategies for change. This ended in a revised framework for understanding that took into account the balancing people had to make between the potential for systemic change and the resources they were able to access by either advancing their own positions within existing frameworks, or 'flying under the radar' (Refstie and Millstein, draft).

❖❖❖

Beginnings matter: Theoretical positioning, participation and accountability

> For any writer to begin is to embark upon something connected to a designated point of departure. Even when it is repressed, the beginning is always a first step from which (except on rare occasions) something follows. So beginnings play a role, if not always a very clearly understood one (Said, 1975, p. xvi).

Through the above sections I have highlighted some of the factors that shaped how our space for action research was produced. The experiences I had as an action researcher in Uganda, the contact points that were construed through previous engagements in the wider field, and the specific circumstances under which the researchers, partners and participants

met and worked together all played their part. Five categories of beginnings were identified: encountering action research, formulating research questions/approach, establishing common aims, moving into action and changing direction. While these categories of beginnings are presented in a linear fashion, their nature is far more complex. Instead of analysing the research process using the categories as headings, I will therefore show how the different categories of beginnings influenced the research along three important axes in particular: those of theoretical positioning, participation and accountability.

Theoretical positioning

Action researchers, particularly in the development tradition, tend to have ambitions in their work towards a world free of social injustice and inequity. Action research therefore typically focuses on 'the marginalized' and 'out of place' (Mehta, 2008, p. 238). Furthermore, since the emphasis tends to be on how participants can change their lives, the perspectives are commonly actor-oriented and focused on people's agency (Reason, 2006). Action researchers are also often dependent on working with organized collectives. Agency, especially in the development studies tradition therefore has a tendency to be studied as community mobilizing practices. This means that agency is framed in a narrow way as collective, organized and taking place within certain frameworks (Robins, Cornwall & Von Lieres, 2008). Our project was no exception. The emphasis was on actors in urban planning, and agency was looked for in community mobilizing processes specifically. As illustrated in this article, this focus was shaped by my normative theoretical background in research and my previous experiences as an action researcher. It was also influenced both by the ways in which I gained access to the field and by the agency performed by the participants and partners of the collaboration.

The specific focus on agency as community mobilizing within the framework of participatory planning might not be problematic in itself. However, in our case it gave rise to some conceptual blind spots where important perspectives were overlooked. For example, the idea that participatory planning is the primary institutional entry point to addressing inequalities in the city tends to ignore other forms of everyday politics (Robins et al., 2008). In our project, this led to an underestimation of the everyday practices that people used to instigate change outside of the participatory planning frameworks and contact points studied. Fortunately, the way the research collaboration and partnership had been built in terms of participation opened up for a broadened perspective, as discussions were facilitated both on the findings themselves and on the way in which they were represented.

Participation

In general, action research aims to involve participants and partners in all phases of the research process. Participation becomes both a means and an end. At the same time, participation is an ambiguous concept and can have different meanings at different stages

10

(McArdle, 2008). In our project, for example, the levels of participation changed throughout the process, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.
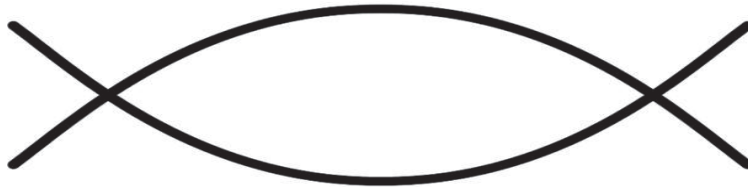
Figure 1: The cycle of participation in the project

The left funnel in this figure could be said to represent all the elements that influenced the project before it was consciously conceptualized. In our story, this was symbolized by the overarching theoretical context and moral commitments, the action research experiences in Uganda, and the institutional context in which the project proposal was developed. The narrowest point on the left-hand side represents the formulation of the project proposal by the researchers (me in discussion with my supervisor). Upon my arrival in Malawi, this conceptualization was then discussed with key informants, such as representatives from CCODE, the Federation, traditional chiefs and community committees. The project also engaged with a wider set of community members through the exploratory phase, as well as with various actors within urban planning in Malawi. At this stage, participation was at its widest. As a more concrete action research project was identified, participation started to narrow again. When the focus expanded to include four cities and seven participatory slum planning and upgrading processes, the project increasingly relied on participation through representatives. Moreover, the conversation on how to act on the research was to a large degree held among the researchers, NGO workers and Federation representatives. This culminated in the narrowest point on the right-hand side, when the researchers began to write up the academic article-based part of the research. While drafts were shared with the partners to comment upon, and some interviews were conducted in the process, during this time the writing was very much the business of the researchers. The right-hand funnel then symbolizes how participation in the research was opened up again when the initial results and reflections were discussed at the workshop and in the radio debate. After this, the research was shared with the wider academic community in the form of articles.

The above figure corresponds well with McArdle's (2008) point that participation is always an ongoing negotiation. Participation therefore contains a whole range of beginnings and ends that shape projects, and that have direct consequences for how accountability is maintained. In our case, participation was weakened in the more academic article-writing stage. However, there were still some mechanisms in place for interaction, and participants and partners therefore managed to get their voices through and influence the course of the research also in this phase.

Accountability

The use of participatory methods can be one way to include more perspectives into the research process. However, this can also lead to a form of 'tyranny' in which voices are silenced by researchers borrowing legitimacy from and speaking 'on behalf of' marginalized groups (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). It is therefore important to keep in mind that while working together through participatory research methods may reduce power inequalities between researchers and participants, it definitely does not erase them (Grant et al., 2008). Action research also adds some extra elements of complexity. Since the emphasis is on co-production of knowledge and action, the positionality and situatedness of participants play a very important role. So does the institutional context in which an action research project is framed. These multiple angles are not easy to capture, and reflexive exercises have often been accused of becoming navel-gazing exercises, thus failing to produce transparency and accountability (Kobayashi, 2003; Nagar, 2002). As described by Finlay (2002, p. 12)

> On their journey, they [the researchers] can all too easily fall into the mire of the infinite regress of excessive self analysis and deconstructions at the expense of focusing on the research participants and developing understanding.

Research is typically presented from the view of the researcher, which silences the perceptions and perspectives of participants. This centrality of the academic voice is further reinforced by the structures in place for research and academic publishing that favour the monological author (Janes, 2016). At the same time, co-authorship does not necessarily challenge the unequal power of (re)presentation. In fact, co-authorship can in some cases conceal power relations, as people are portrayed as participating in the writing process on equal footing while the specific format and formalities that characterize article writing typically favour the researcher voice (Ahmed, 2000). In our process, the distance between the researchers, participants and partners increased in the academic article-writing phase. While some of this distance was mediated by the additional interviews with the project partners, the approach leaves more power in the hands of the researcher than is advocated in more participant-centric approaches (Kapoor, 2009). Nevertheless, acknowledging and making visible that knowledge is produced from negotiated encounters can still be argued to be one step in the right direction, as increased attention to beginnings, even from the perspective of the researcher, makes co-production of knowledge more transparent, and hopefully also more accountable (Heron, 1996).

Conclusion

Beginnings shape projects and influence both processes and outcomes. They are thus important indicators for understanding how projects develop, who makes decisions and how knowledge is negotiated in different encounters. In this article, I have shown how

multiple beginnings shaped the way in which our action research space was formed in Malawi and how this influenced the project along three axes in particular: those of theoretical positioning, participation and accountability. A more conscious reflection on beginnings is thus helpful in explaining why research projects take the shape they do. It makes visible how premises are set for the research at the outset and how research relationships develop. It can also reveal theoretical and conceptual blind spots and say something about how power relations are negotiated throughout a project. While the 'beginnings' approach used in this article did not solve the problem of the academically centred gaze, more consciousness around how action research projects are formed can help action research become more transparent and accountable by at least making visible how the Beginning is never the beginning.

Acknowledgements

References

Ahmed, S. (2000). Who knows? Knowing strangers and strangerness. *Australian Feminist Studies, 15(31),* 49–68. DOI: 10.1080/713611918.

Arieli, D. & Friedman, V. J. (2009). The paradox of participation in action research. *Action Research, 7(3),* 263–290.

Bayat, A. (1997). Un-civil society: The politics of the 'informal people'. *Third World Quarterly, 18(1),* 53-72.

Bradbury-Huang, H. (2010). What is good action research? Why the resurgent interest? *Action Research, 8(1),* 93–109.

Cahill, C., Sultana, F. & Pain, R. (2007). Participatory ethics: Policies, practices, institutions. *ACME, 6(3),* 304–318.

Cammack, D. (2007). The logic of African neopatrimonialism: What role for donors? *Development Policy Review, 25(5),* 599–614.

Cooke, B. & Kothari, U. (Eds) (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?* London: Zed.

Cornwall, A. (2004). Spaces for transformation? Reflections on issues of power and difference in participation in development. In S. Hickey & G. Mohan (Eds), *Participation: From tyranny to transformation? Exploring new approaches to participation in development* (pp. 75–91). London: Zed.

Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'participation': Models, meanings, and practices. *Community Development Journal, 43(3),* 269–283.

Davidson, M. & Iveson, K. (2014). Occupations, mediations, subjectifications: Fabricating politics. *Space and Polity, 18(2),* 137–152.

Dikeç, M. (2005). Space, politics and the political. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 23(2),* 171–188.

Dikeç, M. (2007). *Badlands of the republic: Space, politics and urban policy.* London: Blackwells.

Dikeç, M. (2012). Space as a mode of political thinking. *Geoforum, 43(4),* 669–676.

Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research, 2(2),* 209–230.

Grant, J., Nelson, G. & Mitchell, T. (2008). Negotiating the challenges of participatory action research: Relationships, power, participation, change and credibility. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds), *Handbook of action research: Concise paperback edition* (pp. 589–602). London, Thousand Oaks, CA & New Delhi: Sage.

Haraway, D. J. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature.* London: Free Association Books.

Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition.* London: Sage.

Hickey, S. & Mohan G. (Eds) (2004). *Participation: From tyranny to transformation? Exploring new approaches to participation in development.* London: Zed.

Isin, E. F. (2008). Theorizing acts of citizenship. In E. F. Isin & G. M. Nielsen (Eds), *Acts of citizenship* (pp. 15–43). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jacoby, B. (2003). *Building partnerships for service-learning.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Janes, J. E. (2016). Democratic encounters? Epistemic privilege, power, and community-based participatory action research. *Action Research, 14(1),* 72–87.

Jazeel, T. & McFarlane, C. (2010). The limits of responsibility: A postcolonial politics of academic knowledge production. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 35(1),* 109–124.

Kallio, K. P. (2012). Political presence and the politics of noise. *Space and Polity, 16(3),* 287–302.

Kapoor, D. (2009). Participatory academic research (Par) and People's Participatory Action Research (PAR): Research, politicization, and subaltern social movements in India. In D. Kapoor & S. Jordan (Eds), *Education, participatory action research, and social change* (pp. 29–44). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kallio, K. P. (2012). Political presence and the politics of noise. *Space and Polity, 16(3),* 287–302.

Kemmis, S. (2006). Exploring the relevance of Critical Theory for action research: Emancipatory action research in the footsteps of Jürgen Habermas. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds), *Handbook of action research: Concise paperback edition* (pp. 94–106). London, Thousand Oaks, CA & New Delhi: Sage.

Kobayashi, A. (2003). GPC ten years on: Is self-reflexivity enough? *Gender, Place & Culture, 10(4),* 345–349.

Manda, M. A. Z. (2007). Grassroots-led urban development: Potentials, achievements, limitations – experiences in Malawi. Paper presented at the 8th N-AERIUS Conference, London, 7-9 September.

Maykut, P. S. & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide.* London: The Falmer Press.

McArdle, K. L. (2002). Establishing a co-operative inquiry group: The perspective of a 'first-time' inquirer. *Systemic Practice and Action Research, 15(3),* 177–189.

McArdle, K. L. (2004). *In-powering spaces: A co-operative inquiry with young women in management.* PhD thesis, Postgraduate Programme in Action Research, Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, University of Bath.

McArdle, K. L. (2008). Getting in, getting on, getting out: On working with second-person inquiry groups. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds), *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice,* 2nd edn (pp. 602–614). Los Angeles, CA, London, New Delhi, Singapore & Washington, DC: Sage.

McNay, L. (2014). *The misguided search for the political. Social weightlessness in radical democratic theory.* Cambridge: Polity.

Mehta, L. (2008). Over the rainbow: The politics of researching citizenship and marginality. *Action Research, 6(2),* 233–252.

Millstein, M. (2017). Rights, identities and belonging: Reflections on the everyday politics of urban citizenship in Delft, Cape Town. *Norwegian Journal of Geography, 71(4),* 253–267.

Miraftab, F. (2005). Insurgency and spaces of active citizenship: The story of Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign in South Africa. *Journal of Planning Education and Research, 25(2),* 200–217.

Nagar, R. (2002). Footloose researchers, 'travelling' theories, and the politics of transnational feminist praxis. *Gender, Place and Culture, 9,* 179–186.

National Statistical Office (2010). *Spatial distribution and urbanization 2010.* Lilongwe: Government of Malawi.

Neumann, D. & Otim, P. (2009). What about us? Urban IDPs ask. Kampala: Refugee Law Project. Available at http://www.refugeelawproject.org/component/allvideoshare/video/what-about-us-urban-idps-in-uganda-ask?Itemid=151 (accessed 5 May 2017).

Nielsen, B. S. & Nielsen, K. A. (2010). Aktionsforskning. In S. Tanggaard & L. Brinkmann (Eds), *Kvalitative Metoder og Tilgange*, (pp.97-120). Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Purcell, M., (2013). *The down-deep delight of democracy.* New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.

Purcell, M. (2014). Rancière and revolution. *Space and Polity, 18(2),* 168–181.

Rancière, J. (2001). Ten theses on politics. *Theory and Event, 5(2),* 1–16.

Rancière, J. (2009). *The emancipated spectator.* Translated by G. Elliott. London: Verso.

Rancière, J. (2011). The thinking of dissensus: Politics and aesthetic. In P. Bowman & R. Stam (Eds), *Reading Rancière* (pp. 1–17). London: Continuum.

Rao, U. (2013). Tolerated encroachment: Resettlement policies and the negotiation of the licit/illicit divide in an Indian metropolis. *Cultural Anthropology, 18(4),* 760–779.

Reason, P. (2006). Choice and quality in action research practice. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 15(2),* 187–203.

Refstie, H. (2008). *IDPs redefined: Participatory action research with urban IDPs in Uganda.* MPhil in Development Studies, Department of Geography, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim.

Refstie, H. (2013). Doing it ourselves: Community mobilization and strategic planning in Senti settlement. Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE & URI. Available at http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies/27-case-study-1-senti (accessed 2 May 2016).

Refstie, H. (2014). Negotiating services through community committees: Ndirande Makata Blantyre. Lilongwe: NTNU, CCODE & URI.

Refstie, H. (forthcoming). Critical scholarship in action research: Negotiating multiple imperatives. Accepted to *ACME.*

Refstie, H. & Brun, C. (2011). Towards transformative participation: Collaborative research with 'urban IDPs' in Uganda. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 25(2),* 239–256.

Refstie, H. & Brun, C. (2016). Voicing noise: Political agency and the trialectics of participation in urban Malawi. *Geoforum ,74,* 136–146.

Refstie, H., Dolan, C. & Okello, M. C. (2010). Urban IDPs in Uganda: Victims of institutional convenience. *Forced Migration Review, 34,* 66–67.

Refugee Law Project (2007).'What about us?' The exclusion of urban IDPs from Uganda's IDP related policies and interventions. Kampala: Refugee Law Project.

Robins, S., Cornwall, A. & Von Lieres, B. (2008). Rethinking 'citizenship' in the postcolony. *Third World Quarterly, 29(6),* 1069–1086.

Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography, 21(3),* 305–320.

Said, E. W. (1975). *Beginnings: Intention and method.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Swyngedouw, E. (2011). Interrogating post-democratization: Reclaiming egalitarian political spaces. *Political Geography, 30(7),* 370–380.

Swyngedouw, E. (2014). Where is the political? Insurgent mobilisations and the incipient 'return of the political'. *Space and Polity, 18(2),* 122–136.

Wicks, P. G. & Reason, P. (2009). Initiating action research: Challenges and paradoxes of opening communicative space. *Action Research, 7(3),* 243–262.

Notes

[1] The reports and publications from the project (a report, several news bulletins, a panel discussion, a visit from the Minister of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees in one of the slum settlements, a documentary, one academic article and the thesis itself (Refstie & Brun, 2011; Author, Dolan & Okello, 2010; Neumann & Otim, 2009; Author, 2008; Refugee Law Project, 2007) have been used in both academic and practice-oriented fora, and the documentary was screened in several local and international gatherings, increasing the attention to IDPs in urban areas.

[22] Not all slum-like settlements in Malawi are informal in terms of their existence, but in this article I use the wide sense of the concept, meaning settlements with limited formal service delivery, land and housing regulation and registration, and planned infrastructure. The term thus covers villages incorporated into city boundaries, squatter areas and overcrowded traditional housing areas (Manda, 2007).

[3] For more information on Slum Dwellers International, see www.sdinet.org.

[4] In this article, 'research participants' refers to people who were interviewed and took part in discussion groups; 'project partners' refers to community representatives, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor (the Federation), the Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE), The Research Institute (TRI) and the university researchers (see below); and 'the researchers' refers to the two researchers from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) involved in the project.

[5] At the time of the research, Malawi had not had local government elections since 2000. A tripartite election was held in May 2014, and local councillors are now in place.

[6] The case study series can be accessed at http://www.ccodemw.org/publications-resources-2/case-studies, accessed 20.07.2017.

Action research in critical scholarship – Negotiating multiple imperatives

Hilde Refstie

Department of Geography
Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)
Hilde.refstie@ntnu.no

Abstract

Critical scholars sometimes accuse action researchers of not being radical enough in their approach, while action researchers often see the work of critical scholars as elitist and not grounded in people's everyday experiences. This article draws on an action research project with residents in urban informal settlements in Malawi and their partner organizations in the period 2013-2017 to discuss how research can negotiate and achieve its multiple imperatives of being critical and rooted, explanatory and actionable. It shows how the action research approach with its collaborative elements helped the research project avoid what Louis McNay (2014:4) calls "social weightlessness" in political theorizing – "an abstract way of thinking that is so far removed from the actual practices and dynamics of everyday life that, ultimately, its own analytical relevance and normative validity are thrown into question". The article reflects on the possibilities and limitations of the integrated approach developed in the project and suggests that action research in critical scholarship is a way to avoid 'social weightlessness' in theorizing while at the same time responding to some of the critique made against action research for not engaging with structural inequality and systemic change at scale.

Keywords

Action research, critical scholarship; transformative participation; participatory urban planning; slum upgrading

Introduction

Critical scholarship spans everything from critical theory in the Frankfurt school tradition, feminist and postcolonial theory, as well as more action-oriented methodologies. Common for the approaches is the aim to explore, expose and question hegemony and traditional assumptions about power in the pursuit of social change (Blomley, 2006; Fraser, 1985; Kemmis, 2006). In action research this means engaging directly with oppressed communities and/or activists (Kindon et al. 2007; Reason and Bradbury, 2008). In critical scholarship it can mean to keep an active distance to the subject world (Bohman, 2016). Critical theory in the Frankfurt school, for example, is 'unapologetically abstract'. Normative political thought is separated from the social world it addresses to keep theory from becoming 'handmaidens' to immediate, practical or instrumental concerns (Brenner 2009: 201). Radical democratic scholarship on the other hand, claims to address the dialogic relationship between the political and the social. Its theories therefore have to be anchored in the social world. Louis McNay (2014), however, argues that radical democratic scholars, especially in the agonistic tradition increasingly fail to do this - they avoid engaging with everyday perspectives and instrumental politics and rather concern themselves with developing political principles and formulating abstract models of social organization (e.g. Mouffe, 1999, 2000; Rancière 1992, 2001, 2009, 2011). While this abstraction can be viewed as a strategic theoretical maneuver to enable the identification of an ideal development (Shapiro, 2007), it can also lead to what McNay, inspired by Bourdeu (2000) calls a 'socially weightless' mode of thought. 'Social weightlessness' represents an "abstract way of thinking about the world that is so far removed from the actual practices and dynamics of everyday life, that, ultimately, its own analytical relevance and normative validity is thrown into question" (McNay, 2014: 4). To avoid 'social weightlessness' we need to situate ideas of the political more firmly within an account of the social world in which it is contained (McNay 2014). This has been addressed in feminist research and postcolonial development studies. It is also the basis for action and activist research, which argues that theorists without significant connections to people involved in change making can end up constructing abstractions that are elegant, but with very little insight and utility (Oldfield, 2015).

> We should have learnt that our best work as social scientists … was
> in dialogue with ordinary people and their organizations … because
> the cultural formations, resistances and filters people created had
> profound theoretical relevance (Sitas (2004:23 in Oldfeld, 2015)

Action research provides an excellent avenue for conducting this socially situated research (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). However, the approach is criticized for failing to engage with systemic change at scale and address structures of inequality beyond the community level (Greenwood, 2002; Mohan, 2006; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Action research processes typically focus on consensus and problem solving in communities with relatively small groups of participants (Burns, 2014; Johansson and Lindhult, 2008). Projects are also traditionally

conducted in cycles of action, reflection and learning over relative short periods of time (Dick et al., 2009). They can therefore be ill equipped to work with larger scale structural and systemic change, or with longer-term perspectives where a full turn in the project cycle may not be achievable (Greenwood, 2002; Chatterton et al., 2007; Jordan and Kapoor, 2016). As a result, action research often deals with symptoms rather than with the processes that produce and maintain inequalities in the first place (Greenwood, 2002). This is visible in the ways in which action research is defined vis-à-vis activist research. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Geography (2015) action research is:

> A collaborative research process whereby people with a particular issue work with academics; 'it seeks to democratize knowledge production and foster opportunities for empowerment by those involved'… In comparison with activist research, action research is guided by a pragmatic, problem-solving approach, and is not necessarily underpinned by radical politics.

Radical politics is defined in the same dictionary as engagements with structural inequalities (ibid.), and it is here that tensions seem to arise between certain types of critical scholarship and action research (for a discussion see Johansson and Lindhult, 2008). Action research is often accused of not being 'radical enough', while critical scholarship, and sometimes also activist scholarship, is criticized for being elitist and not grounded in people's everyday experiences (Chambers, 1983; Johansson and Lindhult, 2008). This does not mean that the divide has not been overcome (see for example Brun and Lund, 2010; Diprose, 2015; Kesby, 2005; Pain, 2014; Nagar, 2002, 2014), but tensions still exist in how to develop research that is at the same time critical and rooted, explanatory and actionable (hooks, 1999).

This article draws on examples from an action research project with residents in urban informal settlements in Malawi and their partner organizations in the period 2013–2017 to discuss how research can negotiate and achieve the multiple imperatives discussed above. The article shows how the action research approach with its collaborative elements helped the project avoid 'social weightlessness' by developing an integrated approach negotiated in the dialogue between the more abstract change oriented perspectives of the researchers and the everyday experiences and motivations of the partners and the participants involved. It reflects on the possibilities and limitations of this integrated approach and discusses if action research in critical scholarship is a way to avoid 'social weightlessness' in theorizing while at the same time responding to some of the critique made against action research for not engaging with structural inequality and systemic change at scale.

The partnership

Malawi is only 20 per cent urbanized, but has some of the fastest growing cities in Sub Saharan Africa (NSO, 2010). Almost 70 percent of the urban

population in Malawi is estimated to live in informal settlements[1] (UN, Habitat 2012). Despite this, urbanization and urban growth has not reached high on the national development agenda. Government policies tend to focus on developments in rural areas with the aim to prevent rural-urban migration, while donors and development partners do not prioritize urban issues (Manda, 2013).

One of the major groups that do work with informal settlements in Malawi is the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor (Federation from now on).[2] The Federation mobilizes informal settlement groups to participate in community planning and policymaking processes and has 100,000 members engaged covering 26 districts in Malawi. The Federation is supported by the Non Governmental Organization (NGO) Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE) who provides technical assistance, work with local settlement leaderships, and facilitate learning through exchange visits. The Federation and CCODE are again affiliated to Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), a global network of community based urban poor organizations.[3]

The starting point for the study described in this article was the PhD project of the author based at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). However, the PhD project developed into a collaborative project between the university researcher(s)[4], the Federation, CCODE, their Research Institute

---

[1] Not all slum-like settlements in Malawi are informal in terms of their existence, but this paper uses informal settlements in the wide sense of the concept meaning settlements with limited formal service delivery, land and housing regulation and registration, and planned infrastructure. The term thus covers villages incorporated into city boundaries, squatter areas, and overcrowded traditional housing areas (Manda, 2007).

[2] Previously called the Malawi Homeless People's Federation (MHPF). The Federation started out with a pure urban focus, but changed its policy and name in 2015 to encompass both urban and rural members.

[3] For more information on SDI, see http://knowyourcity.info/

[4] The author was the main university researcher, but the supervisor also became increasingly involved as a researcher throughout the project.

(TRI) [5], and community groups. The project therefore ended up being a partnership in which knowledge was co-constructed. Co-construction of knowledge typically represents a more grounded form of inquiry that investigates how different political and historical contexts shape people`s realities (Robins et al. 2008; Dolan et al. 2016). It involves integrating different forms of knowledge in a dialogic research process with "an intense (and perhaps endless) 'conversation' between research actors and research subjects" (Nowotny et al. 2003:187). It is this conversation that holds the potential to ground research and make research processes more relevant for the partners involved (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). It can therefore be a way to avoid 'social weightlessness' in theory and change making.

Co-construction of knowledge is a messy affair and it can be challenging to define how multiple perspectives are negotiated in different phases of a research project. In this article I will use a narrative form to describe how the research partnership that makes up the case for this article developed and evolved; how knowledge was co-produced, how different interests were negotiated in this process, and how the action research approach in the end helped adjust the research so that it corresponded better to the understandings and lived realities of the participants. The story is told mainly from the researcher perspective. However, the text will include quotes from reflection interviews that were conducted with the Head of Research and Advocacy at CCODE, Wonderful Hunga, and Federation leader Lackson Phiri in preparation of this article. While the excerpts from the interviews complement the analysis it is still the voice of the researcher that frames the narrative presented. The article should therefore not be read as an attempt to 'speak for others', nor to 'represent others'.

Exploring the space for action research – an incremental approach

Action research can be conceptualized and operationalized in a number of ways. Personally I had worked with action research processes before both at the university and in the development sector. I had learned from experience how

---

[5] The Research Institute, previously called The Urban Research Institute, was established as part of a reorganization within CCODE. CCODE and the Federation wanted to become more self-reliant with regard to funding, and they therefore established a holding company owned by CCODE and the Federation. Activities such as house construction, brick production, economic administration and research were moved to this company, which now offered these services to the broader market. The economic surplus is to be channelled back to CCODE and the Federation for community projects.

important it is that action research is firmly anchored in the context in which it is developed (Refstie and Brun, 2011). I therefore viewed the role of the university researcher, especially when coming from the outside, as a mere facilitator that could contribute with time and research skills to support community knowledge production processes. At the same time I was, together with my supervisor, interested in how action research processes could be scaled up to have impact beyond the immediate community level. I was also of the opinion that action research could benefit from a better integration of academic theorizing and practice (Levin, 2012; Pain et al. 2007).

Through previous work with an international development organization I knew that Malawi had recently started to develop various urban policies and that several grass root initiatives were active in informal settlements throughout the country. I was curious as to what motivated people in informal settlements to mobilize, if they participated in the different planning and policy processes, and how this all linked together at various levels of governance. I also found Malawi interesting as a case. With its low level of urbanization and fast city growth, planning seemed to have the potential to make a significant difference in the country`s development. At the same time I was new to the Malawian context. To make the research relevant it was therefore important to find ways in which the research could be linked to existing processes and debates. I therefore contacted CCODE, which is the largest NGO working on informal settlement issues in Malawi. As mentioned above, a key mandate of CCODE is to support the Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor in all its work. The organization also often act as a focal point for research and advocacy efforts that link experiences in informal settlements with wider policy debates. CCODE and the Federation therefore both welcomed the engagement with me as a researcher.

> Researchers add more value to our work. When you have this kind of movement and processes that we support, if people are just talking from the point of view of their experiences, then the validity of whatever issues that they are raising can easily be challenged if it is not validated by any form of research findings, or indeed if there has not been that kind of critical reflection of the situation. The fact that it is a researcher who seriously works on this makes the documents carry some weight with them. So in a bigger way, researchers kind of help us in terms of pushing forward for this particular agenda (Interview Head of Research and Advocacy CCODE 12.05.2017).

During the first months of fieldwork, I spent time at the CCODE office and worked to map the different actors involved in slum upgrading in Malawi. I also spent time in three informal settlements in Lilongwe – Chinsapo, Senti and Kauma – interviewing people living there. The three settlements were chosen after

conversations with CCODE, the Federation leaders and representatives from another network called the Lilongwe Urban Poor People's Network (LUPPEN)[6] on the basis that the settlements all had mobilization processes going on, but at various stages and with different outcomes. The Federation, and in one instance LUPPEN facilitated the initial contact with the leaderships in the settlements (traditional chiefs, community development committee chairs, block leaders, church leaders and leaders of women`s groups). After this me and my research assistant, a planning student from Mzuzu University, moved around and did interviews in a more randomized pattern. The interviews had an open-ended design where we discussed everything from moving patterns, livelihoods, settlement issues, community mobilization and how people thought about and related to planning and slum upgrading efforts in their areas. In the interviews we pursued topics that were emphasized by the participants, and at the end of each interview we always asked the participants what they thought the research should focus on and whether there were ways in which the research could be made relevant for them. In parallel we also conducted interviews with a number of actors such as local and national government, NGOs, service providers, municipal associations, donors, researchers, development partners and so on. After this initial round of interviews we organized a focus group discussion in each of the three settlements to discuss emerging issues and initial findings. The group discussions worked to correct misunderstandings in interpretations, to facilitate analysis, reflection and discussion of the initial findings, and to crystalize some of the issues deemed important by the participants. Similar group discussions were also held with Federation leaders, and with the CCODE staff.

During the interviews community members tended to focus on material changes they wanted to see in their areas in terms of infrastructure and service delivery. Access to clean water, removal of waste, drainage systems to prevent flooding, proper roads and bridges, affordable clinics and schools, police for security, and access to proper jobs and market places were typical concerns: "The priorities now are that we are concerned about the roads, infrastructure, water kiosks and health facilities. And to have clinics and small markets" (Interview female community member Chinsapo, Lilongwe 15.03.2013).

Security of tenure also came up as an issue, but most of the people interviewed did not fear evictions. The three settlements were built on former

---

[6] LUPPEN was established as a network to strengthen the voices of urban poor residents in

Lilongwe to demand improved living conditions and enable them to actively participate in the

development of their city. It has 3,000 members in 29 urban poor settlements. See

https://luppenetwork.wordpress.com/about/ for further details.

customary land, and most of the interviewees who considered themselves homeowners had some kind of documentation signed by the chief. Such documents are ambiguous in legal terms (Silungwe, 2009) but the people interviewed felt it gave them a high security of tenure. This does not mean, however, that people did not struggle with housing. Rent costs and fluctuations were listed as a main challenge amongst the renters interviewed, and renters make up the majority of the settlements.[7] To illustrate the gravity of the situation; three of the families interviewed had moved as many as three times during the past year because their rents had increased. Buying or building a house therefore featured high on their agenda. However, except for the additional need for affordable housing the priorities emphasized by the interviewees who were renting mirrored the homeowners.

Many of the interviewees were mobilizing both individually and collectively to address issues in their settlements. People participated in saving groups, community meetings, community organization work, women`s groups, work through the church, projects organized by NGOs, and activities organized through traditional chiefs. This could be everything from digging drains, levelling roads, contributing with money, bricks and labour for construction, or participate in planning exercises. When asked about their motivations for participating in these various activities the interviewees often stated that they of course were motivated by the prospects of bringing change to their communities, but that more individual gains such as allowances for participating in meetings and project activities were important motivations as well. Another was the sense of community brought about by participating in activities and the possibilities to learn new skills. To 'do your duty' when the chief or other community leaders called on you was also frequently mentioned as a reason for engagement: "I am wasting time to the project, my business has gone down. But since I was chosen by chiefs I am not able to deny it" (Interview female community member Kauma, Lilongwe 03.03.2013).

While some participants were happy with the processes they were part of, many were frustrated and argued that they rarely saw results from their engagements. The interviews and the cases studied, both in this exploratory phase

---

[7] Enumerations exercises conducted by the Federation and CCODE indicate that as many as 60-70

% of people in informal settlements are tenants (CCODE, 2012; CCODE, 2011).

and at the later stages of the project,[8] confirmed that all too often planning documents remained on paper and projects were never implemented (Refstie, 2014a, Refstie, 2014d, Refstie 2015).

> So far nothing has been done even if the [City Council administration][9] representatives moved around. For example here in Ndirande and Ntopwa they even came to meetings. They appreciated our plans and that there were problems but nothing happened. For example in Ntopwa the Chief is very hard working, she got people to collect waste and bring to areas. But the City Council never showed up to collect it (Group discussion 28.03.2014 Ndirande Makata).

Frustrations around funding and implementation of slum upgrading[10] came up again and again in various forms in the interviews and focus group discussions. Project and community leaders promised grand things in the initial mobilization, but projects rarely lived up to the expectations. This therefore formed a topic to be pursued in the research.

Developing the action research project

The aim of the exploratory phase had been to map and understand the dynamics between different actors, and to scope out the potential for developing the research into action research. When discussing the initial findings from the interviews with CCODE and the Federation I suggested with basis in the interviews

---

[8] Over the course of the project from February 2013 to May 2017 the research consisted of participatory observation over 9 months, 20 group discussions and 120 interviews with community members and other involved actors (Urban poor networks, NGOs, national and local government representatives, city associations, service providers, researchers, donors and other development partners), as well as participatory analysis discussions, workshops, meetings, and public radio debates.

[9] At the time of the research, Malawi had not had local government elections since 2000. A tripartite election was held in May 2014, and local councillors are now in place.

10 In this article, slum upgrading refers to an integrated approach, small or large, that aims to improve conditions in a given area. These conditions relate to the legal (e.g. land tenure), the physical (e.g. infrastructure, housing), the social (e.g. crime or education) or the economic.

that we could work on a collaborative project to more closely identify and examine what community groups were able to do themselves through self organization, what they could achieve with some funds and more connections to actors such as the City Council administration, and what required more systemic change at the national level and beyond in terms of prioritization, resource distribution, and recognition of informal settlements. The CCODE staff and the Federation representatives were most eager to go deeper into the question of how informal settlement communities work with their city council administrations. They also wanted to include Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba, three other main cities in Malawi in the study. Initially, I was not thrilled about including more cities since I felt that it would be difficult enough to cover the three settlements in which we were already doing interviews. However, they argued that by including different cities we could show how the city council administrations relate to their settlements differently. In Zomba, for example, the city council administration was engaging quite actively with one of its informal settlements, while in Lilongwe the local administration tended to be out of reach for organized informal settlement communities. The project could use the good examples to push the city councils that tended to ignore their informal settlement populations into action. This was a good point and the scaling up of the project also resonated, as mentioned earlier in the paper, with some of the ideas me and my supervisor had been exploring on how to get action research to move and have an impact beyond the immediate local-community context. We therefore agreed that on my next visit I would travel to the other cities to link up with community groups and document and discuss planning and slum upgrading initiatives that were going on there. We would then see how we could develop the collaborative project also in terms of more actionable outcomes.

When I returned to Malawi in February 2015, I conducted interviews, observations, and facilitated discussions together with the Federation and CCODE in informal settlements in Zomba, Blantyre and Mzuzu to document different planning and slum upgrading processes. We, the project partners, had realized that most community processes in Malawi were undocumented, the exception being a handful that had been developed to respond to donor-reporting requirements. This gave rise to the idea of developing a series of mini-case studies from all four of the cities that could be used to inform and engage decision-makers. [11] Several community representatives had argued that this type of write-up could be useful to their processes. On the basis of the visits in the three cities plus the exploratory research in Lilongwe, seven mini-case studies were therefore developed based on observations and interviews with community members and other actors. Community representatives also took part in the analysis by discussing and commenting on the drafts. The studies were translated into the national language of

---

[11] The series can be accessed at: https://actmalawi.com/case-study-series/

Chichewa (Tumbuka in the case of Mzuzu) and prints were distributed back to the community groups. The studies were also shared in various NGO and university networks, as well as at events organized by CCODE.

In addition to specific findings representing each case, the seven case studies together with the interviews from the exploratory phase also pointed to some overall conclusions. A recurring theme in the series was that the community groups were able to do small projects on their own, but they struggled with getting broader infrastructure projects such as drainage systems, roads, water and electricity implemented. Good plans were developed, but the plans were not followed up by resource allocations. The people interviewed were also unable to secure for themselves the same services that were offered in the wealthier areas of the city or to achieve complete secure tenure. Despite this, resource distribution, social justice and belonging in the city were rarely discussed in the participatory slum upgrading processes, which tended to rather be technical, depoliticized and area-based (Refstie and Brun, 2016). One conclusion was therefore that the participatory planning processes studied were not transformative. The processes did in some instances increase the influence of marginalized groups in decision-making, but they did not confront the forces that were causing the social exclusion to begin with. Following our theoretical framing of transformative participation this meant that agency by and of itself was partly realized through participatory planning, but political agency – defined as the capacity and ability to oppose unjust and inegalitarian practices – was not (Refstie and Brun, 2016).

In June 2014, I facilitated a small workshop at the CCODE office where I discussed the initial conclusions from the study with CCODE, Federation, and TRI representatives as part of a participatory analysis session. Both the NGO workers, the Federation, and TRI representatives agreed that systemic change in terms of recognition, resource redistribution and representation was needed to realize the benefits participants sought through slum upgrading. This fed into an emerging discussion they were already having about how CCODE and the Federation could engage more actively with urban and national governance processes affecting life in the informal settlements. At the level of problem definition there was thus a high degree of convergence between the understandings of the university researchers, the participants, and the project partners. As put by one of the Federation leaders:

> In a bigger way it was not like it was your process. It was as if it was a community process. That made the research study more relevant to us local people. And even with the way the results were shared, it is easier for us to take action based on the fact that we have been involved and know exactly what is happening and how the findings were arrived to (Interview Federation leader 12.05.2017).

The exploratory phase and the development of the case studies were both highly interactive processes with discussions amongst the partners and participants happening on a daily basis. In the periods in-between the fieldwork visits there was also a lot of communication between the researchers and the project partners over e-mail and through Skype. However, as the research proceeded deeper into article and thesis writing, where the broader segment of the material was analyzed together with emerging discussions in the literature, the conclusions continued to develop. In this process the nature of the partnership changed, and some divergence in understanding between the researchers, the project partners, and the other representatives from the informal settlements could be identified.

Critical research or a misguided search for the political?

In the first academic article from the project[12], my thesis supervisor and I made use of what we termed a 'trialectics' of participatory spaces to explain the research findings from the project. In Malawi, the collaboration had found that government and to some extent NGO-led invited planning spaces were typically technical and area-based. Consensus was also in many cases manipulated, as representatives were given little space in which to develop and express 'noise'. Noise was here defined as people raising their voices to challenge existing discourses and the status quo (Marchart, 2007). It represented a particular type of political agency present in insurgent urban planning processes (Holston, 2008) observed in other parts of the world (e.g. South Africa and parts of Latin-America) that we argued was missing from the participatory planning and upgrading discussions in Malawi. This understanding was itself inspired by the concept of 'transformative participation' from the literature on participatory spaces (Cornwall 2004; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Miraftab, 2004) and recent debates in political and cultural geography (Davidson and Iveson, 2014; Dikeç, 2005, 2007, 2012; Isin, 2008; Kallio, 2012; Purcell, 2013, 2014; Rancière, 2001, 2009, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2014). Rancière, for example, suggests that within a hegemonic discourse people can talk, be visible and have a voice as long as they keep within the accepted understandings and frameworks for participation. However, only limited change may come from acting within the existing script (Isin, 2008). This resonated with the findings from the project, which showed that the current participatory spaces had little impact on the status of urban dwellers, their access to resources and their inclusion as full members of the city. Activities that challenged unequal power relations and redistribution of resources were to a large degree absent from the participatory planning and upgrading processes studied. Community groups tended to operate within the established frameworks

---

[12] Following the trends in academic publishing most PhD dissertations in Norway are now article

based rather than written as a monograph.

and to focus on coping mechanisms and survival within the existing system instead of confronting the system and frameworks themselves. The spaces in which people *did* use insurgency and resistance to instigate change (Miraftab, 2004) tended to rather be found outside of and disconnected from the participatory planning framework – in the form of land invasions, squatting, the ignoring of planning regulations or public protests (Mwathunga, 2014). This is maybe not surprising considering how several of the processes studied were facilitated by the Federation and CCODE. The Federation and CCODE are SDI affiliates, and Slum Dwellers International emphasizes cooperation and engagement with decision makers (McFarlane, 2011; Mitlin and Patel 2014). SDI's politics is therefore typically "less oppositional" and situated within existing local political economic frameworks (McFarlane, 2011). Given their affiliation to SDI, CCODE and the Federation in Malawi work with many of the same instruments as SDI affiliates other places in the world. More specifically this means mobilizing through saving groups, profiling, mapping, and enumerations of settlements. Their work is also typically organized through existing leadership structures (McFarlane, 2011), which in Malawi tend to favour deliberations and consensus building (Cammack, 2007; Englund, 2006). Insurgent planning and protest as a radical response to exclusion is therefore not promoted as an avenue to influence decision makers in terms of slum upgrading. For instance, during a focus group discussion in Chikanda settlement in Zomba city some of the representatives explained to us that they had been developing a list of priorities and plans for Chikanda, which they had submitted to the City Council administration (CCA) in the hope of getting the activities included into the city budget. They had done a similar exercise the year before, but had not succeeded with getting any funding from the CCA. When asked if they thought their priorities would be included into the budget this time around the representatives said that they hoped they would, but that they did not have high hopes for it. "What will you do if they are not?" my supervisor and I asked. "We will go again and submit the document," a representative answered. "And what if they do not act this time either?" we asked. "Then we will continue to go there with our documents" (Focus group discussion Chikanda 10.02.2014).

A recurring observation was that groups typically continued to work within frameworks given by the City Council administration, planning institutions or NGOs regardless of if they gave results or not. Protest and dissatisfaction was also seldom voiced in a direct way. In a participatory planning process in Blantyre for example, community representatives expressed their dissatisfaction with the process in interviews, but they did not raise their voice in the actual budgeting process. The participants interviewed rather spent their energies on area based initiatives which had a technical focus in terms of developing maps and planning documents. My supervisor and I initially interpreted this as a form of passiveness since the work conducted did not create 'noise' - it did not challenge the status quo. The lack of 'noise' also meant that the community processes were not able to reach their stated goals. In our article we therefore argued that if participatory planning in Malawi were to be transformative, it would be necessary to strengthen the more

agonistic dimension of participation and ensure that the various planning spaces connected and overlapped (Refstie and Brun, 2016).

CCODE and Federation representatives agreed with this overall conclusion, but pointed out that most of the participants in the study wished to be included *into* existing frameworks rather than to challenge them. This also became visible in workshop discussions where the understandings expressed in the article were presented, and in an interactive live radio debate that was organized as part of the project. It was thus important for us as researchers to understand that 'the political' – defined as challenging unequal power and resource distribution – is not necessarily the prime motivation that drives people to participate in planning processes (Kapoor, 2002). At the same time the research showed that many of the benefits that participants sought at both individual and community levels required political transformation, as the current participatory spaces had little impact on status, access to resources, and the inclusion of informal settlements into city service provision. From the researchers' perspective it thus seemed as if many of the partners and participants were somehow 'trapped' in a technicalized, depoliticized, and localized participatory planning discourse. This did not mean that we as researchers sat with the answers, nor that we were not equally 'trapped' in our discursive thinking, but we believed that the action research project held the potential to disrupt the existing participatory planning discourse by asking some critical questions about implementation, resource distribution, and the limits of consensus based participatory planning (Friedman and Rogers, 2009; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Moini, 2011). This discursive approach was not discarded by the project partners, but they stressed that it was crucial to work within the current frameworks with strategies that were familiar to, and acceptable for the community representatives and members to engage in.

'Social weightlessness' in political theorizing

As mentioned in the introduction, McNay (2014) shows in her book "The misguided search for the political" how political theorizing has a tendency to remove itself from the everyday understandings and practices of people. When critical theory aims to speak more directly to strategies of change they therefore run the risk of becoming 'socially weightless'.

> It is my claim that some types of democratic theory have become so enmeshed in a style of abstract and closed reasoning about the political that their relevance to the phenomenal social world and to the logic of embodied action is cast into doubt along with, ultimately, their purportedly progressive political implications (McNay, 2014:4-5).

In our project critical theory in the spirit of Castells (1972), Harvey (1973, 2012), Lefebvre (1974), Marcuse (1964), Mouffe (1999, 2000), and Rancière (1992, 2001, 2009, 2011) worked well to explain why things were the way they

were. However, the same theories did not provide a framework for solutions that resonated with the motivations and understandings of the partners and participants. This represented a divergence in understanding between the researchers, the project partners and the participants – a divergence that was exacerbated by the geographical distance that prevented the constant dialogue characteristic of the initial phases of the research. As put by one of the project partners:

> Because you move elsewhere to write from afar [Norway], you do not get the same amount of input. You have the analysis at the level of case studies, but it is also important to test if the conception of the argument would be as you have conceived it at the abstract level in the academic articles too. Because those arguments is from the knowledge that you have collected from these people. I think sometimes, when you have participant observation and then move out, you lose out on certain developments of the discourse. At the same time this particular process cannot be indefinite and I think you have done very well in drawing most of the answers of the arguments from this kind of discussions that we are having (Interview Head of Research and Advocacy CCODE 12.05.2017).

Action research has, despite its good intensions, been accused of being just another tool used by Western researchers and agencies to legitimize their agendas and impose them onto people from the global South (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Spivak, 1988). At the same time, researchers can contribute with theoretical and analytical tools that can help interrogate established and taken-for-granted practices and make visible 'hidden mechanisms of control or seductive appearances'. They can help disturb discursive normalization through critical inquiry (Beauregard, 2012: 479; Freire, 1970). In our project we therefore adopted an integrated approach that focused both on analysing and deconstructing discourses in order to challenge them *and* on finding ways to operate within the existing frameworks.

An integrated action research approach

The case studies were used to document existing practices, to facilitate learning between places and levels, and to provide a basis for advocacy towards decision-makers focusing mainly on what could be done within the existing frameworks in the short and medium term. For example, funding that was long overdue was addressed by a UN agency after one of the case studies was published and sent to them. Some groups also used the case studies to fundraise for their community funds, while others used 'their' case study to initiate a dialogue with the relevant city council administration on issues in their settlement. The studies were also used for learning between community groups and within CCODE as an organization. The larger analysis of the research project included more of a system critique of how the participatory planning discourse was practiced in Malawi. Here, critical theory and discourse analysis were used to make visible mechanisms of exclusion and create reflection on the limitations inherent in the practised discourse

(Refstie and Brun, 2016). The discussions were facilitated through smaller meetings with different stakeholders, a workshop, and the national live interactive radio debate mentioned earlier (*ibid.*). The meetings and events worked to disseminate the mini-case studies and the findings from the overall study, to create dialogue between stakeholders, and to bring up some of the more contentious issues that tended to be avoided in the participatory slum upgrading processes studied. This more critical oriented part of the research process thus made visible some of the difficult decisions that need to take place for slum upgrading to happen (see Refstie and Brun 2016). It also prompted CCODE and the Federation to engage more with how national and urban governance dynamics and relations influence the results they seek through participatory urban planning processes.

> Some of the issues that you have raised have actually informed how we are doing our work now. That concept note I sent you, on the proposal that we did, which project we are doing now. You will see that some of the issues that were brought out in the research are issues that we have taken aboard in terms of projecting the arguments that we want to pursue, so in a way you have given us a very good basis for some of our interventions (Interview Head of Research and Advocacy CCODE 12.05.2017).

The dialogue between the university researchers, project partners, and the participants led to the development of the integrated action research strategy. However, it also prompted the researchers to dig deeper in terms of academic theorizing. The research had not succeeded in presenting a model for change that resonated fully with the understandings of the project participants and partners. In the theoretical framework for example, we had conceptualized 'noise' as a necessary component for change. However, the opposite of 'noise' is not necessarily silence or passiveness. The people involved in the study, both as partners and participants were in fact actively pursuing a variety of strategies. The lack of 'noise' could for example be seen as a strategic choice. By not drawing attention to their areas, people were able to continue a range of informal practices related to housing and planning without the government's interference (Mwathunga, 2014). For many, it also made more sense to try to negotiate their individual place within the system than to challenge it in a collective way (Cammack, 2007). Resistance was rather found in the ways in which people settled in informal settlements and organized themselves directly with service providers (Refstie, 2014a), or in how community groups organized services for themselves (Refstie, 2013, 2014 b,c). This is more in line with what Bayat (1997) describes as the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' and represents a type of 'tolerated encroachment' from the side of the state (Rao, 2013) - a 'tolerated encroachment' that could be jeopardized if people made too much 'noise'. People also exploited bureaucratic slippages and connections and made use of a multitude of subject positions to negotiate their state or client relationships (Millstein 2017). In Nancholi Chimiire, an informal settlement in Blantyre, for example, community

representatives managed to get several aspiring politicians to fund parts of their community development plan in the run-up to the tripartite election in 2014 (Refstie, 2014b). Similar initiatives were also documented elsewhere.

> There was a problem where children had been falling into the river and the community was in need of a bridge. The chief in Ntopwa [informal settlement in Blantyre] therefore approached a shadow MP [Member of Parliament]. He was yet to be bribed so he said he could contribute. Two bridges were then constructed (Group Discussion Federation members 30.03.2014).

As for more visible protests, these were also present, but typically conducted separate from the participatory planning and slum upgrading discussions (e.g. the 2011 protests against the government).[13]

The lack of noise with regards to failed planning processes did therefore not necessarily mean, as argued by Cammack (2007) that civil society in Malawi was "weak" and silent, not easily roused to civic action, or demanding of government, even after years of "strengthening"' (Cammack, 2007: 601). It rather meant that people were finding alternative ways to influence their everyday lives in line with what risks they were willing to take and what practices they believed would yield results. The initial framework of transformative participation and understandings of political agency brought in by the university researchers were not able to cater for this reality. It therefore had to be expanded to account for what Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield (2014) describe as the balancing people do between "the complex negotiation of local clientelist linkages that render daily lives bearable" and "the generally more external, ephemeral, and oppositional politics of rights, which often discard, expose, or confront clientelist links, at the risk of losing resources, if the new mobilization network does not last or succeed" (Bènit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2014: 286).

> The complex articulation between economically impoverished – often informal – residents' everyday politics of access to resources, and collective mobilization to claim rights, is often overlooked; considered unproblematic in formalistic approaches to 'rights' in mobilization for the substantiation of democracy in developing post-colonial African urban contexts; understood in overly broad and often depoliticized notions of a 'rights to the city' – little more than any form of mobilization taking the city as its object; or,

---

[13] In July 2011, civic activists organized nationwide demonstrations in response to economic hardships and deepening governance problems such as postponed local elections, stricter censorship measures, and heavy corruption. For more information see Cammack, 2012.

underestimated in importance and impact, when analysis prevails that focuses on the reproduction of 'political society' (Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2014: 292).

This realization on behalf of the researchers did not necessarily happen in a linear fashion. It was a result of revisiting the empirical material, observations, new directions in the literature, feedback from presentations, and reviewer comments such as the ones for this article. Most important though, it was the result of the on-going dialogue between the project partners, a dialogue that pushed the researchers to dig deeper into the empirical material and focus on what people were actually *doing*. In this process a more nuanced understanding of the strategies people use to influence their position in the system was produced.

> Where different types of knowledge such as academic erudition and popular knowledge are combined or enter into dialogue, the outcome may deconstruct assumed or accepted framings, leading to the creation of alternative ways of seeing the world (Fals Borda 2013). The extent to which engagement either expands how we see the world or reinforces unquestioned prior positions is an important indicator of whether or not meaningful co-construction of knowledge in research and learning approaches has been achieved (Dolan et al. 2017: 39).

Considering the above, the project could be said to have achieved a dialogical research process with certain degree of meaningful co-construction of knowledge (Dolan et al. 2017). However, our project did not comply with the gold standards of action research that uphold the participants as full owners and drivers of research projects (see e.g. Jordan and Kapoor, 2016, Winterbauer et al. 2016), or for a more critical discussion Garret and Brickell 2015, Kesby et al. 2005; Shaw, 2012). This became most visible in the final phases of the research, which consisted of academic article writing. Participation and representation are two important principles in action research. However, the academic writing process is not necessarily well suited to accommodate this, which in turn raises a number of ethical questions. Some of these could maybe have been solved through a more active use of co-authorship. However, academic publishing takes a lot of time and effort and is not necessarily a priority for project partners outside of academia. Furthermore, co-authorship does not always solve the power challenges inherent in knowledge co-construction (Ahmed, 2000; Franks, 2015). The partners and participants are therefore represented in this article through interviews only, framing the article mainly as a researcher's narrative.

> I think the writing is also a self-awakening process, because when you are writing then there are also new issues that come to your mind. But at some point you have to divide the audiences. So there are issues that are of interest to the academia, and then you would

have a different set-up where you engage with policy makers. At the same time you are bouncing the ideas as you are writing. And this is something that occurred to me. So then you are sharing that with the people, so in one way or the other they are consciously participating in your writing process (Interview Head of Research and Advocacy CCODE 12.05.2017).

Research projects have to respond to a variety of demands, in our case made by the research participants, the partners, as well as the formal requirements of the university institution issuing the Phd. In this process the research becomes a negotiated outcome, and it is exactly in the dynamics of negotiation between the researchers, project partners and participants that the critical capacity on both sides develops, and 'social weightlessness' is avoided. In this lies the potential of action research in critical scholarship to create research that is at the same time critical, rooted, explanatory and actionable.

Conclusion

The main dilemma in our research process still stands. Many of the benefits participants sought in slum upgrading processes are not achievable without significant systemic change, and it is difficult to see how this type of change is to be accomplished within current participatory planning practices (Refstie and Brun, 2016). However, the collaborative approach helped us to understand that participants navigate the planning practices in different ways, and that participation in planning was only one amongst a number of strategies that the participants employed to reach their goals in terms of improving their living conditions. For many it therefore made more sense to work for inclusion into planning frameworks rather than to challenge them. This had to be reflected into the action research process and led to the development of the integrated approach that focused both on analysing and deconstructing discourses in order to challenge them *and* on finding ways to operate within the existing frameworks. The dialogue also pushed the researchers to go deeper into the material and develop a more nuanced understanding of the strategies people use to improve their livelihoods and settlements.

Another dilemma was how to operationalize participation throughout the research process. As the researchers worked with a large number of groups in several cities at different times rather than with a fixed smaller group, it became more difficult for participants to develop ownership, to keep track of the research process and to keep the researchers accountable. The process had to rely heavily on representatives, both within the communities and with the partners. This can of course be problematic, since one risk supporting unjust power structures that are in place. However, since the project moved between levels and places this was seen as the most efficient way of maintaining a project partnership that could ensure that the research project was integrated into existing work and ongoing discussions. The distance between the researchers, the partners, and the community members

interviewed was mediated by holding regular meetings, discussions and presentations with representatives throughout the project. However, as the researchers moved from Malawi to Norway, and engaged more actively with academic article writing conclusions continued to develop without direct engagement from the project partners and participants. This concentrated more power in the hands of the researchers than is advocated, for example, in more participant-centred approaches to action research (Jordan and Kapoor, 2016; Choudry, 2014; Spivak, 1988).

One conclusion is therefore that the integrated approach did work to reduce 'social weightlessness'. It did also to a certain extent respond to the critique made against action research for not engaging with structural inequality and systemic change at scale as the research project brought different actors together and opened up a space where the potentials and limitations of the current participatory planning practices in Malawi were discussed (see Refstie and Brun, 2016). However, the research process did not escape the problems of representation, which is considered an imperative in much participatory research. The research process was also limited in the sense that the participants and partners were less active in the final phases of the research. This may have reduced the potential to connect more deeply, also at the theoretical level with the lived realities and motivations of the people involved.

The integrated approach developed in our project did therefore not reach its full potential in responding to the multiple imperatives for research to be critical and rooted, explanatory and actionable. However, it represents one way in which critical scholarship and action research can be combined to produce socially situated research with a critical potential. If we do not engage fully with the groups we research with, we run the risk that our critical theorizing becomes rootless instead of radical (hooks, 1990). 'Who' researches matters (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991) and action research holds the potential of including more people into critical theorizing. It can therefore help critical scholarship connect with and grow from the roots and reduce the risk for 'social weightlessness' in theory and change making.

University of Cape Town who commented on earlier drafts. Finally, I would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their valuable comments.

References

Ahmed, Sara. 2000. Who Knows? Knowing Strangers and Strangerness, *Australian Feminist Studies* 15(31), 49-68.

Allen, John. 2003. *Lost Geographies of Power*. Malden: Blackwell.

Beauregard, Robert A. 2012. What theorists do. *Urban Geography* 33, 474–487.

Bènit-Gbaffou, Claire and Sophie Oldfield. 2014. Claiming 'rights' in the African city: popular mobilization and the politics of informality. In Susan Parnell and Sophie Oldfield (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 281-296.

Blomley, Nicholas. 2006. Uncritical critical geography? *Progress in Human Geography*. 30 (1), 87-94.

Bohman, James. 2016. Critical theory. In, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2016 Edition)*. Available at: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/critical-theory/ (accessed 3 October 2016).

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations*. Cambridge: Polity.

Brenner, Neil. 2009. What is critical urban theory? *City* 13(2–3), 198–207.

Brickell, Katherine and Garrett, Bradley. 2015. *ACME* 14 (3), 928-953.

Brun, Cathrine and Ragnhild Lund. 2010. Real-time research: Decolonizing research practices – or just another spectacle of researcher–practitioner collaboration? *Development in Practice* 20(7), 812–826.

Burns, Danny. 2014. Systemic action research: Changing system dynamics to support sustainable change. *Action Research* 12(1), 3–18.

Cammack, Diana. 2012. Malawi in crisis, 2011-2012. *Review of African Political Economy* 39 (132), 375-388.

Cammack, Diana. 2007. The logic of African neopatrimonialism: What role for donors? *Development Policy Review* 25(5), 599–614.

Castells, Manuel. 1972. *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach.* London: Edward Arnold.

Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE). 2012. Mtandire Enumeration Report, Lilongwe: CCODE.

Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE). 2011. Chinsapo Enumeration Report, Lilongwe: CCODE.

Chambers, Robert. 1983. *Rural Development: Putting the Last First.* Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Chatterton, Paul, Duncan Fuller and Paul Routledge. 2007. Relating theory to activism: Theoretical and methodological reflections. In, Sara Kindon, Rachel Pain & Mike Kesby (eds), *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place.* London: Routledge, pp. 216–223.

Choudry, Aziz. 2014. (Almost) Everything you always wanted to know about activist research but were afraid to ask: What activist researchers say about theory and methodology. *Contention: The Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Protest* 1(2), 75–88.

Cooke, Bill and Uma Kothari (eds). 2001. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed.

Cornwall, Andrea. 2004. Spaces for transformation? Reflections on issues of power and difference in participation in development. In, Samuel Hickey & Giles Mohan (eds), *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development.* London: Zed, pp. 75–91.

Davidson, Mark and Kurt Iveson. 2014. Occupations, mediations, subjectifications: fabricating politics. *Space and Polity* 18 (2), 137-152.

Dikeç, Mustafa. 2005. Space, politics and the political. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2), 171-188.

Dikeç, Mustafa, 2007. *Badlands of the Republic: Space, Politics and Urban Policy.* London: Blackwells.

Dikeç, Mustafa. 2012. Space as a mode of political thinking. *Geoforum* 43 (4), 669-676.

Dick, Bob, Ernie Stringer and Chris Huxham. 2009. Introduction: Theory in action research. *Action Research* 7(1), 5–12.

Diprose, Gradon. 2015. Negotiating contradiction: work, redundancy and participatory art. *AREA* 47(3), 246-253.

Dolan, Chris, Thea Shakrokh, Jerker Edström, and Darius King Kabafunzaki. 2017. Engaged Excellence or Excellent Engagement? Collaborating Critically to Amplify the Voices of Male Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. *IDS Bulletin* 47(6), 19-37.

Englund, H., 2006. *Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor.* University of California Press, Berkeley.

Fals Borda, Orlando. 2013. Action Research in the Convergence of Disciplines. *International Journal of Action Research* 9.2: 155–67

Franks, Aaron. 2015. Kinder cuts and passionate modesties: the complex ecology of the invitation in participatory research. *AREA* 47 (3), 237-245.

Fraser, Nancy. 1985. What`s Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender. *New German Critique*. 35, 97-131.

Freire, Paulo 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Seabury Press.

Friedman, Victor J. and Tim Rogers. 2009. There is nothing so theoretical as good action research. *Action Research* 7(1), 31–47.

Garrett, Bradley, L. and Katherine Brickell. 2015. Participatory politics of partnership: video workshops on domestic violence in Cambodia. *AREA* 47, 230–236.

Greenwood, Davydd. 2002. Action research: Unfulfilled promises and unmet challenges. *Concepts and Transformation.* 7(2), 117–139.

Haraway, Donna. 1988. Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14(3), 575–599.

Harding, Sandra. 1991. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Harvey, David. 1973. *Social Justice and the City.* London: Edward Arnold.

Harvey, David. 2012. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution.* New York: Verso.

Hickey, Samuel and Giles Mohan (eds.). 2004. *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development.* London: Zed.

Holston, James. 2008. *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

hooks, bell. 1990. Postmodern blackness. *Postmodern Culture* 1(1). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Isin, Engin F. 2008. Theorizing acts of citizenship. In, Engin F. Isin & Greg M. Nielsen (eds), *Acts of Citizenship.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 15–43.

Johansson, Anders W. and Erik Lindhult. 2008. Emancipation or workability? Critical versus pragmatic scientific orientation in action research. *Action Research* 6(1), 95–115.

Jordan, Steven and Dip Kapoor. 2016. Re-politicizing participatory action research: Unmasking neoliberalism and the illusions of participation. *Educational Action Research* 24(1), 134-149.

Kallio, Kirsi Pauliina. 2012. Political presence and the politics of noise. *Space and Polity* 16 (3), 287-302.

Kapoor, Ilan. 2002. The devil's in the theory: A critical assessment of Robert Chambers' work on participatory development. *Third World Quarterly* 23(1), 101–117.

Kemmis, Stephen 2006. Exploring the relevance of Critical Theory for action research: Emancipatory action research in the footsteps of Jürgen Habermas. In, Peter Reason & Hilary Bradbury (eds), *Handbook of Action Research: Concise Paperback Edition.* London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, pp. 94–106.

Kesby, Mike 2005. Retheorizing empowerment-through-participation as a performance in space: Beyond tyranny to transformation. *Signs* 30(4), 2037–2065.

Kesby Mike, Sara Kindon and Rachel Pain. 2005. 'Participatory' approaches

and diagramming techniques in Flowerdew Robin and David Martin (eds.) *Methods in human geography.* Harlow: Pearson 144‑66

Kindon, Sara, Rachel Pain and Mike Kesby. 2007. *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place.* London: Routledge.

Kobayashi, Audrey. 1994. Coloring the field: Gender, 'race,' and the politics of fieldwork. *The Professional Geographer* 46(1), 73–80.

Kobayashi, Audrey and Linda Peake. 2000. Racism out of place: Thoughts on whiteness and an antiracist geography in the new millenium. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, 392–403.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1974. *The Production of Space.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Levin, Morten. 2012. The academic integrity of action research. *Action Research* 10(2), 133–149.

Manda, M.A.Z., 2007. Grassroots-led urban development: potentials, achievements,

limitations – experiences in Malawi. Paper presented at the 8th N-AERIUS Conference, London.

Manda, Mtafu .A.Z. 2013. Situation of Urbanization in Malawi Report, prepared for the Ministry of Lands and Housing, Lilongwe.

Marchart, Oliver. 2007. *Post-Foundational Political Thought.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Marcuse, Herbert. 1964. *One-Dimensional Man.* Boston, MA: Beacon.

McFarlane, Colin. 2011. *Learning the City: Knowledge and Translocal Assemblage.* Wiley Online Library.

McNay, Louise. 2014. *The Misguided Search for the Political. Social Weightlessness in Radical Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Miraftab, Faranak. 2004. Invited and invented spaces of participation: Neoliberal citizenship and feminists' expanded notions of politics. *Wagadu* 1(Spring), 1–7.

Miraftab, Faranak. 2005. Insurgency and spaces of active citizenship: The story of Western Cape Anti-eviction Campaign in South Africa. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 25(2), 200–217.

Mitlin, Diana and Sheela Patel. 2014. The urban poor and strategies for a pro-poor politics – Reflections on Shack/slum dwellers International, in Parnell, S. and Oldfield, S. (eds.) 2014. *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*, Chapter 26: 296-308, London and New York: Routledge

Mohan Giles. 2006. Beyond participation: strategies for deeper empowerment in Cooke Bill and Uma Kothari (eds.) *Participation: the new tyranny?* London: Zed Books, 134 – 67.

Mohan, Giles and Kristian Stokke. 2000. Participatory development and empowerment: The dangers of localism. *Third World Quarterly* 21(2), 247–268.

Moini, Giulio, 2011. How participation has become a hegemonic discursive resource: towards an interpretivist research agenda. *Critical Policy Studies* 5 (2), 149-168.

Mouffe, Chantal. 1999. Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? *Social Research* 66(3), 745–758.

Mouffe, Chantal. 2000. *The Democratic Paradox.* London: Verso.

Mwathunga, Evance. 2014. *Contesting Spaces in Urban Malawi: A Lefebvrian Analysis.* Phd dissertation, Stellenbosch University. Available at: http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/86660 (accessed 01 January 2017).

Nagar, Richa. 2014. *Muddying the Waters – Coauthoring Feminisms across Scholarship and Activism*. Illnois: University of Illnois Press.

Nagar, Richa. 2002. Footloose researchers, 'travelling' theories, and the politics of transnational feminist praxis. *Gender, Place and Culture* 9, 179–186.

National Statistical Office (NSO) 2010. Spatial Distribution and Urbanization 2010. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi.

Nowotny, Helga. 2003. Democratising expertise and socially robust knowledge. *Sci Public Policy*. 30(3), 151-156.

Oldfield, Sophie. 2015. Between activism and the academy. The urban as political terrain. *Urban Studies* 52(11), 2072-2086.

Oxford Dictionary of Geography. 2015. *A Dictionary of Geography.* 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pain, Rachel, Sara Kindon and Mike Kesby. 2007. Participatory action research: making a difference to theory, practice and action in Kindon Sara, Rachel Pain

and Mike Kesby (eds.) *Participatory action research approaches and methods: connecting people, participation and place*. London: Routledge, 26 – 32.

Purcell, Mark. 2014. Rancière and revolution. *Space and Polity* 18(2), 168–181.

Purcell, Mark. 2013. *The Down-Deep Delight of Democracy*. Wiley-Blackwell, UK.

Rancière, Jacques. 1992. Politics, identification, and subjectivization. *October* 61(Summer), 58–64.

Rancière, Jacques. 2001. Ten theses on politics. *Theory and Event* 5(2).

Rancière, Jacques. 2009. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Trans. Gregory Elliott. London: Verso.

Rancière, Jacques. 2011. The thinking of dissensus: Politics and aesthetics. In, Paul Bowman & Richard Stamp (eds), *Reading Rancière*. London: Continuum, pp. 1–17.

Reason, Peter and Hilary Bradbury (eds). 2008. *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research:* Participative Inquiry and Practice. 2nd edn. London: SAGE.

Refstie, Hilde. 2013. Doing it ourselves – Community mobilization and strategic planning in Senti settlement. NTNU, CCODE, and TRI, Lilongwe. https://actmalawi.com/2017/12/20/case-study-1-senti/ accessed 02.05.2016

Refstie, Hilde. 2014a. Building Representation and Partnerships – Chikanda Zomba, NTNU, CCODE, and TRI, Lilongwe. https://actmalawi.com/2017/12/15/case-study-2-zomba-chikanda/ accessed 04.05.2016

Refstie, Hilde. 2014b. From Plans to Action: Mobilizing Funds and Credits for Slum Upgrading in Nancholi Blantyre, NTNU, CCODE, and TRI, Lilongwe. https://actmalawi.com/2017/12/14/case-study-3-nancholi-chimiire/ accessed 04.04.2016

Refstie, Hilde. 2014c. Negotiating Services through Community Committees – Ndirande Makata Blantyre, NTNU, CCODE, and TRI, Lilongwe. https://actmalawi.com/2017/12/13/case-study-4-ndirande-makata/ accessed 04.05.2016

Refstie, Hilde. 2014d. Left Hanging? Participatory Slum Upgrading and Studio Planning in Salisburyline, NTNU, CCODE, and TRI, Lilongwe. https://actmalawi.com/2017/12/12/case-study-5-salisburyline-mzuzu/ accessed 04.05.2016

Refstie, Hilde. 2015. Is this Participatory Budgeting? The Blantyre Process, NTNU, CCODE, and TRI, Lilongwe. https://actmalawi.com/2017/12/11/case-study-6-participatory-budgeting-blantyre/ accessed 09.07.2017

Refstie, Hilde and Cathrine Brun. 2011. Towards transformative participation: Collaborative research with 'urban IDPs' in Uganda. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25(2), 239–256.

Refstie, Hilde and Cathrine Brun. 2016. Voicing noise: Political agency and the trialectics of participation in urban Malawi. *Geoforum* 74, 136–146.

Robins, Steven, Andrea Cornwall and Bettina von Lieres 2008. Rethinking 'citizenship' in the postcolony. *Third World Quarterly* 29 (6) pp. 1069-1086.

Shapiro, Ian. 2007. *The Flight From Reality in the Human Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Shaw, Jacqueline. 2012.Interrogating the gap between the ideals and practice reality of participatory video in Milne, E-J, Mitchell ,Claudia, and Lange, Naydene de (eds.) *Handbook of participatory video*. 225-242, Plymouth: Altamira Press.

Silungwe, Chikosa M. 2009. Customary land tenure reform and development: A critique of customary land tenure reform under Malawi's national land policy. *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal* 2009(1). Available at: https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/lgd/2009_1/silungwe/ (accessed 20 December 2016).

Sitas, Ari. 2004. *Voices that Reason: Theoretical Parables*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers and Pretoria: UNISA Press.

Spivak, Gayatri C. 1988: Can the subaltern speak? Marxism and the interpretation of culture. In, Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.* Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, pp. 271–313.

Swyngedouw, Erik. 2011. Interrogating post-democratization: Reclaiming egalitarian political spaces. *Political Geography* 30(7), 370–380.

Swyngedouw, Erik. 2014. Where is the political? Insurgent mobilisations and the incipient 'return of the political'. *Space and Polity* 18(2), 122–136.

UN Habitat 2012. Malawi National Urban Profile. Nairobi: UN-Habitat

Winterbauer, Nancy L., Bekemeyer, Betty, VanRaemdonck, Lisa, and Anna G. Hoover 2016. Applying Community-Based Participatory Research Partnership Principles to Public Health Practice-Based Research Networks. *SAGE Open,* October-December 1-13.

Chapter 8 Findings and contributions

This chapter presents the findings and contributions of the research project with specific reference to the articles. The table below indicates how each article contributes to answering the research questions. Each research question is then presented and discussed.

How the articles connect to the research questions	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
Article I: Voicing noise: Political agency and the trialectics of participation in urban Malawi	**X**	(x)	(x)	
Article II: Does participatory planning promise too much? Global discourses and the glass ceiling of participatory urban planning in Malawi	(x)	**X**	**X**	
Article III: The Beginning is never the beginning: How to co-produce a space for action research				**X**
Article IV: Critical action research: Negotiating multiple imperatives			**X**	**X**

Table I. Article and research questions

8.1   What are the different and overlapping spaces for community participation in urban planning and slum upgrading in Malawi and how do informal settlement groups engage with them?

This research question is mainly covered in Article I, which is co-authored with Cathrine Brun. As mentioned in Section 4.3, we identified three main categories of participatory spaces in urban Malawi: claimed, invited and invented spaces (Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2006; Miraftab, 2005).

Invited spaces are facilitated by decision-makers, and participants are invited to join. Spaces that were explored under this category in the project included city-led slum-upgrading processes, national urban forums and participatory budgeting. Claimed spaces are opened up and shaped by relatively powerless actors themselves. Such spaces can be created through social movements, organizations or community groups, or just be general spaces where people meet to discuss and interact outside of formal institutional frameworks. Examples of this were Federation-organized savings schemes, community-led mappings and enumerations, and strategic planning happening at the community level through various structures. Both invited and claimed spaces may be relatively institutionalized, and they tend to operate within existing participation and planning discourses as visible spaces with a stated aim of inclusion. The third type of space identified – invented spaces – are more confrontational and less institutionalized (Miraftab, 2005). Here, participants directly oppose authorities and the status quo. The invented space is thus more agonistic than the 'claimed'.

In Malawi, we found that there was an abundance of invited spaces that were led by local or national government and NGOs. Examples included national urban forums, participatory budgeting, policy hearings and spaces created as part of specific urban planning and slum-upgrading programmes. However, as exemplified by Field Note 8 on participatory budgeting in Blantyre, invited spaces were typically technical and area based. Consensus was also in many cases manipulated, as representatives were given little space in which to develop and express 'noise':

> Last year we were being called to the city council. The city council office only explained what they had done with development and the financial budgets, but we think it is no point in just getting informed. Problems are still in the community and the budget was not reflecting the problems on the ground (Group discussion, Federation leaders, Blantyre 28 March 2014).

At the same time, we found that claimed planning spaces driven by informal settlement groups were also typically depoliticized. Community groups tended to operate within the established frameworks and to focus on coping mechanisms and survival within the existing system rather than confronting it. As exemplified in the field note below, confrontation was typically avoided in community-mobilized planning spaces.

Field note 10: Community mobilizing in Chikanda, Zomba

In Chikanda, an informal settlement in Zomba, community groups had begun to raise money from community members to renovate a clinic. The clinic had been built in 2004 by UNICEF and was run by the district health office. However, after the city council administration took over the clinic's management in 2008, water and electricity were disconnected, the clinic's equipment was sold off, and the building deteriorated. Community representatives now wanted to get the clinic up and running again. The representatives had previously collected money from community members to build a footbridge and were now using the same approach to renovate this clinic. Their relationship with the city council administration had not been so good in the past, but they now worked with city council officials who had agreed that the city council administration would take on the operating costs of the clinic if it was renovated. This, however, was not enough. Staffing of clinics is the responsibility of the district health office, which had other competing priorities. It would therefore not staff the clinic in Chikanda (Case Study 2).

Photo 14. Community representatives and the Clinic building in Chikanda. Source: Author

> After realizing that the district health office might not provide staffing for the clinic, the community representatives decided to work with some of the other priorities from their community development strategies. However, they did not get much response for their plans at the city council administration:
>
> > *Community representative:* We went to the council and gave them our plans so they could be included into the city budget.
> >
> > *Me:* Were they?
> >
> > *Community representative:* No.
> >
> > *Me:* Is there anything more you can do yourselves without waiting for them?
> >
> > *Community representative:* No, we cannot manage. The things to provide are too expensive.
> >
> > *Me:* So what do you do next, then?
> >
> > Community representative: We go and submit the plans again.
> >
> > *Me:* And if that does not work?
> >
> > *Community representative:* We will continue to work with the city council and go again with our documents.
> >
> > (Group discussion, Chikanda community representatives, 10 February 2014).

Agonistic planning issues such as structures of exclusion and dynamics of resource distribution at various levels were typically not part of the conversation in either the claimed or the invited planning spaces explored. Spaces where such topics were raised tended rather to work outside of and be disconnected from the participatory planning framework – in the form of activities such as land invasions, squatting, ignoring of planning regulations or public protests (Mwathunga, 2014). Since there was little or no connection between what was going on outside and inside the planning frameworks, the participatory planning spaces remained depoliticized (Articles I and II).

Throughout the research (see Article I) it became clear that the more concrete material benefits the participants in participatory spaces sought – such as housing, access to

mainstream services, large-scale infrastructure, etc. – were not attainable without some form of political transformation that addressed structures of exclusion and resource distribution. At the same time, the interviews, discussions and observations indicated that participants in participatory spaces typically wished to be included *into* existing frameworks rather than challenge them. We therefore decided to explore a third way for understanding transformative participation in the Malawian context, one that negotiated the need between a programme of insurgent radical action and the more pragmatic consensus-based participation model that was being practised. As part of this approach, we suggested the use of a 'trialectics of participatory spaces' inspired by the literature on participatory spaces (Cornwall, 2004, 2008; Gaventa, 2006; Holston, 2008; Miraftab, 2005) and recent debates in political and cultural geography (Dikeç 2005, 2007, 2012; Davidson and Iveson, 2014a, 2014b; Isin, 2008; Kallio, 2012; Mouffe, 1999, 2000; Pieterse, 2008; Purcell, 2013, 2014; Rancière, 2001, 2009, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2014). Here, the potential for transformation is found in the ways the 'claimed', 'invited' and 'invented' dimensions of participation connect, overlap and open up for ways in which actors can meet. However, inspired by Lefebvre (1974) and Soja's (1996) reading of Lefebvre's work, we did not see claimed, invited and invented spaces as a dialectic in which one space builds upon another to create the ultimate transformative space. Rather, on the basis of the interviews and the collaborative research, we suggested a starting point where the three spaces identified are strong, recognized and connected, and where one is always a transcending inclusion of the other two.

Figure 6. The 'trialectics of participation' in urban Malawi

Following the 'trialectics' thinking, it was necessary in Malawi to strengthen the more agonistic dimension of participation and to create platforms where the various spaces could be connected. The live national radio debate that was organized as part of the PhD research project was analysed as one such space in which claimed, invited and invented dimensions of participation overlapped. As explained in the previous chapter, the debate represented a widening of the traditional planning space, and what would often count as noise in other spaces was accepted as voice in this context.

8.2 What opportunities and barriers for realizing citizenship rights do informal settlement groups face in participatory spaces?

While increasing people's voice is an important step towards realizing urban citizenship, it is also necessary to consider how this voice translates into concrete benefits that participants seek. In the Malawian context, we realized that even if the informal settlement groups were able to gain more influence through a 'trialectics' of participation, there were a number of factors that limited what they were actually able to achieve with

their influence. Some of these contextual and discursive constraints have been described in the background chapters in this foundation, and they are more thoroughly discussed in Article II.

Co-authored with Marianne Millstein, Article II explores how global discourses on community mobilization and participatory planning are enacted locally in urban Malawi, and how they work in terms of realizing citizenship rights such as housing, services and political voice. In the article, we show that in a low-resource setting such as Malawi, where slum-upgrading issues are typically disconnected from the wider development discourse, the strategies promoted through discourses on urban citizenship 'from below' (Holston, 2008, 2011; Mitlin and Patel, 2014; Rossi and Vanolo, 2012; Satterthwaite, 2001) have not achieved the same results as elsewhere. In Malawi, this has led to a serious participation fatigue in many areas, which in turn is having a negative on prospects for further mobilization:

> Now people will not participate without getting allowances. There has been no implementation. Maybe if something was implemented people would do it without allowances. But the slum upgrading has lost its chance with them because they have been engaged 4–5 years (Group discussion, community leaders, Salisburyline, 23 April 2014).

The thesis shows that there are quite a few things community groups are able to achieve on their own or in collaboration with NGOs and local governments (see, for example, the field notes throughout this foundation). These include participatory planning activities; community financing of services such as waste management and roadworks; community policing; negotiating services from private and parastatal service providers; and taking advantage of upcoming elections to secure funding for projects. However, informal settlement groups struggle with gaining access to housing and larger-scale infrastructure and services. The people interviewed were also unable to secure for themselves the same services that were offered in the wealthier areas of the city or to achieve complete security of tenure. Contextual dimensions such as limited national and local resources, disconnections from national and urban policies of redistribution, and a local politics shaped by both clientelism and democratic reforms limit the range of strategies and practices available to local groups seeking to realize their citizenship rights through

participatory urban planning (Section 8.2; Article II). These constraints are typically not taken into consideration, and overly ambitious participatory slum-upgrading proposals thus produce expectations that are not possible to meet within the existing frameworks:

> Since the project was on a voluntary basis people started contributing. But then they dropped out because they see there is no benefit (Group discussion community leaders and representatives, Kauma Lilongwe, 27 March 2013).

Given the situation described above, we caution in Article II against the democratic promises of global discourses on participatory planning and argue for more locally grounded approaches to the potential of participatory planning in substantiating citizenship claims that take into consideration the specific social, political and economic context of Malawi. When it comes to participatory planning, it is, for example, important to establish the potential and constraints of what can be achieved at different scales, by whom and in what time frame. This means identifying what can be done by community groups themselves through strategies of self-transformation; what can be achieved with some funds and more connections to actors such as the city council and its administration; and what requires more systemic change at the national level and beyond in terms of prioritization, resource distribution and recognition of informal settlements. It also means, as will be discussed in the next section, acknowledging that the solution is not necessarily to be found with participatory planning at all, even when it transcends scale.

8.3   How can we better understand the transformative potential of participatory strategies and practices available to informal settlement groups?

Urban theory-building has often been about and located in the global North and West (Chatterjee, 2012; Parnell and Oldfield, 2014; Roy, 2009, 2015a, 2015b; Robinson and Roy, 2016; Sheppard et al., 2013; Watson, 2009). Moreover, some cities tend to be the subject of research and discussions, while others are relatively poorly understood (Mabin, 2014). At its most extreme, this can result in 'travelling theories' that reproduce power relations and impose agendas on the peripheries (Patel, 2014; Vainer, 2014; Nagar, 2002; Said, 1983). This has been most visible in terms of the 'Eurocentrism' and 'Americanism'

of urban studies, but certain trends can also be identified within theorization on cities from the global south.

As noted earlier, much of the urban scholarship focusing on mobilization and citizenship in the global South has been developed from major cities in South Africa, India and parts of Latin America (Parnell and Oldfield, 2014; Bénit-Gbaffou 2012; Holston 2011, 2008; Pieterse, 2008; Miraftab, 2005; Chatterjee, 2004). In these cities, urban planning and slum upgrading have comprised a very pronounced basis from which to mobilize against socio-economic inequality and injustice (Pieterse, 2008; Parnell and Oldfield, 2014). They are also all contexts in which the state has played a significant role in service provision and housing. Most importantly, they are contexts in which a substantial amount of resources are available for redistribution. As has been shown in this thesis, when approaches developed in these contexts are uncritically transferred to a setting like Malawi, they do not yield the same results.

To understand the transformative potential of participatory strategies and practices available to informal settlement groups, it is therefore important to unpack contextual dynamics and conditions under which urban citizenship claims are formed. An action research approach can help in this endeavour as it holds the potential to situate and link community strategies and practices with policy structures and development. In our project, for example, it became clear that many of the benefits participants sought in slum-upgrading processes are not achievable without systemic and structural change, and it was difficult to see how this type of change is to be accomplished within current participatory planning practices (Articles I and II). At the same time, the collaborative approach helped us to understand that participants navigate the planning practices in different ways, and that participation in planning was only one among a number of strategies that the participants employed to reach their goals in terms of improving their living conditions. For many, it therefore made more sense to work with planning frameworks in conjunction with other practices rather than to challenge them. This had to be reflected into the action research process and led to the development of an integrated approach that focused on both analysing and deconstructing discourses in order to challenge them, as well as on finding ways to operate within the existing frameworks. The dialogue also pushed the

researchers to go deeper into the material and develop a more nuanced understanding of the strategies people use to improve their livelihoods and settlements.

In our theoretical framework, for example, we had conceptualized 'noise' as a necessary component for change. However, the opposite of 'noise' is not necessarily silence or passiveness. The people involved in the study, both as partners and participants, were in fact actively pursuing a variety of strategies. The lack of 'noise' could for example be seen as a strategic choice. By not drawing attention to their areas, people were able to continue a range of informal practices related to housing and planning without the government's interference (Mwathunga, 2014). Resistance was rather found in the ways in which people settled in informal settlements and organized themselves directly with service providers (Case Study 4), or in how community groups organized services for themselves (Case Studies 1-3). As exemplified in Field Note 1, people also exploited bureaucratic slippages and connections and made use of a multitude of subject positions to negotiate their state or client relationships (Millstein, 2017).

The lack of noise with regards to failed planning processes therefore did not necessarily mean, as Cammack (2007) has argued, that civil society in Malawi was ""weak" and silent, not easily roused to civic action, or demanding of government, even after years of "strengthening"' (Cammack, 2007: 601). It rather meant that people were finding alternative ways to influence their everyday lives in line with what risks they were willing to take and what practices they believed would yield results. The initial framework of transformative participation and understandings of political agency brought in by us as university researchers were not able to cater to this reality. In order to comply with the participatory approach, the framework therefore had to be expanded to account for the lived realities of the participants.

8.4   How can action research be used to know, theorize and support spaces for transformative participation?

In her book *The Misguided Search for the Political,* McNay (2014) shows how political theorizing has a tendency to remove itself from the everyday understandings and practices

of people. When critical theory aims to speak more directly to strategies of change, it therefore runs the risk of becoming what McNay, inspired by Bourdieu (2000), calls a 'socially weightless' mode of thought. 'Social weightlessness' represents an 'abstract way of thinking about the world that is so far removed from the actual practices and dynamics of everyday life, that, ultimately, its own analytical relevance and normative validity is thrown into question' (McNay, 2014: 4).

Action research provides an avenue for conducting socially situated research and thus avoiding social weightlessness (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Action research projects have to respond to a variety of contextual demands from researchers, participants and partners. In this process, the research becomes a negotiated outcome, and it is exactly in the dynamics of negotiations between the researchers, project partners and participants that the critical capacity on both sides develops and 'social weightlessness' is avoided. In this lies the potential of action research in critical scholarship to create research that is at the same time critical, rooted, explanatory and actionable (Article IV).

In our case, for example, the dialogue between the university researchers, project partners and participants led to the development of an integrated action research strategy. The researchers had initially advocated a more agonistic understanding of transformative participation based on critical theory in the spirit of Castells (1972), Harvey (1973, 2012), Lefebvre (1974), Marcuse (1964), Mouffe (1999, 2000), and Rancière (1992, 2001, 2009, 2011). The participants and partners, on the other hand, promoted a more pragmatic approach, which focused on what could be achieved through inclusion into current frameworks. In the integrated approach, the case studies were used to document existing practices, to facilitate learning between places and levels, and to provide a basis for advocacy towards decision-makers focusing mainly on what could be done within the existing frameworks in the short and medium term. The larger analysis of the research project, however, included more of a system critique of how participatory planning was practised in Malawi. Here, critical theory and discourse analysis were used to make visible mechanisms of exclusion and create reflections on the limitations inherent in the current planning practices. The integrated approach thus aimed to create critical reflection while at the same time responding to the needs of the partners and the participants involved in the research (Nielsen and Nielsen, 2010).

Action research has often been criticized for failing to contribute towards the wider body of academic theory (Dick, 2004, 2006). While this may have changed in recent years, there is still a tendency for action research to 'diffuse theory' rather than create it (Gustavsen, 2008; Levin, 2012). At the same time, 'there is nothing so theoretical as good action research' (Friedman and Rogers, 2009). Action research often produces very rich and experiential knowledge that can shed light on processes of domination, make critical theory less abstract, and refine and develop concepts with roots in everyday practices (Friedman and Rogers, 2009; Johansson and Lindhult, 2008).

In Malawi, we as researchers could engage closely with concepts such as political agency, transformative participation, participatory spaces and urban citizenship. In doing this, we brought together literature from political geography (Castells, 1972; Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1974; Marcuse, 1964; Mouffe, 1999, 2000; Rancière, 1992, 2001, 2009, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2014), development studies (Cornwall, 2002, 2004, 2008; Hickey and Mohan, 2004) and urban studies (Miraftab, 2005; Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011, 2014; Pieterse, 2008; Roy, 2009, 2015a, 2015b). Our understandings of the concepts employed in the research developed not just from academic literature, policy documents and interview material, but also from group analysis, discussion meetings, existing practices and, last but not least, practices that were tried out as part of the action research project, such as the stakeholder workshop and the radio debate. The critical dialogue that made up the action research process thus shaped conceptual and theoretical developments within the study.

For example, since many of the participants wished to be included into participatory frameworks rather than challenge them, the project sought to bridge Harvey's (1973) call for a programme of radical action and the more consensus-based urban participation model currently practised in Malawi, and therefore explored a third way between the two. In this work, a 'trialectics' of participation and notions of 'voice', 'noise' and 'silence' were explored (Articles I and IV) to enable greater understanding of everyday citizenship practices and the relationship between people's political agency and what change they want to engage in. Finally, by contextualizing international discourses in a low-resource situation with reference to empirical examples, the study brought in a critique of urban

citizenship 'from below' and how the concept has been theorized and practised across contexts.

The thesis also makes some theoretical contributions in terms of methodological reflections. One consists of its emphasis on documenting and analysing the beginning of a research project and how spaces for action research are co-produced (Article III). Another is through its adoption of an integrated approach that seeks to combine pragmatic and critical elements as a way of responding to some of the multiple imperatives within action research regarding the need to be critical and rooted, explanatory and actionable (Article IV). Lastly, by working with community groups at scale, the thesis responds to some of the frequently levelled critique that action research is too localized and depoliticized.

While theoretical contributions are important, action research projects are not evaluated on theory alone. The research also has to have some practical contributions. As described in Articles III and IV, a weakness of the integrated action research approach was that it did not necessarily deliver immediate practical results for the participants involved. Furthermore, it is very difficult to distinguish between what was achieved by the project and what was the result of other processes into which the project was integrated. Similar challenges arise when one attempts to assess longer-term effects that are not possible to capture within the project cycle. Nevertheless, the next section attempts to sum up some of what can be argued to be practical contributions of the project in supporting spaces for transformative participation, starting with one of the more concrete outputs – the case study series:

> A lot has happened since I last wrote. One is that I feel we have identified the action part of the project. That is a case study series that communities can use towards various stakeholders. Either for advocacy on issues or as fundraising. Also, it is documenting some things going on that can be used for learning in general. The big challenge now will be to try to raise funds for a meeting next year to discuss some of the issues that have come up during the research. If we are to pull that off I think that something concrete has come out of the research (Research diary, 15 April 2014).

The seven case studies documented existing practices and helped to facilitate learning between community groups, within the Federation, within CCODE and among other actors. The studies also provided a basis for advocacy towards decision-makers. For example, funding that was long overdue was addressed by a UN agency after one of the case studies was published and sent to them (Case Study 5 on Salisburyline). Some groups also used the case studies to fundraise for their community funds (Senti in particular), while others used 'their' case study to initiate a dialogue with the relevant city council administration on issues in their settlement (Senti, Chikanda and Ndirande Makata). The studies were also used for learning between community groups and within CCODE as an organization.

The workshop and radio debate worked to bring the various stakeholders together, to create dialogue between them and to bring up some of the more contentious issues that tended to be avoided in participatory slum-upgrading processes. This part of the research process made visible some of the difficult decisions that need to take place for slum upgrading to happen. It also prompted CCODE and the Federation to engage more with how national and urban governance dynamics and relations influence the results they seek through participatory urban planning processes. While CCODE was already moving in this direction, the research has been used as a basis for funding applications that seek to bridge the gap between governance and planning processes:

> Some of the issues that you have raised have actually informed how we are
> doing our work now. That concept note I sent you, on the proposal that we
> did, which project we are doing now. You will see that some of the issues
> that were brought out in the research are issues that we have taken aboard
> in terms of projecting the arguments that we want to pursue, so in a way you
> have given us a very good basis for some of our interventions (Interview,
> Head of Research and Advocacy, CCODE, 12 May 2017).

The project can thus be said to have had some practical contributions, but it is difficult to evaluate how they will play out in the long term. The lack of evaluations, especially long-term ones, is a general weakness with many action research projects (Levin, 2012). The time cycle in which projects are expected to be completed constrains such learning opportunities. Furthermore, restrictions in funding often make it difficult to conduct

123

thorough evaluations. It is therefore my hope that I will be able to work with the partners in Malawi also in the future – to develop a longer-term partnership that can take into account some of these activities.

8.5   Concluding reflections: Suggestions for future research and practice

While the PhD project answers some questions, it also raises many others, suggesting a number of areas for future research. Article I calls for more research into how different participatory spaces can be strengthened and connected to bring out potentials for transformation. This suggests a repoliticization of participatory planning discourses, but one sensitive to context. Article II picks up where Article I leaves off, illustrating how the Malawian context does not fit neatly into dominant narratives on transformation, be these based on ideas of inclusive citizenship as a feature of neoliberal urbanism or on those of communities as collective insurgents. It concludes, as Roy (2009: 827) has observed, that

> this is perhaps the point, the Africanist debates about agency, subjectivity, and politics defy the easy categorizations of power and resistance. Under conditions of crisis, the subaltern subject is simultaneously strategic and self-exploitative, simultaneously a political agent and a subject of the neoliberal grand slam.

Our work suggests that mobilizing in a low-resource context in which funds for the implementation of slum upgrading are not likely to become available requires an approach that differs somewhat from those that are advocated through dominant participatory planning discourses. This does not mean that the principles behind how communities are currently mobilized should be abandoned. In many ways, longer-term mobilization with a focus on people's capabilities is exactly what is needed in a low-resource context to influence resource distribution and capacities of inclusion in the city. However, with the lack of concrete results and the participation fatigue that follows it, there is a risk that the process of transformative participation might fold in on itself before it gets that far.

According to the observations above, the thesis has therefore argued for a more modest link between participatory planning and citizenship, as well as for a move beyond urban citizenship as it has been conceptualized and translated into practice from the discourses on 'urban citizenship from below'. It has emphasized how it is necessary to better understand everyday citizenship practices and the relationship between people's political agency and what types of change they wish to engage in. While such research is on the increase (e.g. Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011; Millstein, 2017; Robbins et al., 2008), there is still a need to define more concretely what is meant by everyday citizenship practices, how such practices relate to other ways in which citizenship claims are fronted, and what groups and individuals can achieve this way.

Knowledge always arises from a context and is put into context (Vainer, 2014). It is therefore important to build a wide repertoire of cases and include contexts that have previously not been explored in full. Urbanization, informality and governance in Malawi represents such a case, and this dissertation has therefore hopefully contributed to providing urban theorization with a wider range of urban experience that it can benefit from and build upon (Robinson, 2014).

Reference list

Ahmed, S, 2000. Who Knows? Knowing Strangers and Strangerness. *Australian Feminist Studies,* 15(31), 49-68.

Althusser L. 2005. *Pour Marx, Editions La Découverte*. Paris.

Andresen, S. A., Epremian, L., Jakobsen, T. S, Jones, M, and Refstie, H. 2015. Fighting fog - The case of creeping neoliberalism and weakening university democracy in Norway. *Krisis: Tijdschrift voor empirische filosofie*, 2015(2), 27-33.

Appadurai, A. 2001. Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon for politics. *Environment and Urbanization*, 13(2), 23-43.

Appadurai A. 2000. Grassroots globalization and research imagination. *Public Culture*, (12), 1–19.

Baiocchi, G. 2005. *Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre*. Stanford University Press: Stanford.

Bayat, A. 2010. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East. 1st edition.* Stanford University Press: Stanford.

Bayat A. 2000. From 'dangerous classes' to 'quiet rebels': the politics of the urban subaltern in the global south. *International Sociology* (15), 533–557.

Bènit-Gbaffou, 2015 (Ed.). *Popular Politics in South African Cities*. Johannesburg: HSRC Press.

Bènit-Gbaffou, C. 2012. Party politics, civil society and local democracy – Reflections from Johannesburg. *Geoforum*, 43(2), 178-189.

Bènit-Gbaffou, C. and Oldfield, S. 2014. Claiming 'rights' in the African city: popular mobilization and the politics of informality. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 281-296). London and New York: Routledge.

Bènit-Gbaffou, C. and Oldfield, S. 2011. Accessing the State: Everyday Practices and Politics in the South. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 46(5), 445-452.

Berg, L., Huijbens, E.H. and Larsen, H.G. 2015. Producing anxiety in the neoliberal university. *The Canadian Geographer*, 60(2), 168-180.

Bishop, R. and Glynn, T. 1999. *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education. Palmerston North.* Auckland: Dunmore Press.

Blomley, N. 2007. Critical geography: anger and hope. *Progress in Human Geography*, 31(1), 53–65.

Blomley, N. 2006. Uncritical critical geography? *Progress in Human Geography,* 30 (1), 87-94.

Bohman, J. 2016. Critical Theory. In E.N. Zalta (Ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2016 Edition)*. Available at

http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/critical-theory/ accessed 03.10.2016

Boonyabancha. S. and Mitlin, D. 2012. Urban poverty reduction: learning by doing in Asia. *Environment and Urbanization*, 24(403), 403-421.

Booth, D., Cammack, D., Harrigan, J., Kanyongolo, E., Mataure, M. and Ngwira, N. 2006. *Drivers of Change and Development in Malawi.* (Working Paper No 261). London: Overseas Development Institute.

Bourdieu, P. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations.* Cambridge: Polity.

Brenner, N. and Schmid, C. 2012. Planetary urbanization. In M. Gandy (Ed.). *Urban constellations* (pp. 10–13). Berlin: Jovis.

Brun, C. 2009. A geographer's imperative? Research and action in the aftermath of disaster. *The Geographic Journal*, 175(3), 196-207.

Burns, D. 2014. Systemic action research: Changing system dynamics to support sustainable change. *Action Research*, 12(1), 3–18.

Butcher, S. and Frediani, A.A. 2014. Insurgent citizenship practices: the case of Muungano wa Wanavijiji in Nairobi, Kenya. *City*, 18(2), 119-133.

Byrne, D. 2009. Case-Based Methods: Why We Need Them, What They Are; How to Do Them. In D. Byrne and C.C. Ragin (Eds.). *The SAGE Handbook to Case-Based Methods* (pp. 1-13). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Caldwell, R. 2007. Agency and Change: Re-evaluating Foucault's Legacy. *Organization,* 14(6), 769 – 791

Calhoun, C. 1988. Justice, Care, Gender Bias. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 85(9), 451-463.

Cammack, D. 2012a. *Peri-urban governance and the delivery of public goods in Malawi 2009-2011.* (Report Africa Power and Politics Programme). London: Overseas Development Institute.

Cammack, D. 2012b. Malawi in crisis, 2011-2012. *Review of African Political Economy*, 39 (132), 375-388.

Cammack, D. 2011. *Malawi´s political settlement in crisis, 2011.* (Background Paper Africa Power and Politics Programme). London: Overseas Development Institute.

Cammack, D. 2007. The Logic of African Neopatrimonialism: What Role of Donors? *Development Policy Review*, 25(5), 599-614.

Cammack, D., Kanyongolo, E. and O'Neill, T. 2009. *Town chiefs in Malawi.* (ODI Working paper no. 3, June 2009). London: Overseas Development Institute.

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. 1989. *Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research.* Philadelphia: Falmer Press.

Castells, M. 1972. *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach.* London: Edward Arnold.

Chambers, R. 1997. *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last.* London: Intermediate Technology Publications

Chambers, R. 1995. Paradigm shifts and the practice of participatory research and development. In N. Nelson and S. Wright (Eds.). *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice* (pp. 30-42). London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Chasukwa, M. and Chinsinga, B. 2013. Slapping Accountability in the Face: Observance of Accountability in Malawi's Local Governments in the Absence of Councillors. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 36(5), 354-366.

Chatterjee, P. 2012. After subaltern studies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(35), 44–9.

Chatterjee, P. 2004. *The politics of the governed in most of the world*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chatterton, P., Fuller, D. and Routledge, P. 2007. Relating theory to activism: Theoretical and methodological reflections. In S. Kindon, R. Pain and M. Kesby (Eds.). *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place* (pp. 216–223). London: Routledge.

Chen, M., Jhabvala, R., Kanbur, R. and Richards, C. (Eds.). 2007. *Membership Based Organizations of the Poor.* New York: Routledge.

Chibber, V. 2013. *Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital.* New York: Verso.

Chinsinga, B. 2015. The Political Economy Analysis of Urban Governance and Management in Malawi. (Report Tilitonse Fund November 2015). Lilongwe: Tilitonse Fund. Accessible at: http://tilitonsefund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/PEA-on-Urban-Governance-PV-111215.pdf accessed 21.12.2017.

Chirwa, W. C. 2014. *Democracy and Political Participation.* (A review by AfriMAP and the Open Society for Southern Africa). New York: Open Society Foundations.

Chome, J. and McCall, M. K. 2005. Neo-customary title registration in informal settlements: The case of Blantyre. *International Development Planning Review*, 77(4), 385-411.

Choudry, A. 2014. (Almost) Everything you always wanted to know about activist research but were afraid to ask: What activist researchers say about theory and methodology. *Contention: The Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Protest,* 1(2), 75–88.

Cities Alliance 2012. *Cities Alliance Annual Report 2012.* (Annual report 2012). Washington DC: Cities Alliance.

Cleaver, F. 2001. Institutions, agency and the limitation of participatory approaches to development. In B. Cooke and U. Kothari (Eds.). *Participation, The new Tyranny?* (pp. 36 – 55). London: Zed Books.

Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (Eds.) 2001. *Participation, The new Tyranny?* London, Zed Books.

Cornwall, A. 2004. Spaces for transformation? Reflections on issues of power and difference in participation in development. In S. Hickey and G. Mohan (Eds.).

Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development (pp. 75-91). London: Zed.

Cornwall, A. 2008. Unpacking 'participation': models, meanings, and practices. *Community Development Journal,* 43(3), 269-283.

Cornwall, A. 2002. *Making Spaces, Changing Places: Situating Participation in Development.* (IDS Working Paper 170). Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

Cornwall A. and Coelho, V.S. (Eds.). 2007. *Spaces for change? The politics of citizen participation in new democratic arenas.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Davidson, M. and Iveson, K. 2014. Occupations, mediations, subjectifications: fabricating politics. *Space and Polity*, 18(2), 137-152.

Davies, B. and Bansel, P. 2010. Governmentality and academic work shaping the hearts and minds of academic workers. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 26(3), 5–20.

Davis, C.S. 2008. Critical Action Research. In L. M. Given (Ed.). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Davis, M. 2006. *Planet of Slums.* London and New York: Verso.

Del Gandio, J. 2010. *Neoliberalism and the academic-industrial complex*. Available at: truth-out. org/archive/component/k2/item/91200:neoliberalism-and-the-academicindustrial-complex (accessed 21.12.2017).

Depoy, E., Hartman, A. and Haslett, D. 1999. Critical Action Research: A Model for Social Work Knowing. *Social Work*, 44(6), 560-569.

Dick, B. 2006. Action research literature 2004-2006 – Themes and trends. *Action Research*, 4(4), 439-458.

Dick, B. 2004. Action research literature – Themes and trends. *Action Research*, 2(4), 424-444.

Dick, B. and Greenwood D.J. 2015. Theory and method: Why action research does not separate them. *Action Research*, 13(2), 194-197.

Dikeç, M. 2012. Space as a mode of political thinking. *Geoforum*, 43(4), 669-676.

Dikeç, M. 2007. *Badlands of the Republic: Space, Politics and Urban Policy*. London: Blackwells.

Dikeç, M. 2005. Space, politics and the political. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 23(2), 171-188.

Dionne, K.Y. and Horowitz, J. 2016. The Political Effects of Agricultural Subsidies in Africa: Evidence from Malawi. *World Development,* 87, 215-226.

Duncan, J.S. 1985. Individual action and political power: a structuration perspective. In R. J. Johnston (Ed.). *The Future of Geography* (pp. 174-190). London: Methuen.

Dunn, K. 2005. Interviewing. In I. Hay (Ed.). *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (pp. 79-105). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dwyer, S.C. and Buckle, J.L. 2009. The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 54-63.

Eggen Ø. 2011. *Dissonance in Development – Foreign Aid and State Formation in Malawi.* Doctoral dissertation. Ås: University of Life Sciences.

Englund, H. 2006. *Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Englund, H. (Ed.). 2002a. *Democracy of Chameleons: Politics and Culture in the New Malawi.* Blantyre: Christian Litterature Association Malawi.

Englund, H. 2002b.The village in the city, the city in the village: migrants in Lilongwe. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28(1), 137-154.

Escobar, A. 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Fay, M. and Opal, C. 2000. *Urbanization Without Growth: a Not so Uncommon Phenomenon.* (The World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series 2412). Washington DC: World Bank.

Fals Borda, Orlando 1979. The problem of investigating reality in order to transform it. *Dialectical Anthropology, 4*(1), 33–56.

Ferguson, J. 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine – Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Focault, M. 1976. Power/Knowledge. In G. Delanty and P. Strydom (Eds.). 2003. *Philosophies of Social Science – The Classic and Contemporary Readings* (pp. 342 – 353). Philadelphia: Open University Press

Fraser, N. 1985. What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender. *New German Critique*, 35, 97-131.

Freire, Paulo 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Seabury Press.

Friedman, V. J. and Rogers, T. 2009. There is nothing so theoretical as good action research. *Action Research*, 7(1), 31–47.

Gaventa, J. 2006. Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis. *IDS Bulletin,* 36(6), 23-33.

Giddens, A. 1984. *The Constitution of Society.* Cambridge: Polity.

Gleeson, B. 2014. *The Urban Condition.* London and New York: Routledge.

Government of Malawi (GoM) 2012. *The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2011-2016.* Lilongwe: GoM.

Greenwood, D. 2002. Action research: Unfulfilled promises and unmet challenges. *Concepts and Transformation, 7*(2), 117–139.

Gustavsen, B. 2008. Action research, practical challenges and the formation of theory. *Action Research, 6*(4), 421–437.

Habermas, J. 1984. *Theory of Communicative Action. Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society.* Borston: Beacon Press, Boston.

Hall, B. 1981. Participatory Research. Popular Knowledge, and Power: A Personal reflection. *Convergence*, 14(3), 6-17.

Haraway, D. 1988. Situated knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist studie*s, 14(3), 575-599.

Harding, S. 1991. *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Harding, S. 1986. *The Science Question in Feminism*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Harrigan, J. 2000. *From Dictatorship to Democracy: Economic Policy in Malawi 1964– 2000*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Harvey, D. 2012. *Rebel Cities – From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso.

Harvey, D. 1973. *Social Justice and the City*. London: Edward Arnold.

Herr, K and Anderson, G.L. 2015. *The action research dissertation: a guide for students and faculty.* London: SAGE Publications.

Hickey, S. and Mohan, G. (Eds.). 2004. *Participation – From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development*. London: Zed.

Hodgson G. M. 2004. *The Evolution of Institutional Economics. Agency, Structure and Darwinism in American Institutionalism*. London: Routledge.

Holston, J. 2011. Contesting privilege with right: the transformation of differentiated citizenship in Brazil. *Citizenship Studies*, 15 (3-4), 335-352.

Holston, J. 2008. *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

hooks, b. 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press.

Isin, E. F. 2008. Theorizing acts of citizenship. In F. Engin and Greg M. Nielsen (Eds.). *Acts of Citizenship* (pp. 15-43). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ismail, S. 2014. The politics of the urban everyday in Cairo: infrastructures of oppositional action. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 269-280). London and New York: Routledge.

Johansson, A. W. and Lindhult, E. 2008. Emancipation or workability? Critical versus pragmatic scientific orientation in action research. *Action Research,* 6(1), 95–115.

Johnston, R.J., Gregory, D., Pratt, G. and Watts, M. (Eds.) 2000. *The Dictionary of Human Geography 4th Edition*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Jordan, S. and Kapoor, D. 2016. Re-politicizing participatory action research: Unmasking neoliberalism and the illusions of participation. *Educational Action Research*, 24(1), 134-149.

Kallio, K.P. 2012. Political presence and the politics of noise. *Space and Polity*, 16(3), 287-302.

Kapoor, I. 2002. Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? The relevance of the Habermas–Mouffe debate for third world politics. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 27(4), 459-487.

Kapoor, D. 2009. Participatory academic research (Par) and People's Participatory Action Research (PAR): Research, politicization, and subaltern social movements in India. In D. Kapoor and S. Jordan (Eds.). *Education, Participatory Action Research, and Social Change* (pp. 29-44). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kemmis, S. 2008. Critical Theory and Participatory Action Research. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury: *The Sage Handbook of Action research second edition* (pp.121-138). London: Sage Publications.

Kemmis, S. 2006. Exploring the relevance of Critical Theory for action research: Emancipatory action research in the footsteps of Jürgen Habermas. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury (Eds.). *Handbook of Action Research: Concise Paperback Edition* (pp. 94-106). London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R. and Nixon, R. (Eds.). 2014. *The Action Research Planner – Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*. New York: Springer.

Kesby, M. 2005. Retheorizing Empowerment-through Participation as a Performance in Space: Beyond Tyranny to Transformation. *Signs*, 30(4), 2037–2065.

Kindon, S., Pain, R. and Kesby, M. (Eds.). 2007. *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place.* London: Routledge.

Kobayashi, A. and Peake, L. 2000. Racism out of place: Thoughts on whiteness and an antiracist geography in the new millennium. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 90, 392–403.

Kruse, C. 2005. Grassroots Participation in Urban Environments - Involving the People in the Development Planning Process in Towns and Cities. In C. Kruse & M.A.Z. Manda (Eds.). *Lessons in Urban Management - Experiences in Malawi 2000-2005.* Lilongwe: Malawi-German Programme for Democracy and Decentralization.

Levidow, L. 2002. Marketizing higher education: Neoliberal strategies and counter-strategies. In K. Robins and F. Webster (Eds.). The Virtual University? Knowledge, Markets and Management (pp.227–248). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Levin, M. 2012. The Academic Integrity of Action Research, *Action Research*, 10(2), 133-149.

Lefebvre, H., 1974. *The Production of Space.* Oxford: Blackwells.

Mabin, A. 2014. Grounding southern city theory in time and place. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 21-37). London and New York: Routledge

Manda, M.A.Z . 2013. *Situation of Urbanization in Malawi Report*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Lands and Housing.

Manda, M.A.Z. 2009. Water and sanitation in urban Malawi: *Can the Millennium Development Goals be met? A study of informal settlements in three cities.* (IIED, Human Settlements Working Paper Series). London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

Manda, M.A.Z., Nkhoma, S, and Mitlin, D. 2011. *Understanding pro-poor housing finance in Malawi.* (IIED, Human Settlements Working Paper Series, Poverty reduction in urban areas 32). London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

Marchart, O. 2007. *Post-Foundational Political Thought.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Marcuse, H. 1964. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society.* Boston: Beacon.

Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the Postcolony.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mbembe, A. and Nutall, S. 2004. Writing the world from an African metropolis. *Public Culture*, 16, 347–372.

McFarlane, C. 2009. Translocal assemblages: Space, power and social movements. *Geoforum*, 40(4), 561-567.

McFarlane, C. 2004. Geographical Imaginations and Spaces of Political Engagement: Examples from the Indian Alliance. *Antipode*, 36(5), 890-916.

McNay, Louise. 2014. *The Misguided Search for the Political. Social Weightlessness in Radical Democratic Theory.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Millstein, M. 2017. Rights, identities and belongings: Reflections on the everyday politics of urban citizenship in Delft, Cape Town. *Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 71(4), 253-267.

Millstein, M. 2013. The state of urban agendas in Norwegian development research and policy. *Forum for Development Studies*, 40(3), 373-392.

Millstein, M. 2007. *Challenges to Substantive Democracy in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Politics of Urban Governance Transformations and Community Organizing in Delft.* Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oslo.

Millstein, M., Oldfield, S., and Stokke, K. 2003. uTshani BuyaKhuluma – The Grass Speaks: The Political Space and Capacity of the South African Homeless People`s Federation. *Geoforum*, 34(4), 457-468.

Miraftab, F. 2012. Planning and Citizenship. In R. Weber and R. Crane (Eds.). *Oxford Handbook of Urban Planning* (pp.1180-1204). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miraftab, F. 2005. Making Neoliberal Governance: The Disempowering Work of Empowerment. *International Planning Studies*, 9(4), 239-259.

Mitlin, D. 2014a. Achieving universal sanitation*: Sharing the experience of the SDI affiliate in Blantyre, Malawi*. Available at http://www.newuniversitynorway.org/protestpub-fremtidens-universitet-for-hvite-menn-som-pusher-50/ accessed 23.03.2017.

Mitlin, D. 2014b. *Urban social movements, poverty reduction and social justice*. (IEED Briefing March 2014). Available at http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17208IIED.pdf accessed 21.11.2016.

Mitlin, D. and Patel, S. 2014. The urban poor and strategies for a pro-poor politics - Reflections on shack/slum dwellers international. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp.296-308). New York: Routledge.

Mukhija, V. 2012. Cities with Slums. In R. Weber and R. Crane (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Planning* (pp. 524-539). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mohan, G. and Stokke, K. 2000. Participatory development and empowerment: the dangers of localism. *Third World Quarterly,* 2(2), 247-268.

Mohanty, C. T. 1984. Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Boundary*, 12(3), 333-358.

Morselli, A. 2014. The Mutual Interdependence between Human Action and Social Structure in the Evolution of the Capitalist Economy. *Microeconomics and Macroeconomics*, 2(1), 6-11.

Mouffe, C. 2000. *The Democratic Paradox.* London: Verso.

Mouffe, C. 1999. Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? *Social research,* 66(3), 745-758.

Mwathunga, E. 2014. *Contesting Spaces in Urban Malawi: A Lefebvrian Analysis*. Doctoral dissertation. Available at http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/86660 accessed 21.12.107.

Nagar, R. 2002. Footloose researchers, ''travelling''theories, and the politics of transnational feminist praxis. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 9,179–86.

National Statistical Office (NSO) 2010. *Spatial Distribution and Urbanization 2010*. Lilongwe: Government of Malawi.

Newell, J. 1995. 'A Moment of Truth'? The Church and Political Change in Malawi, 1992. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33(2), 243-262.

Nielsen, B. S. and Nielsen, K. A. 2010. Aktionsforskning. In S. Brinkmann and L. Tangaard (Eds.). *Kvalitative Metoder og Tilgange*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Nielsen, K. A. and Nielsen, B. S. 2006, Methodologies in Action Research - Action Research and Critical Theory. In K. A. Nielsen & L. G. Svensson (Eds.). *Action Research and Interactive Research - Beyond Practice and Theory* (pp. 63-88). Maastricht: Shaker Publishing.

Nielsen, K. A. and Nielsen, B. S. 2005. Kritisk-Utopisk Aktionsforskning: Demokratisk naturforvaltning som kollektiv dannelsesproces [Critical Utopian Action Reseach: Democratic nature management as social learning]. In T. Bechmann Jensen and G. Christensen (Eds.). *Psykologiske og pædagogiske metoder: kvalitative og kvantitative forskningsmetoder i praksis*. Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetsforlag.

NTNU, 2011. *Strategy 2011-2020. Vision: Knowledge for a better world*. Available at https://www.ntnu.edu/strategy-2011-2020 (accessed 21.12.2017).

Oldfield, S. 2014. Politics, transformation and the southern city. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield, (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 255-257). London and New York: Routledge.

Oldfield, S. 2002. Local state restructuring and urban transformation in post-apartheid Cape Town. *GeoJournal*, 57(1-2), 39-47.

Parnell, S and Oldfield, S. (Eds.). 2014. *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*. New York: Routledge.

Patel, S. 2014. Is there a 'south' perspective to urban studies? In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 37-48). London and New York: Routledge.

Patel, S., Burra, S., and D`Cruz, C. 2001. Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) – foundations to treetops. *Environment and Urbanization*, 13(2), 45-59.

Peake, L. 2016. The twenty-first century quest for feminism and the global urban. *International Journal of urban and regional research*, 40(1), 219-227.

Pieterse, E. 2008. *City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development*. London: Zed

Purcell, M. 2014. Rancière and revolution. *Space and Polity*, 18(2), 168-181.

Purcell, M. 2013. *The Down-Deep Delight of Democracy*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

Ragin, C. 1992. "Casing" and the process of social inquiry. In C. Ragin and H. S. Becker (Eds.). *What is a case? Exploring the foundations of social inquiry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rancière, J. 2011. The thinking of dissensus: politics and aesthetic. In P. Bowman and R. Stam (Eds.). *Reading Rancière* (pp.1-17). London: Continuum.

Rancière, J. 2009. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by G. Elliott. London: Verso.

Rancière, J. 2001. Ten theses on politics. *Theory and Event,* 5(2), 1-16.

Rancière, J. 1992. Politics, identification, and subjectivization. *October*, 61 (Summer), 58-64.

Rao, U. 2013. Tolerated Encroachment: Resettlement Policies and the Negotiation of the Licit/illicit Divide in an Indian Metropolis. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(4), 760-779.

Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (Eds.). 2008. *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice. 2nd ed.* London: SAGE.

Reitz, M. 2017. Analyzing and communicating action research data: Practical approaches to conveying the quality and texture of experience. *Action Research,* 15(4), 424-440.

Robins, S. 2010. How deep is deep Democracy? Grassroots mobilization from Mumbai to Cape Town. In V. Schattan, P. Coelho and B. Von Lieres (Eds.). *Mobilizing for Democracy: Citizen Action and the Politics of Public Participation* (pp.1-11). London: Zed Books.

Robins, S., Cornwall, A. and von Lieres, B. 2008. Rethinking 'Citizenship' in the Postcolony. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(6), 1069-1086.

Robinson, J. 2014. New geographies of theorizing the urban: putting comparison to work for global urban studies. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (Eds.). 2014. *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp. 57-70). New York: Routledge.

Robinson, J. 2003. Postcolonialising Geography: Tactics and Pitfalls. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 24(3), 273-289.

Robinson, J. and Roy, A. 2016. Debate on global urbanisms and the nature of urban theory. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 40(1), 181-186.

Rossi, U. and Vanolo, A. 2012. *Urban Political Geographies: A Global Perspective, 1st edition.* Los Angeles: SAGE.

Roy, A. 2015a. What is urban about critical urban theory? *Urban Geography*, 37(6), 810-823.

Roy. A. 2015b. Who`s afraid of postcolonial theory? *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 40(1), 200-209.

Roy, A. 2009. The 21st-Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory. *Regional Studies*, 43(6), 819-830.

Roy, A. 2005. Urban Informality: Toward and Epistemology of Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(2), 147-158.

Roy, A. 2003. *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Said, E. 1983. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge. Harvard University Press.

Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism.* London: Penguin.

Satterthwaite, D. 2001. Reducing urban poverty: constraints on the effectiveness of aid agencies and development banks and some suggestions for change. *Environment & Urbanization*, 13(1), 137-158.

Scott, A. and Storper, M. 2015. The nature of cities: the scope and limits of urban theory. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39(1), 1–16.

Scott, J. 1987. *Weapons of the Weak – Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance.* Yale. Yale University Press.

Slum Dwellers International (SDI), 2016. *About us.* Available at http://knowyourcity.info/who-is-sdi/about-us/ accessed 21.12.2017.

Sheppard, E., Leitner, H. and Maringanti, A. 2013. Provincializing Global Urbanism: A Manifesto. *Urban Geography*, 34(7), 893-900.

Silverman, R.M. and Patterson, K.L. 2015. *Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development*. New York: Routledge.

Simone A. 2006. Pirate towns: reworking social and symbolic infrastructures in Johannesburg and Douala. *Urban Studies*, 43, 357–370.

Simone A. 2004. People as infrastructure: intersecting fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, 16, 407–429.

Smith, D. 1987. The standpoint of women in the everyday world. In G. Delanty and P. Strydom (Eds.). 2003. *Philosophies of Social Science – The Classic and Contemporary Readings* (pp. 405-409). Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Soja, E. 1996. *Thirdspace*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Spivak, G.C. 1988. Can the subaltern speak? Marxism and the interpretationof culture. In C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Eds.). *Marxim and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

Staeheli, L. 2016. Citizenship and the problem of community. *Political Geography*, 27(1), 5-21.

Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (SDKP) 2017. *Sustainable Development Goal 8*. Available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg8 accessed 21.12.2017.

Swyngedouw, E. 2014. Where is the political? Insurgent mobilisations and the incipient 'return of the political'. *Space and Polity*, 18(2), 122-136.

Swyngedouw, E. 2011. Interrogating post-democratization: reclaiming egalitarian political spaces. *Political Geography*, 30(7), 370-380.

Tambulasi, R. and Kayuni, H. 2007. Decentralizatization Opening a New Window for Corruption: An Accountability Assessment of Malawi's Four Years of Democratic Local governance. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 42(2), 163-183.

Törnquist O., Webster N. and Stokke K. 2009 (Eds.). *Rethinking Popular Representation*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

UNDESA, 2014. *World Urbanization Prospects – Highlights: 2014 Revision*. New York: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (UNDESA).

UNDP, 2015. *Human Development Report 2015 – Work for Human Development*. New York: UNDP.

UN Habitat 2013. *Streets as public spaces and drivers of urban prosperity*. Nairobi: UN Habitat.

UN Habitat, 2012. *State of the world`s cities 2012/2013 – Prosperity of cities*. Nairobi: UN Habitat.

UN Habitat, 2007. *Enhancing Urban Safety and Security: Global Report on Human Settlements 2007*. London: Earthscan.

United Nations, 2016. *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 23 December 2016*. United Nations General Assembly. Available at http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/New-Urban-Agenda-GA-Adopted-68th-Plenary-N1646655-E.pdf accessed 21.12.2017.

Universitetsavisa, 2010. *Fjerde best i verden på næringslivs-samarbeid*. Available at http://www.universitetsavisa.no/notiser/article37777.ece accessed 21.12.2017.

Vainer, C. 2014. Disseminating 'best practice'? The colonialityof urban knowledge and city models. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield. (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* (pp.48-57). Routledge: London and New York.

Vasstrøm, M. 2013. *Openings and Closures in the Environmental Planning Horizon – An analysis of the participatory potential in a nature protection planning process in Norway.* Doctoral dissertation. Kristiansand: Agder University.

Watson, V. 2014. Co-Production and collaboration in planning – The difference. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 15(1), 62-76.

Watson, V. 2009. Seeing from the South: Refocusing Urban Planning on the Globe`s Central Urban Issues. *Urban Studies*, 46(11), 2259-2275.

Williams, G. 2004. Evaluating participatory development: tyranny, power and (re)politicisation. *Third World Quarterly*, 25(2004), 557-578.

Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. 2009. Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory, and methodology. In R. Wodak, and M. Meyer (Eds.). Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis (pp. 1-33). London: Sage Publications.

World Bank 2016. *Poverty and shared prosperity 2016 - Taking on inequality.* Washington DC: World Bank.

World Bank. 2010. *Systems of cities: Harnessing Urbanization for growth & Poverty Alleviation.* (The World Bank Urban & Local Government Strategy). Washington DC: World Bank.

World Bank, 1992. *Good Governance and Development*. Washington DC: World Bank.

Yin, R. K. 2003. *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*. London: Sage Publications.

.

APPENDIX I. Overview of interviews

Interviews organizations and institutions

No.	Organization	Position	Gender
1	Cities Alliance	Regional adviser, Cities Alliance/World Bank South Africa	F
2	UN-Habitat	Malawi Programme Manager	M
3	MALGA	Programme Officer	F
4	CCODE	Fund Manager	M
5	Polytechnic University	Student volunteer	F
6	GIZ	Technical adviser seconded to CCODE	M
7	Lilongwe City Council	City Development Strategy Manager Lilongwe	M
8	Ministry of Lands and Housing	Commissioner for Physical Planning	M
9	Ministry of Lands and Housing	Dept. Physical Planning and Malawi Urban Forum facilitator	M
10	GIZ	Technical adviser at Ministry of Lands and Housing	M
11	CCODE	Programme officer	M
12	LUPPEN	Coordinator	M
13	LUPPEN	Executive member	M
14	LUPPEN	Coordinator	M
15	Malawi Housing Corporation	Planning official	F
16	Lilongwe City Council	Director, Physical Planning Department	F
17	Royal Norwegian Embassy	Ambassador	M
18	Lilongwe City Council	Project Manager, Informal Settlement Unit	M
19	Lilongwe City Council	Community Liaison Officer, Informal Settlement Unit	F
20	CCODE	Director	F
21	Action Aid	Coordinator	F
22	Habitat for Humanity	Operations Manager	M
23	Malawi Parliament	Member of Parliament	M

24	JICA	Technical Adviser	M
25	CCODE	Acting Director	M
26	CCODE	Office Manager Blantyre Office	M
27	CCODE	Community Development Officer	M
28	Chancellors College	Director, Dept of Geography and Education	F
29	Chancellors College	Professor, History Department	M
30	Chancellors College	Deputy Director, Dept of Geography and Education	M
31	Chancellors College	PhD student	M
32	GIZ	Zomba officer	M
33	Zomba City Council	Director of Planning and Development	M
34	Zomba City Council	Data Officer	M
35	Zomba City Council	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer	F
36	Zomba City Council	Health Department Officer	M
37	Bwalo Initiative	Manager	M
38	Action Aid	Urban Governance Adviser	F
39	Water Aid	Programme Manager	M
40	Local Development Fund	Director	M
41	Local Development Fund	Director of Urban Development	M
42	Local Development Fund	Physical Development Planning specialist	M
43	Blantyre Water Board	Cluster Manager, Ndirande	F
44	Blantyre Water Board	Network engineer	F
45	Blantyre Water Board	Kiosk Manager	M
46	Blantyre City Council	Director of Planning and Development	M
47	Polytechnic University	Lecturer	M
48	Polytechnic University	Lecturer	M
49	Mzuzu University	Head of Department of Physical Planning	M
50	Mzuzu University	Lecturer	M
51	Mzuzu University	Senior Lecturer	M

52	Mzuzu University	Student	F
53	Mzuzu University	Student	M
54	Muzu University	Lecturer	M
55	Mzuzu City Council	Deputy Director of Planning	M
56	Mzuzu City Council	Desk officer and coordinator Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP)	M
57	Mzuzu City Council	Revenue Mobilization officer	M
58	Mzuzu City Council	Revenue Mobilization officer	M
59	CCODE	Head of research	M

Table II. Interviews – organizations and institutions

No.	Community	Position	Gender	Age
1	Area 49, Lilongwe	National Federation leader	M	50?
2	Mtandire, Lilongwe	National Federation leader	F	40
3	Mtandire, Lilongwe	Community member	M	34
4	Mtandire, Lilongwe	Community member	M	28
5	Mtandire, Lilongwe	Community member	F	38
6	Mtandire, Lilongwe	Community member	F	19
7	Mtandire, Lilongwe	Community member	M	55
8	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Regional Federation leader	F	37
9	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Chief	M	45
10	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Community member	M	73
11	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Community member	M	49
12	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Community member	F	32
13	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Community member	F	40
14	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Community member	M	49
15	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Community member	M	57
16	Chinsapo, Lilongwe	Community member	F	23
17	Kauma, Lilongwe	Community member	F	29

18	Kauma, Lilongwe	Community member	F	34
19	Kauma, Lilongwe	Youth enumerator	M	25
20	Kauma, Lilongwe	Head of Community Development Committee	M	45
21	Kauma, Lilongwe	Community member	F	45
22	Kauma, Lilongwe	Community member	F	46
23	Kauma, Lilongwe	Community member	M	34
24	Kauma, Lilongwe	Village headman	M	X
25	Kauma, Lilongwe	Chief	M	X
26	Kauma, Lilongwe	Community member	M	X
27	Kauma, Lilongwe	Community member	M	X
28	Senti, Lilongwe	Federation member	M	31
29	Senti, Lilongwe	Federation member	M	23
30	Senti, Lilongwe	Community member	F	33
31	Senti, Lilongwe	Community member	F	19
32	Senti, Lilongwe	Community member	M	39
33	Senti, Lilongwe	Federation member	M	51
34	Senti, Lilongwe	Federation member	F	X
35	Nancholi Chimiire, Blantyre	Federation member	F	42
36	Nancholi Chimiire, Blantyre	Chief	M	X
37	Nancholi Chimiire, Blantyre	Community member	F	28
38	Nancholi Chimiire, Blantyre	Community member	F	21
39	Nancholi Chimiire, Blantyre	Community member	M	48
40	Nancholi Chimiire, Blantyre	Community member	M	46
41	Ndirande Makata, Blantyre	Federation member	F	30
42	Ndirande Makata, Blantyre	Community member	M	34
43	Ndirande Makata, Blantyre	Block leader	M	47
44	Ndirande Makata, Blantyre	Federation member	M	36
45	Ndirande Makata, Blantyre	Community member	F	24

46	Ndirande Makata, Blantyre	Community member	M	38
47	Chikanda, Zomba	Federation member	M	47
48	Chikanda, Zomba	Federation member	F	58
49	Chikanda, Zomba	Community member	F	25
50	Chikanda, Zomba	Community member	M	32
51	Chikanda, Zomba	Community member	M	30
52	Chikanda, Zomba	Community member	F	21
53	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Community member	F	42
54	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Community member	M	58
55	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Community member	M	23
56	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Community member	F	27
57	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Chief	M	X
58	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Federation member	F	29
59	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Federation member	F	34
60	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Federation member	F	39
61	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Community member	M	36
62	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Community member	M	42
63	Salisburyline, Mzuzu	Community member	M	56
64	Lilongwe	Federation leader	M	X

Table III. Interviews – community members

No.	Group interviews/discussions	Participants	Gender
1	The Federation of the Rural and the Urban Poor	5	4F, 1M
2	Senti community representatives	5	2F, 3M
3	Senti community representatives	3	1F, 2M
4	Senti community representatives	7	3F, 4M
5	Kauma community representatives	3	1F, 2M
6	Kauma community representatives	5	3F, 2M

7	Chinsapo community representatives	8	5F, 3M
8	Chinsapo community representatives	12	7F, 5M
9	Federation Blantyre	4 (national leader, regional leader, Blantyre leader and Federation member)	4F, 0M
10	Ndirande Makata community representatives	7	3F, 4M
11	Ndirande Makata community representatives	5 (including one Federation member)	2F, 3M
12	Nancholi Chiimire community representatives	5	3F, 2M
13	Nancholi Chimiire community representatives	6 (including one Federation member)	3F, 3M
14	Chikanda community representatives	8	4F, 4M
15	Chikanda community representatives	12 (including block leader)	7M, 5F
16	Chikanda community representatives	5	3F, 2M
17	Salisburyline Mzuzu community representatives	4 (chief, village headman, deputy senior block leader, community member)	1F, 3M
18	Salisburyline community representatives	7 (including one Federation member)	2F, 5M
19	Federation Mzuzu	6	6F, 0M
20	Mtirande community members doing waste composting	4 community members	4F, 0M

Table IV. Group interviews/discussions

Participatory observations (in addition to observations while spending time in informal settlements)

No.	Meetings/Settlement walks	Participants	Topic	Place
1	Slum-upgrading meeting, Chinsapo	6 Federation and community leader representatives, 12 students, 4 CCODE staff	Identification and measuring of roads for slum-upgrading project	Chinsapo

2	Enumeration training	2 Federation members, 2 CCODE staff, 12 community members	Training of team to do enumerations	Kauma
3	Meeting with community leaders, Senti	1 national Federation leader, 1 Senti Federation member, chief, village headman, 1 community member	How to proceed with community strategy plans	Senti
4	Community meeting, Chinsapo and Mtandire	40 Federation members, 20 students, 5 CCODE staff	Progress in slum-upgrading programme, Chinsapo and Mtandire	CCODE office
5	Progress meeting, Tilitonse	5 CCODE staff	Improving the results monitoring framework for the Tilitonse project	CCODE office
6	CCODE staff meeting, Blantyre	3 Blantyre CCODE staff, 2 Lilongwe CCODE staff	Update on progress	CCODE office, Blantyre
7	Federation meeting, Blantyre	6 Federation members, 5 CCODE staff	Discussion on progress	CCODE office, Blantyre
8	Community meeting Blantyre	5 federation members, 20 community leaders, 5 CCODE staff	How to engage MPs and others in community initiatives	CCODE office, Blantyre
9	Blantyre City Council – CCODE meeting	Director of Physical Planning, 2 CCODE staff	How to work together on slum upgrading and other efforts	Blantyre City Council
10	Zomba City Council – CCODE Meeting	Director of Planning, estates and planning officer, technical adviser, technical officer, 1 CCODE staff	How to work together on slum upgrading and other efforts	Zomba City Council
11	CCODE meeting on capacity-building	4 CCODE staff	Develop capacity-building plan for CCODE	CCODE office

12	CCODE meeting on proposal development	CCODE Director and Advocacy coordinator	Develop proposal to Tilitonse	CCODE Office
13	Multi-donor meeting	Ca. 100 NGO representatives and 10 Tilitonse staff	Guidelines for proposal and sessions on political economy analysis and theory of change	Sunbird Capital Hotel
14	Strategic planning session, Senti	20 community representatives, 2 CCODE staff	Two days, prioritizing areas of intervention	Senti
15	UrbanTalk	40 participants, broadcasted on national radio	On the challenge of urbanization in Malawi	Crossroads Hotel
16	Construction training, Blantyre	15 women	Learning how to construct houses, bricklaying	CCODE office
17	Community strategic planning session, Chikanda, Zomba	40 community representatives, 2 CCODE staff, GIZ representative, German urban expert	Training on community strategic planning	Chikanda
18	Settlement walk Chikanda, Zomba	5 community representatives	Walked through settlement and discussed with community members	Chikanda
19	Settlement walk, Ndirande, Blantyre	4 community representatives	Drove and walked through settlement and discussed with community members	Ndirande
20	Settlement walk Nancholi Chiimire, Blantyre	1 community member, 1 CCODE staff	Walked through settlement and discussed with community members	Nancholi
21	CCODE staff meetings	4 CCODE staff meetings	Progress on various activities as well as one presentation on PhD research	Lilongwe

			findings and discussion	
22	Participatory budgeting, Blantyre City Council	50 participants, various stake holders		Blantyre
23	Meeting to explore informal urban sector meet-up	Action Aid, LUPPEN, CCODE, URI	Updating each other on various issues and discussing starting an informal meeting space	Lilongwe
24	University – community meeting		The first meeting in the follow-up to the PSUP.	Salisburyline
25	Salisburyline community walk	Walked through settlement and discussed with community members and students		Salisburyline
26	Settlement walk, Senti	Walked through settlement and discussed with community members		Senti
27	Settlement walk, Kauma	Walked through settlement and discussed with community members		Kauma
28	Settlement walk, Chinsapo	Walked through settlement and discussed with community members		Chinsapo
29	Lecture, Chancellors College	Lecture by Professor Wiseman Chirwa on urban governance		Zomba

Table V. Participatory observations

APPENDIX II: Interview guide – key informant interviews

(Government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, etc.)

The interview guide changed through the different stages of the research, and the interviews worked more as an open-ended social inquiry. However, the original form – the starting point – is presented below.

Interview guide – key information interviews

No:

Date: **Place:**   **Contact/introduced by:**

Context:

Observations:

Name:

Institution:

Sex:

Age: (Maybe not important)

Position:

Hello, my name is Hilde Refstie. I am a PhD student at the Norwegian University of Technology and Science. I am interested in understanding more about informal settlements in Malawi, the actors working there, the urban planning processes, and so on.

Organization's/individual's work

Could you tell me about the work that you/your organization do?

What is your focus? Target groups? Policies? Strategy? How long have you been working here?

Urbanization

Could you tell me a bit about how urbanization works in Malawi?

Are there any challenges connected with it?

How has Malawi historically dealt with urbanization?

How does the national government relate to urbanization today? Local governments? Civil society? Other actors?

Informal settlements

Could you tell me a bit about the informal settlements in Malawi?

How are they established?

Are they increasing?

Who lives there?

What would you say are the main challenges faced by the people living in informal settlements in Malawi today?

Are there differences between the areas or between cities?

How has Malawi historically dealt with informal settlements?

Plans and processes

Have there been any particular processes or events that have had a large impact on urbanization and formations of informal settlements?

Are there any plans or processes going on with regards to informal settlements?

How does the National Housing Policy relate to informal settlements?

How does the City Development Strategy process relate to informal settlements?

Actors and participation

Who are your most important partners? Do you work much with local and/or national governments? How about groups of urban poor?

Who are the main actors involved in the different processes?

How do they relate to each other?

Who would you say are the most influential actors in the processes?

Do people from informal settlements participate in the planning processes? If so, how? Are there any challenges connected to this?

Should communities be involved in the urban planning processes? If so in which way?

How do the urban forums work?

What is discussed at the urban forums?

Do people from informal settlements participate in the urban forums? Why/why not?

Agency and mobilization

Do people in informal settlements organize themselves or mobilize in any way?

How are people in informal settlements represented in the processes discussed?

Is there anything else they could do to participate?

Secondary information:

Do you have or know about any statistics or literature I should look at connected to this research?

Thank you so much for taking the time. If I have some more questions at a later stage, can I contact you again?

The interview guide changed through the different processes in the research, and the interviews worked more as an open-ended social inquiry. However, the original form – the starting point – is presented below.

Interview guide – urban poor living in informal settlements

No:

Date: **Place:**   **Contact/introduced by:**

Context:

Observations:

Name:

Sex:

Age:

Origin if relevant:

Position:

Hello, my name is Hilde Refstie. I am a PhD student at the Norwegian University of Technology and Science. I am interested in understanding more about life in informal settlements and different planning processes that are happening. The interviews are confidential – that means that I will not mention your names when I talk about this or write this up.

Informal settlement and individual history

Where were you born?

When did you come here?

Have you lived other places in between?

Why did you come here?

Could you tell me a bit about this place?

How will you describe this place?

Has the area changed much since you came here?

Is the informal settlement increasing or getting smaller?

Why do you stay exactly here and not another place?

Housing

Where do you live?

Who do you live with?

Have you always lived at that house when you are here?

Do you own where you are staying?

Do you rent where you are staying?

How does it work?

How much do you pay in rent?

Do you think you will continue to stay in that house? (Why/why not?)

What makes this an informal settlement?

What would you say is a slum?

Livelihood

What do you do to make a living?

Have you always done that?

What do people in your household do to make a living?

Is this what you plan on keeping doing?

Actors – networks

Do people organize themselves in any way here? If so how?

Are you organized in any way? If so, how?

Who are the main actors involved in the different processes?

Are there local government representatives?

Are there chiefs, NGOs working here? Councils of elders, youth groups, women's groups, NGOs working here?

Which type of organizing do you think is most influential?

Urban planning initiatives

What do you think is most important to improve this area?

What do you think you can do yourself to improve the area or your livelihood?

Are you doing anything specific to improve the area nowadays?

What do you think you would need others for? In what way?

What do you think would be most important to do?

Has there been any work or projects happening here?

Do you know if there are any planning processes happening?

If so, do you participate in any of them? Why/why not? How?

If so, what did/do you expect to get out of them?

Did it turn out as expected?

Will you participate in similar processes again?

What did you like about it? What did you not like about it?

Do other people participate?

Why do you think some people do not participate?

Do you think you can change this place if enough people come together? If so, how? Why not? What do you think is needed to change the place?

Do many researchers come here and ask questions like this?

How do you feel about that?

What would you recommend to researchers like me?

Thank you so much for taking the time. If I have some more questions at a later stage, can I contact you again?

APPENDIX IV: Case study series

1. 'Doing it ourselves': Community self-mobilizing and pooling of resources in Senti (Lilongwe)

2. Building representation and partnership in Chikanda (Zomba)

3. From plans to action: Mobilizing funds and credit for slum upgrading in Nancholi Chimiire (Blantyre)

4. Negotiating services through community committees in Ndirande Makata (Blantyre)

5. Left hanging? Participatory slum upgrading and studio planning in Salisburyline (Mzuzu)

6. Is this participatory budgeting? Some lessons learned from the 2013 and 2014 participatory budgeting process in Blantyre

7. Informal Settlement Upgrading Project in Chinsapo and Mtandire: Some lessons to be learned (Lilongwe)

"Doing it ourselves"

Community self mobilization and pooling of resources in Senti settlement Lilongwe

February 2014

INTRODUCTION

This case study is the first 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 study documents and explores how Senti community in Lilongwe pools monthly collected community savings to address some of the challenges in their settlement. They also use this initiative to advocate and build partnership with other stakeholders.

SENTI SETTLEMENT

Senti Township is located about three kilometers from the City Centre of Lilongwe in the north western direction. The settlement started as a village on the outskirts of Lilongwe some decades ago but has since grown and provides homes to many people employed in the informal sector in the city. The total population for the settlement is currently about 16 000 people. As in many informal settlements in Lilongwe the infrastructure is of low quality with no tarmac roads or proper drainage systems. Most of the houses in the settlement are built using adobe bricks and mud mortar. The houses are either roofed with iron-sheets or grass. Residents use a temporary market to run small businesses and access commodities. Many people in the settlement are self-employed or work in the informal sector. They run small businesses or are employed as skilled or unskilled workers in town. Some of them are farmers whose main food crop is maize.

Photo: Senti Settlement   Source: CCODE

SENTI SETTLEMENT

Senti has no public nursery, primary or secondary schools, clinics or police units, so residents have to travel long distances to access these services.

The settlement has, however, a community policing committee which helps to foster security in the area. There is also a Victim Support Unit that looks into gender-based violence cases. As for waste people in the settlement just dump it anywhere as there is no designated area for it.

Photo: Waste piling up in Senti   Source: Hilde Refstie

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

In 2011 communities in Senti decided with support from the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF, previously MHPF) and Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE) to undertake a profiling exercise.

The aim of the exercise was to gather more information about their settlement to use in planning and development efforts. In October 2012 a profile of the settlement had been compiled comprising of information on socio economic factors, and health, education, water and sanitation services. The information was collected through community meetings, and discussions between various leaders and representatives. The community proceeded with undertaking a detailed mapping and enumeration exercise which also included a survey. Through this process the community mobilized and came together to discuss what developments were needed in their settlements. In their discussions they came up with some prioritized interventions. However, realizing that access to funding through the Government or NGOs might not be a sufficient option, the communities decided to take matter into their own hands.
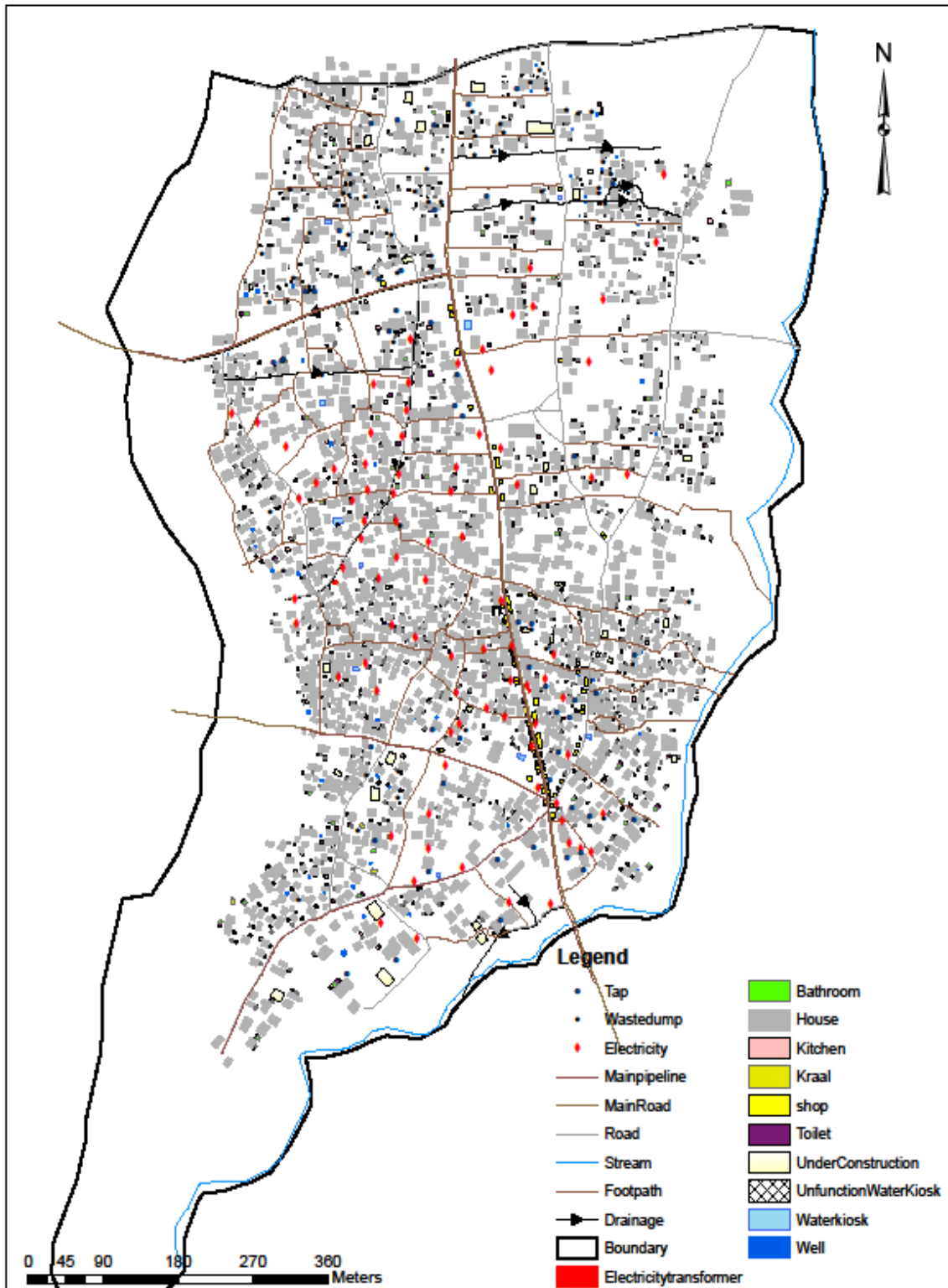
"Enumerations were helpful because we did not know how many people or structures were in the areas. We did also not know the problems we had. Now we know the numbers, the structures and the challenges."

Senti Community member 10.05.2013

Federation and community members in Senti working on planning and information gathering exercises in 2011
Source: CCODE

SENTI MAP

Legend

•	Tap	▪	Bathroom
•	Wastedump	▪	House
♦	Electricity	▪	Kitchen
—	Mainpipeline	▪	Kraal
—	MainRoad	▪	shop
—	Road	▪	Toilet
—	Stream	▪	UnderConstruction
—	Footpath	▪	UnfunctionWaterKiosk
▶	Drainage	▪	Waterkiosk
▭	Boundary	▪	Well
▪	Electricitytransformer		

0 45 90   180   270   360
Meters

Map prepared by Senti community supported by NSDF and CCODE

'COMMUNITIZING' SERVICES

Many members had experience with savings groups, either through the NSDF or different organizations. In many communities people were also already contributing some money to the Neighborhood watch which functioned as community police, and to funeral funds. It was therefore suggested that each household in the community would contribute some money every month towards community development. This money would be used to hire jobless community members to work on the issues that had been identified in the strategic planning process. The activities suggested were in the first instance waste collection and management, sanitation, and work on roads and footpaths.

Photo: Some houses in Senti settlement.   Source: Hilde Refstie

Committees comprising of ten members were formed in each cluster with a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Vice secretary, treasurer, auditors and collectors. The committees then met with CCODE and the NSDF in a two day Funds Management training in June 2013 to discuss the organization structures of the initiative.

On this meeting they decided that cluster committee members will collect MK100 from the households every month. The money will be collected door to door. At the cluster level all payments are registered in a savings book.

FUNDS GOVERNANCE

At the training the members also discussed the organization and governance of the funds. The funds will be managed and spent at the cluster level. While the cluster committees will manage the initiative, a board comprising of Chiefs, Block Leaders and representatives from the committee will provide general oversight and make decisions on where to spend the funds.

Each cluster will have its own bank account. The chairperson, treasure and one member within the committee will be responsible for depositing and cashing the money at the bank. All clusters will be holding a meeting every month to report on the funds to the members within the clusters. It will be the responsibility of the committees to make sure that every household is paying.

Senti settlement committee
Chiefs, Block leaders, representatives from Committees

⇧

Cluster Committees
Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Vice secretary, Treasurer, Auditors and Collectors.

⇧

Community
Represented in the Cluster Committee, the Board, and through regular community meetings.
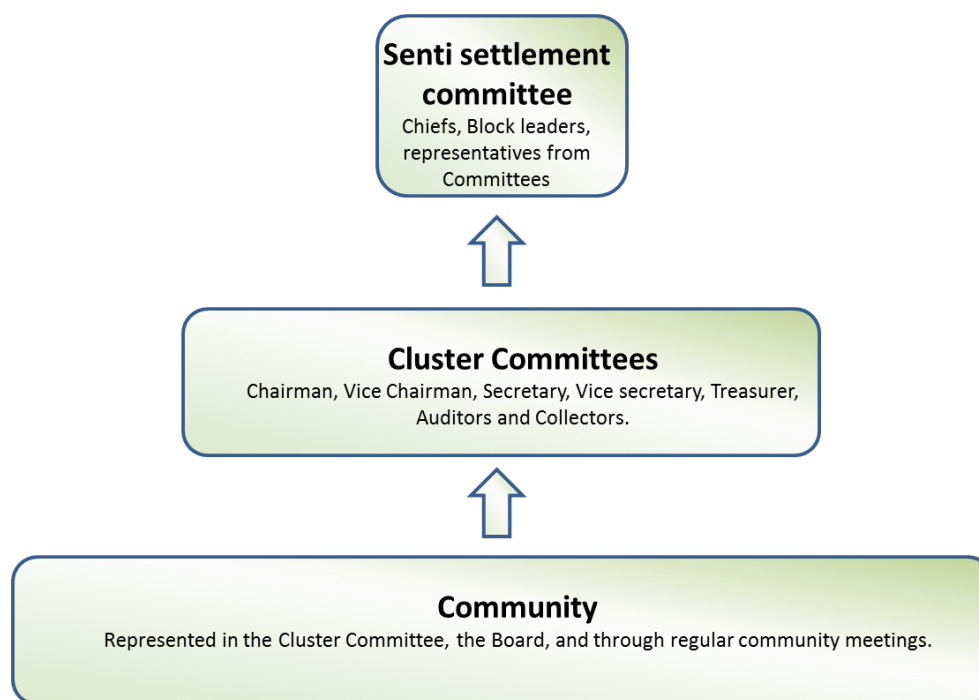
Depending on the size of the funds collected, each cluster employs 5 or 6 people. A meeting is called to register who are interested to work. All the people present at the meeting will be shortlisted. The first five or six will then start working while the others will be waiting for their shift. This way more people have the chance to be involved in the initiative and access some income. The responsible personnel on the short listing of the people will be the committee members including the Chiefs.

WASTE MANAGEMENT AND SANITATION

In July 2013 each cluster started collecting money. While the collectors have faced some challenges, it is slowly improving as the arrangement is getting better known. The challenge now will be to make visible the developments taking place and communicate them widely to the community.

«Now things have improved. They participate and ask for meetings. I think it will continue to improve from here since people are getting more interested.»

(Senti community member 22.01.2014)

The people employed with these funds will start working on collecting waste from every household. It was also agreed that they will fill up dilapidated roads. The days of the week will then be divided for waste collection, and road filling.

To kick-start the initiative an exchange visit was organized where community members and leaders from Senti visited Mtandire, another informal settlement in Lilongwe, to learn about their compost manure center. The purpose of the visit was for the people who will be managing the compost factory in Senti to get some experience on what goes into making compost manure.

Photo: Women working at the manure compost center Mtandire Lilongwe

One of the requirements is to have a site where waste can be disposed for further treatment. In Senti they were using an area, but had to stop during the growing season. When the harvest season is over they expect to have it ready to start using again.

ROADS

Another activity has been working on opening up roads. People have been allocated land and settled without considering the need for public infrastructure. An important part of the work is therefore negotiating with house and land owners to give up land to let the roads come through.

Left: Mrs. Kawundu is one of the house owners who gave up 1,5 meters of land for this road. *Upper right:* Federation leader Mr. Banda showing one of the planned roads. *Lower right:* A road that is being worked on by the church and its neighbors.

> *"The road benefits almost everybody. If someone is sick or with funerals.*
> *Also when it comes to developments materials can pass by"*
>
> Mrs. Kawundu 29.01.2014

Instead of paying the 100 kwacha per month, community members can choose to work on the roads. One meter of road represents 100 kwacha.

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Through their approach, Senti community is exploring a new way of financing and organizing developments in their settlement. Their approach does not rely on public services nor privatization but rather a 'communitization' of services where community revenues are collected and administered by the community itself.

However, while the Senti initiative shows an extraordinary ability to mobilize own resources , the settlement still faces larger scale challenges that requires a continued engagement with the Lilongwe City Council in particular. They have therefore initiated a process of strategic planning and formed committees to engage with stakeholders as the City Council, the Waterboard, and ESCOM amongst others.

At the UrbanTalk organized by the Urban Research Institute in collaboration with CCODE and the NSDF, they started this work by encouraging the Chief Executive of Lilongwe City Council to come and visit Senti and discuss ways of developing the area. The Chief Executive agreed and the visit is being scheduled.
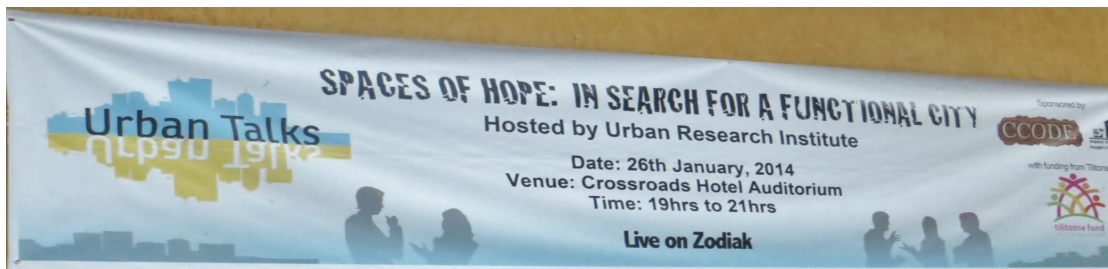
Left: Community Leader from Senti Right: Chief Executive Lilongwe City Council

WAY FORWARD

The way forward now is for Senti settlement to develop the approach and adjust it as they gain experience. They will be in constant dialogue with the Federation and CCODE to get support and to have their initiative documented. It will also be interesting to see if the community manages to secure support from Lilongwe City Council on these issues

Other communities in Lilongwe and other cities in Malawi have already shown interest in learning from Senti. If all goes well the Federation and CCODE will facilitate exchanges between different informal settlements in Malawi on the approach. However, in the meantime Senti community is not waiting for anybody, they are "Doing it themselves".

"Now we have learnt that we can do something ourselves without waiting for others."

Senti Community member 22.01.2014

This report was prepared by Hilde Refstie, Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU) in close collaboration with CCODE and NSDF. The support from NSDF and CCODE is part of the Tilitonse funded project "Activating Urban Poor Community Voice in Planning and Governance for Responsive Urban Development".

Case Study 2: Zomba - Chikanda

Building representation and partnerships

Zomba – Chikanda settlement

APRIL 2014

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING IN ZOMBA

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.

Zomba City from Zomba Plateau. Photo: Hilde Refstie

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).

SYSTEMS OF REPRESENTATION FOR PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

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 Zuzammarbeit) 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 councilors to work with after the elections.

Zomba City has 10 Wards and 25 CDCs.

Ward	Population	No. of Community Development Committees	No. of Traditional Village Headmen
Central	8526	2	2
Chambo	6542	2	2
Chinamwali,	12305	3	5
Chirunga,	10596	3	9
Likangala,	12855	3	3
Masongola,	5255	2	2
Mbedza	6839	2	2
Mtiya	7056	2	6
Mpira	6865	3	12
Sadzi,	11474	3	6
Totals	88313	25	49

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.

Photo: Theatre for Development at the community awareness raising meetings. Source: Adrian Hodgson - GIZ

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.

COMMUNITY AND WARD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

Photo: Election of a CDC in Zomba. Source: Adrian Hodgson, GIZ

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.

COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY

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.

Photo: Capacity building training WDCs. Source: Adrian Hodgson, GIZ

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.

CHIKANDA SETTLEMENT

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

CHIKANDA SETTLEMENT

Photo: Chikanda settlement with community representatives Source: Hilde Refstie

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 though 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.

Strategic planning session Chikanda Settlement. Photos: Hilde Refstie

At the training the community representatives identified and prioritized initiatives and projects for their settlements and discussed how these could be best realized.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

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.

Footbridge in Chikanda. Photo: Hilde Refstie

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

Group discussion Chikanda 26.02.2014

FROM PLANS TO ACTION

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.

WAY FORWARD
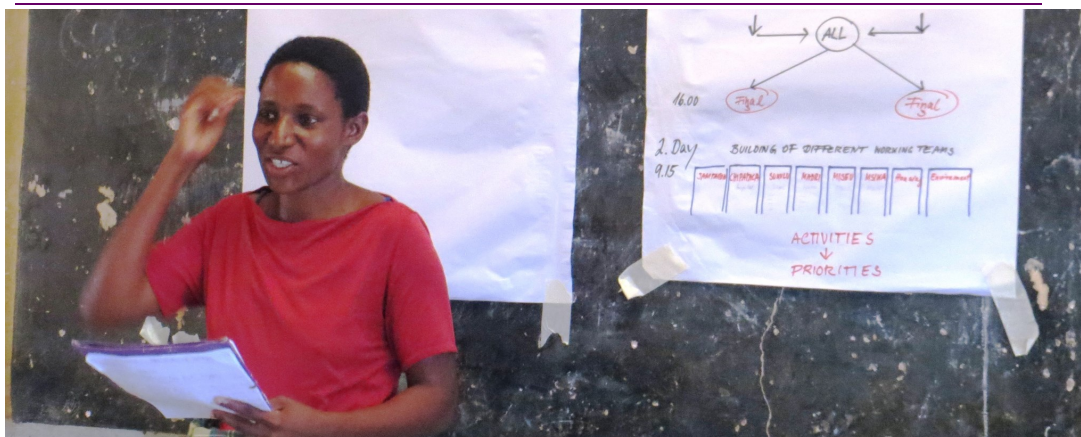
While the process is still in its initial phase, Zomba City Council has shown that they are willing to engage with their informal settlements and take a proactive role in participatory urban planning. As such they are a role model in the Malawian setting for trying to come up with solutions to real problems 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.

CONCLUSION

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.

Planning meeting Chikanda community January 2014. Photo: Adrian Hodgson GIZ

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
* GoM (1998): Local Government Act 1998
* Interviews Chikanda community members and representatives, Zomba City Council, Ministry of Lands and Housing, Bwalo Initiative, CCODE, NSDF, and GIZ.
* Kruse C., and Manda M.A.Z (2005): Lessons in Urban Management – Experiences in Malawi 2000-2005, Malawi German Programme for Democracy and Decentralization
* Nyirenda B. (2012): Community & Ward Development Committees Election Report 2012 – Bwalo Initiative
* 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

Case Study 3 - Nancholi Chiimire

From plans to action — Mobilizing funds and credit for slum upgrading

JUNE 2014

MOBILIZING FUNDS AND CREDIT FOR SLUM UPGRADING

This case study is the third 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 Federation for the Rural and Urban Poor (the Federation), formerly known as the Malawi Homeless People's Federation), 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 Nancholi Chiimire settlement in Blantyre city explores how organized communities engage with the City Council, NGOs, and its politicians to raise funds and access loans for slum upgrading in their settlements.

Photo: From Nancholi Chiimire settlement. Source: Hilde Refstie

Blantyre is the oldest urban centre in Malawi and its commercial capital. Following the national population census the city had a population of 661, 256 in 2008. Today Blantyre is estimated to have reached over one million inhabitants (UNDESA 2011).

The medium and high income classes are the only ones with access to serviced land. Consequently, over 65 per cent of the population live in informal settlement where they struggle with issues like access to water, electricity, sanitation, health services, education, and security (UN Habitat 2011).

According to Blantyre City Council there are 21 informal settlements in Blantyre. However, this number does not reflect the present situation as some settlements have extensively extended and some areas have experiences recent settling increasing the number of informal settlements.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS - BLANTYRE CITY

Kameza

Sputhi Lunzu

Chirimba

Likhubula

Mulunguzi

Nyambadwe

Mapanga

Mbayani

Chilomoni

Ndirande

Nkolokoti

Namiwawa

Sanjika

Maone

Kachere

Sunnyside   Mandala   Portland
Cement

Mudi Dam

Chichiri

Mnt. Pleasant

Mudi

Hynde
Dam

Bangwe Railway

Maryowe

Kanjedza   Limbe

Mpingwe

Napen   Chitawira

Chinyonga

Nkolokosa

Njamba

Chilobwe

Zingwangwa

Nanja

Nancholi

Chinwamkhunda   Burn
Dam   ITG

Ntopwa   Bangwe

Angelo Goveya   BCA Hill

Chiwembe

Namiyango

Chensomba

BCA

Newlands

Chigumula/Msesa

Chigumula

N

Scale 1 : 75 000

1   0   1   2   3 Km

LEGEND

Formal
Informal

Main roads
Other roads
Dams
Rivers
Railway

Source: Blantyre City Council

BLANTYRE CITY COUNCIL
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

In 2012 the Blantyre City Council reopened its Community Development Office which had been down for many years. The office now consists of three Community Development Officers (CDOs) who are to act as the link between communities and the City Council. This has been a welcome development for many informal settlement community representatives as they now have a way of engaging directly with the City Council. The CDOs attend meetings with communities and provide monitoring and some technical assistance to community projects. Furthermore, when community representatives report problems they forward the reports to the relevant units at the Council.

"Our role is mainly to link the communities to the Council"

(Interview Community Development Officer BCC 01.04.2014)

While an office like this is a major positive development, many community leaders and representatives do not know about it. With the exception of some few communities the officers therefore mainly engage with representatives through NGO initiatives. Nancholi is one example of two informal settlements where community representatives have organized themselves and linked up with the Community Development Office and service providers to improve their area.

Photo: Nancholi Chiimire   *Source: Hilde Refstie*

NANCHOLI CHIIMIRE

Photo: Nancholi Chiimire Source: CCODE

Nancholi Chiimire is located eight kilometers towards the South of Blantyre Central Business District. Most of the houses in the community have cement floors, un-burnt brick walls, and iron sheet roofs. A main road which is partly tarmacked goes through the community. The other five roads are dirt roads maintained by the community on a voluntary basis.

Nancholi is surrounded by the three rivers Mudi, Namasimba, and Chiwandira. Up until 2013 there were no proper foot bridges over these rivers although nine temporary footbridges had been constructed and maintained using community contributions.

The settlement has been struggling with poor drainage facilities and inconsistent water supply with few water kiosks (seven out of nine functioning at the time of profiling in 2012) and individual taps. Water-borne diseases like cholera have therefore been an issue during the rainy seasons (CCODE 2012).

Most people in the area are using pit latrines, while as will be discussed below, some have recently begun to construct Ecosan pit latrines which decomposes human waste into compost manure.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

In 2012 community members in Nancholi Chiimire engaged with CCODE and the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor and started organizing themselves into clusters. They produced the Nancholi Settlement profile and started working on enumeration and mapping of the settlement. Community representatives also engaged with students from Malawi Polytechnic University in planning studio exercises to design identified community projects and quantify project materials. The Community Development Office at the Blantyre City Council was a partner in this process. They visited the settlement, participated in meetings, and provided advice.

Some of the main issues identified through the information gathering were access to water and toilets. One of the problems with getting a water tap for the household was that most people could not afford the high installment fee. The community therefore organized themselves into groups of ten and ten people that could save together and apply for loans for installments of water taps. Through this process around 300 households got loans to pay for the installments and managed to get water connections by applying to the Blantyre Water Board.

Photo: Household water tap. Source: Hilde Refstie

ACCESSING WATER

The loans for the water taps were on the range of MK40,000 to MK110,000 depending on the distance from the main connection pipes to one's house and the group had to come up with 10 percent of the amount to be considered for the loan. The loan was then to be repaid within two years. The repayment rate has up until now been on average 85 percent. However, some household struggled with both paying on the loan and paying the monthly water bills at the same time and therefore had their water disconnected. A suggestion from the community representatives is therefore to expand the repayment period from two to three years. Furthermore, the poorest households would for the most part not apply for such loans given their financial situation. They would therefore still rely on accessing water through water kiosks. As this was realized by community leaders they also engaged with the Blantyre Water Board to have more water kiosks built.

Photo: Water Kiosk constructed last year. Source: Hilde Refstie

ECO-SAN TOILETS

Another issue was toilets. Since Nancholi is quite congested digging new holes for pit latrines can be a challenge as there is limited space. As part of the initiative CCODE therefore offered loans to build Ecosan toilets. These are toilets with an estimated life span of almost 100 years where human waste is transformed into compost. While the toilets are more sustainable and last very long, the building costs are quite high (MK110,000). However, in a congested area as Nancholi they are particularly suitable since they require less space than traditional pit latrines which has to move after a certain number of years. In Nancholi 35 households applied for loans to CCODE and constructed Ecosan toilets.

Photo: Community representative with Eco-san toilet in Nancholi Chiimire   Source: Hilde Refstie

FOOT BRIDGES

Since Nancholi is surrounded by three rivers, foot bridges were also a priority for the community. By engaging with aspiring local councilors for the tripartite election that was underway the community representatives managed to get three foot bridges built and paid for by two aspiring local councilors. They also managed to build an ADMARC (Agricultural Developing and Marketing Corporation) building and renovate the under-five-clinic in the settlement.

Photo: One of the three foot bridges constructed. Source: Hilde Refstie

The Community Development Office (CDO) had offered to provide technical assistance and oversight to the footbridge projects, but since the aspiring councilors wanted to build the bridges right away in good time before the election they organized it themselves. However, this shows that the CDO is willing to provide technical expertise to projects in the settlement.

While making use of campaign funds from aspiring councilors have proved to be useful it supports a system of clientalism. However, as argued by community representatives; at least the money is going to community prioritized projects instead of in the pockets of community leaders (which is known to happen in some areas). Nonetheless, now after the elections the community will probably need to look into other sources of funds for this type of projects.

CONCLUSION

While much has been achieved in Nancholi Chiimire, they still face some challenges. One is how to involve and address the needs of the poorest segments of the community. According to the Situation Analysis on Informal Settlements in Blantyre from 2006, around 46 percent of informal settlement dwellers in Blantyre are renting. Most of these households cannot afford to take up loans for water taps and Ecosan toilets. While they will still benefit from water kiosks and infrastructure developments, a study from Malawi Polytechnic University on slum upgrading in Nancholi Chiimire shows that tenure affects how community members engage with upgrading efforts.

> *"Most of the people that were interviewed said they would not participate in upgrading their homes and surroundings because they stay in rented houses. As such they believe it is the responsibility of the owner of the house or plot to maintain and improve the living conditions in their places* (Khomba 2014:37)."

Furthermore, when areas are upgraded with improved infrastructure and access to services, rents tend to go up. This often forces people to move. As such people owning and people renting often have different objectives when it comes to settlement upgrading. How people that rents relate to and are affected by community mobilization and settlement upgrading initiatives continues to be a research gap in Malawi. If initiatives are to reach also the poorest in the communities this needs to be addressed.

Nonetheless, the community representatives in Nancholi Chiimire have achieved some concrete outcomes by negotiating with service providers and the City Council. They have realized development priorities as access to water, toilets, and some infrastructure. While Ward and Community Development Committees are expected to fill some of these functions now after the election, they can build on some of the experience gained through this process.

The reopening of the Community Development Office at the Blantyre City Council is also a welcome initiative. The officers have been engaging with the Nancholi Chiimire community throughout the process. However, the test of this office will be on how they are able to get relevant departments at the Council to respond to the issues raised by community representatives.

SOURCES

∗   Blantyre City Council (2006): Situational Analysis of Informal Settlements in Blantyre, Malawi

∗   Interviews with community leaders and representatives in Nancholi Chiimire, Federation leaders, CCODE, Blantyre City Council, Blantyre Water Board, Polytechnic University, and observations.

∗   Khomba, T. (2014): An Assessment of community participation in slum upgrading—a case of Nancholi Chiimire in Blantyre City, Bachelor dissertation Malawi University Polytechnic

∗   UNDESA (2011): World Urbanization Prospects, the 2011 Revision, http://esa.un.org/unup/

∗   UN Habitat (2011): Malawi: Blantyre Urban Profile, UN Habitat

This report was prepared by Hilde Refstie, Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU) in close collaboration with CCODE, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, URI, and Nancholi Chiimire community representatives.

Case Study 4 - Ndirande Makata

Negotiating services through community committees

JUNE 2014

NEGOTIATING SERVICES THROUGH COMMITTEES—NDIRANDE MAKATA

This case study is the fourth 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 Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor (the Federation), formerly called the Malawi Homeless People's Federation), 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 Ndirande Makata settlement in Blantyre City explores how organized communities engage with service providers, the City Council and other relevant stakeholders to reach solutions to problems faced in their settlement.

Photo: Interview meeting with committee representatives and Federation leaders Ndirande Makata.
Source: Hilde Refstie

BLANTYRE AND NDIRANDE MAKATA

Blantyre is the oldest urban centre in Malawi and its commercial capital. Following the national population census the city had a population of 661, 256 in 2008. Today Blantyre is estimated to have reached over one million inhabitants (UNDESA 2011). Over 65 per cent of the population live in informal settlement where they struggle with issues like access to water, electricity, sanitation, health services, education, and security (UN Habitat 2011).

Of the informal settlements Ndirande has the highest population of about 118,000. people. The settlement consists of four parts, one of them being Ndirande Makata. Ndirande Makata has according to its community leaders a population of over 35 000 people.

Satellite image Ndirande settlement.   Source: Blantyre City Council

NDIRANDE MAKATA

Photo: Ndirande Makata Source: Hilde Refstie

In 2013, community representatives in Ndirande Makata engaged with the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor and split the area into 24 clusters with around 250 households each. Representatives for these clusters have since then come together and discussed problems that the area is facing. Three main issues have been identified; access to water, waste management, and problems with sewage. To address the problems the community therefore formed committees on each of these topics in November 2013. Each committee consists of ten people. The committees are responsible for identifying problems in their areas and try to solve them within the community, or where relevant, link up with responsible stakeholders.

Photo: Representatives from the committees, the Federation and CCODE.
Source: Hilde Refstie

ACCESS TO WATER

In their planning process the community representatives in Ndirande Makata prioritized access to water as the most urgent issue. The settlement used to have only one main water pipe line. This pipe line has been functioning well, but the capacity is very limited given the high number of people in the area. A new pipe line was therefore constructed to serve the growing population. However, while people welcomed the initiative there have been several problems with the new pipeline in terms of continuous water provision and water pressure. Some of this is due to general problems with water provision and capacity in these areas, while some is caused by the pipes not being put deep enough in the ground. Since the pipes are too close to the surface they are vulnerable to breaches and the Blantyre Water Board has previously been slow in responding to such problems.

Photo: Upper section: Main water pipe house. Lower section: Pipe on road surface.
Source: Hilde Refstie

NDIRANDE WATER COMMITTEE

After priorities were identified, one of the first tasks of the Water Committee was to link up with the Blantyre Water Board (BWB). The committee asked for a meeting which was facilitated through CCODE and the Federation. Following this, representatives from the BWB, including the Ndirande zone Water Manager, came to the community and met with the representatives in January this year. The meeting was experienced as useful by both parties and several of the water challenges were discussed.

"We encouraged them to go and visit other institutions as well. I wish it [committees] were formed in almost each and every area."

Interview Blantyre Water Board official 27.03.2014

At the meeting it was agreed that the committee representatives could contact the BWB officers directly if there were any problems with the pipes (water shortages, breaches and so on). The community representatives promised on their end to keep a better eye on the pipes to make sure they are not breached on purpose to tap free water. They would also work to make sure that people did not construct structures as for example pit latrines on top of water pipes or in places hindering their maintenance.

"Another problem is for example how someone set up a toilet on top of the pipe. We found the person and stopped the development. We referred the person to some other land."

(Group discussion community representatives 30.03.2014).

NEGOTIATING WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

While the main problems with the new pipeline; water pressure and inconsistent water provision is still there, it seems like the meeting was quite productive when it came to addressing issues such as breaches. The community representatives said they had called the BWB on several occasions and that the BWB had been quick to respond. In the instance photographed below a pipe had been broken by a vehicle. The water committee then called the BWB and they showed up to fix the pipe the day after. Such cases of breaches are common in the area but the water board has promised to lower all pipes to the required depth (Interview community leader 10.04.2013).

Photo: Workers from BWB fixing the breached pipe. Photo: Hilde Refstie

WASTE

Another issue that was identified and was waste management. The City Council (BCC) is not collecting waste from Ndirande Makata, something that has led to the market vendors refusing to paying their fees to the city. Waste continues to pile up from the market as well as from the households. One of the committees formed therefore focuses on this issue.

Several reports are given to City Council officials. But they never showed up. They say it is because of lack of trucks. People are tired and they have stopped paying city rates at the market.

(Group discussion community representatives Ndirande Makata 30.03.2014)

Photo: Waste disposal site Ndirande Makata. Source: Hilde Refstie

MANAGING WASTE

The BCC on their side argue that they have way too few trucks to be able to service these areas. However, it is well worth noting that they manage to deliver these services to middle income and upper class areas where people pay city rates. As such it is also matter of prioritization.

The Waste Management Committee has not yet attempted to follow up further with the BCC on these issues as the representatives are well aware of the general resource constraints and do not believe they will get very far with their issues. They have therefore looked into other solutions as waste reusing and recycling. However, since a market for reused and recycled waste such as compost or plastics has not yet been identified this process is still in its early stages.

In this area because of the high population density a lot of waste is produced. We try to come up with ways of how such waste could be managed. We make bins where to dump the waste. There are also ways of using the waste to make manure or other things selling the waste.

(Group discussion community representatives Ndirande Makata 30.03.2014)

Photo: Waste along the roadside Ndirande Makata. Source: Hilde Refstie

SEWAGE COMMITTEE

The community plans to also form a committee to look into issues on sewage. The river gets polluted with sewage both from overfilled tanks in the housing area managed by the Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) and from households located near the rivers. To address this, community representatives have contacted the Blantyre City Council to meet with the MHC. The Chiefs have also held meetings where they have advised people living near the river to stop disposing their toilet waste into the river.

Photo: Women washing clothes in the river. Source: Hilde Refstie

CONCLUSION

The committees in Ndirande Makata are in their start-up phase, but as shown in this case study some of them have already achieved concrete results.

One issue that was raised in some of the interviews was the potential for better coordination between the committees and existing service delivery governance structures such as the Water User Associations (WUAs). The WUAs are community groups who run and maintain the water kiosks on behalf of the Blantyre Water Board. At the same time the community water committee fills an important gap. They look at the settlement as a whole, both in terms of water kiosks, individual water pipes, and the main provision lines. The committee also sees water issues in relation to other developments in the settlements as they meet regularly with the other committees. That being said a better coordination with the WUAs could potentially increase the impact of the committees even more and help avoid duplication of efforts or parallel processes.

While the Water Committee's contact with the Water Board seems to have yielded some results, the work for the committee on waste management has been more of a challenge. While community members are working on innovative ways to manage and dispose of waste, the Blantyre City Council has yet to respond to the issues raised by the committee. In the meantime garbage continues to pile up at the waste collection points in the settlement.

As for the sewage issues they seem quite complex and requires engaging with several actors as for example the Malawi Housing Corporation. As of now this communication is left to the Community Development Office at the City Council.

The process is still in its early stages and the contact points between the committees and relevant stakeholders have just been made. However, this case illustrates how organized communities can negotiate with service providers and initiate mutually beneficial partnerships.

Photo: Ndirande Makata   Source: Hilde Refstie

SOURCES

* Interviews with community leaders and representatives in Ndirande Makata, Federation leaders, CCODE, Blantyre City Council, Blantyre Water Board, Polytechnic University, and observations.

* UNDESA (2011): World Urbanization Prospects, the 2011 Revision, http://esa.un.org/unup/

* UN Habitat (2011): Malawi: Blantyre Urban Profile, UN Habitat

This report was prepared by Hilde Refstie, Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU) in close collaboration with CCODE, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, and Ndirande Makata community representatives.

LEFT HANGING?

Participatory slum upgrading and studio planning in Salisburyline — Mzuzu

september 2014

PARTICIPATORY SLUM UPGRADING AND STUDIO PLANNING IN SALISBURYLINE

This case study is the fifth 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 Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, 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 from Mzuzu focuses on the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) facilitated by UN Habitat, and the collaboration between Mzuzu University, CCODE, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, Slum Dwellers International and settlement representatives in a studio planning exercise in Salisburyline Mzuzu.

Photo: Studio planning meeting walk Salisburyline May 2014 Source: Hilde Refstie

MZUZU

Mzuzu is the fastest growing city in Malawi with an estimated population of 210 000 making it the third largest urban centre in Malawi (UNDESA 2011). The city is the hub for government administration, industry and commerce in the northern region. Over 60 percent of the people in Mzuzu live in unplanned settlements (UN Habitat 2012). The City Council owns most of this land which is mainly classified as Traditional Housing Areas. Mzuzu have twelve unplanned settlements and one of them is Salisburyline, the focus for this case (Mzuzu University 2012).

PARTICIPATORY SLUM UPGRADING PROGRAMME (PSUP)

In 2008 UN Habitat launched their global Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme. The programme aims to improve the living conditions in towns and cities and thereby contribute to Milennium Goal 7, Target 11; to improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. The programme is currently being implemented in 34 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific Group of States. One of these countries is Malawi where project activities started in 2010.

The PSUP consists of three phases. The first phase is a rapid participatory urban profiling at both national and city level. The profile explores various themes and proposes interventions in different areas. This is developed further in the second phase with detailed proposals. The final phase of the project is implementation of the prioritized project proposals.

In Malawi the PSUP was launched with support from the Government of Malawi (GoM) in 2010. During the first phase urban profiles were developed for the four major cities in Malawi; Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba.

MALAWI:
MZUZU URBAN PROFILE
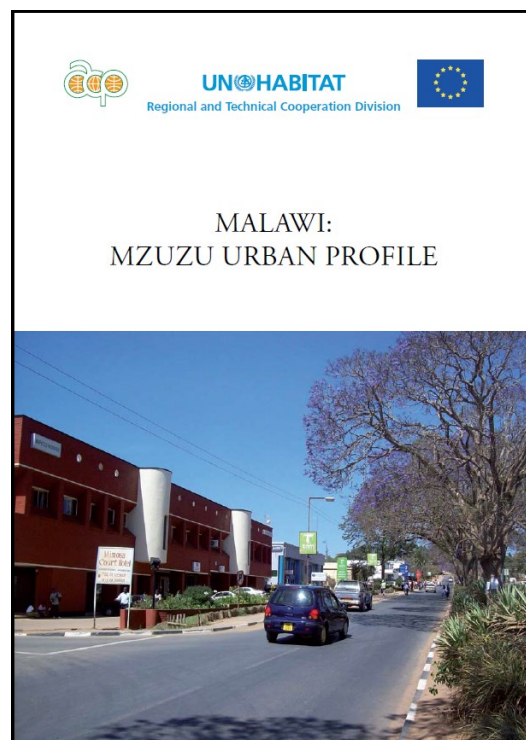
In Mzuzu the profile covered themes as Governance and Financial Management, Local Economic Development, Environment, Land, Shelter and Slums, Gender and HIV/AIDS, and Basic Urban Services. The profile also proposed projects under each theme.

For the next phase of the PSUP Mzuzu was selected as the pilot city and Salisburyline as the pilot settlement for the programme. The objective was to use this pilot as a learning experience that could guide the implementation of the PSUP in the other settlements and cities.

SALISBURYLINE

Salisburyline is named after the first people settling there in 1955, who came back from Zimbabwe. The area consists of shallow wetland and marshes and is consequently waterlogged. Mzuzu City Council therefore declared the area uninhabitable and advised against further settlement. However, Salisburyline has continued to grow and is now one of the largest informal settlements in Mzuzu. While exact data is not available the settlement is estimated to host around 8500 people. Salisburyline is an interesting settlement in many regards. Over 44,5 percent of the population are employed in the formal sector and have access to permanent sources of income. In contrast to many other informal settlements in Malawi only 15,6 percent of the residents in Salisburyline therefore rent their houses. The rest, while not necessarily having official titles, own their residences (Mzuzu University 2013). This makes it an interesting case for slum upgrading as most of the households would benefit directly from interventions.
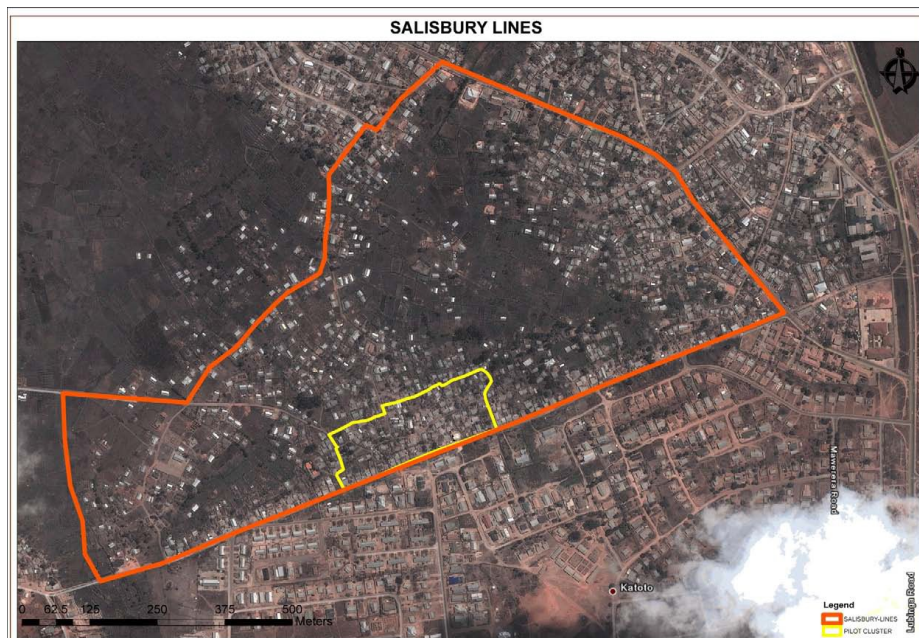

Photo: Satellite image of Salisburyline (indicated in red, studio planning cluster in yellow).
Source: SDI-AAPS 2012

CHALLENGES IN SALISBURYLINE

Given its location on a waterlogged marshy area, the biggest challenge for residents living in Salisburyline has been flooding. The community has recently dug some drains within the settlement to address this.

While the digging of drains has improved the area, it is still vulnerable to flooding when the weather is extreme, or when drains are clogged by garbage. Mzuzu City Council does not provide waste collection services as the settlement is regarded as informal. Furthermore, many toilets dispose of waste directly into the drains which increases the risk of diseases such as cholera and dysentery. Contamination from pit latrines and other pollutants is also assumed to affect the quality of water for drinking and household use. Rains and periodic flooding also affects the roads and footpaths in the settlement making mobility an issue.

While almost half of the population has water taps at their houses, only three out of seven communal water kiosks were working at the time of the situational analysis of Salisburyline (Mzuzu University 2013). Access to affordable clean water is therefore a challenge for many.

Photo: Drain in Salisburyline. Source: Hilde Refstie

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH PLANNERS

Since Salisburyline had been selected for slum upgrading under the PSUP, Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS) decided to include Salisburyline as one of the areas under their collaboration on planning studios.

SDI and AAPS have facilitated planning studio exercises in several parts of the world working with communities in an effort to close the gap between planning education and practice. CCODE being the support NGO for the Malawian Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor worked with Federation and other community leaders in Salisburyline to mobilize the community for the exercise. Mzuzu University was AAPS' implementing partner and engaged lecturers and planning students. By linking the planning studio to the PSUP the partners aimed to avoid some of the critique against planning exercises for spending community members' time and raising unrealistic expectations of project implementation.

Photo: Students and community representatives on settlement walk.   Source: Hilde Refstie

COMMUNITY PLANNING STUDIO

CCODE and the Federation had been engaging with Salisburyline since 2010. They had built the capacity of community leaders and facilitated demarcation of the area into eight clusters, each having their own cluster committee. Together with the existing community structures the committees were important contact points for the planning students when the community planning studio was launched in July 2012.

During the first meetings it was decided to pilot the process in two of the community clusters. The two clusters discussed challenges and prioritized areas for intervention. The students and community members were then split into teams focusing on Electricity and Water, Sanitation (toilets and solid waste disposal), Drainages (storm water and grey water channels), and Land Use and Circulation. They then started gathering information to produce a profile of the settlements. (For more details on the process see MHPF et. al. (2012) and SDI-AAPS (2012).

The next step was to map the settlement using digitized map sheets, printed satellite images, cameras and tape measures for data collection. At the end of this process the teams met with the rest of the community to discuss the issues and develop proposals for concrete projects.

Photo: Students and community members working on the maps. Source. CCODE
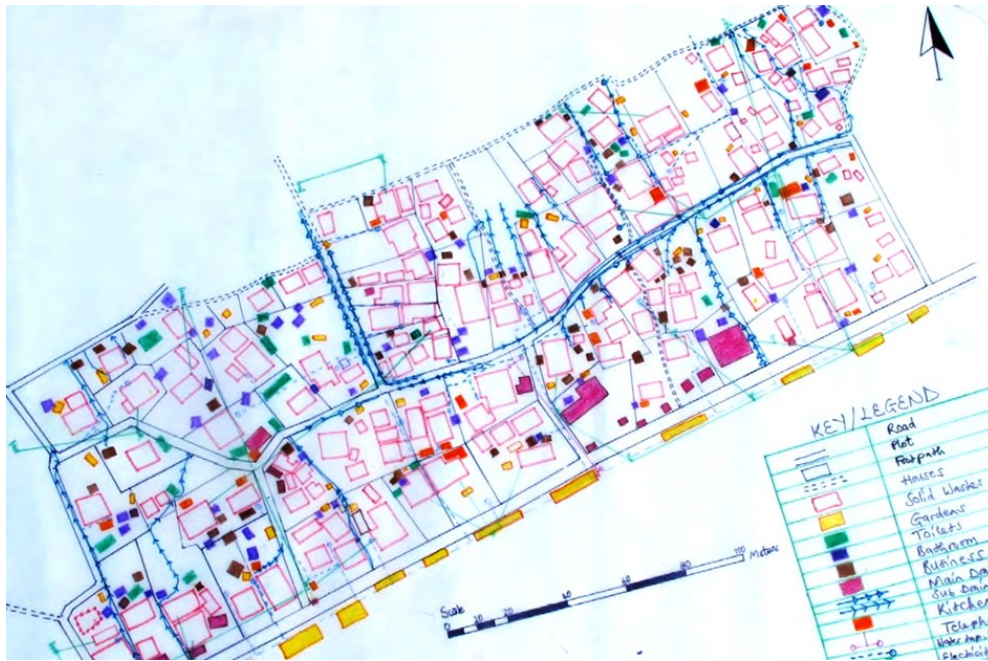
COMMUNITY PLANNING STUDIO

Photo: Map over cluster in Salisburyline with suggested interventions. Source: CCODE

The process was described by the community representatives and the students alike as being very useful and enriching with both parties learning from each other. The collaboration was therefore deemed successful in terms of facilitating a bottom-up planning process while at the same time providing a learning platform for all the partners. Salisburyline community representatives now had information, maps, and project proposals for two of their clusters.

Overall it seems like the community planning studio for the two clusters had been quite successful. However, as pointed out in several studies on participatory urban planning in Malawi and elsewhere, the challenge is often to move from plans to action. This has unfortunately proved to be the issue also for Salisburyline.

PLANNING FOR WHAT?

In Malawi the project budget for the third phase of PSUP was to be one million Euro in total for all the four cities. The projects identified, prioritized and designed in the community planning studio in Salisburyline were supposed to be funded and implemented with parts of this budget.

The European Union (EU) was to provide 750 000EUR through UN Habitat on the condition that the Malawian Government (GoM) would cover the last USD250 000. UN Habitat and the GoM had assumed that funds under the Local Development Fund (LDF) and other transfers would count towards this commitment. However, when the EU made it clear that the commitment had to be in direct money, the process stopped. While it took some time, UN Habitat had (at the time of this study being written up) just secured a letter of commitment from the Government. However, it remains to be seen if the money comes through and if the process can be sped up so that PSUP can conclude phase three. If not, communities are 'left hanging', having contributed time and resources to the planning process without any concrete projects coming out of it. Not only have community representatives felt deceived by this process taking so long, having put their names and energy behind the project. It is also very difficult to proceed with any other forms of community resource mobilization in Salisburyline given that resources had already been promised.

While the community planning studio is being extended to other clusters in Salisburyline, it is challenging to mobilize community members and leaders to participate. They often demand allowances for participating in further work as they have not seen concrete results from the first phases. The lack of communication and information on the way forward with the larger PSUP has also been a contributing factor to frustration felt by community members.

There has been no implementation. Maybe if something was implemented people would do it without allowances.

(Group discussion Salisburyline)

LEFT HANGING?

To avoid leaving the Salisburyline community hanging while waiting for the EU and Government money to come through, UN Habitat is now working to try to secure some money that can be pooled into a community upgrading fund. If this works out the community committees could apply with their projects to this fund. Furthermore, the plans for the two clusters have been submitted to the City Council for further development and approval. The hope is that some of the suggested interventions will be included in the city budget and implemented through the Local Development Fund through for example the Public Works Programme. Some opening of drains and levelling of roads in Salisburyline have already been implemented under this programme.

"It is very disheartening to see things happening like this. Because what we want to see is the project implemented. We have a feeling still of eagerness, but it has been 3-4 years."

(Interview Community Leader Salisburyline)

In the meantime CCODE and the Federation are working together with Mzuzu University to finalize maps and plans for the remaining 6 clusters with funding from Slum Dwellers International.

Photo: Planning studio meeting May 2014.   Source: Hilde Refstie

THE WAY FORWARD

If some resources come through either with the City Council, Government, UN Habitat, or other agencies it might make it easier for the community representatives to also convince the community members to start working on some of the issues that can be solved by the community members themselves like waste collection, opening of drains, levelling of roads, forward thinking when allocating land and so on. It is therefore crucial that following the letter of commitment from the Government, the funds becomes available for implementation without more delay.

However, a lesson that can be learnt from the PSUP and the related initiatives is to be a hundred percent sure in advance that the funds will come through on time. While the main objective of community studio planning is to build the capacity of the planners and the participants, it seems to be important to also manage expectations in these processes. If funding has not been a hundred percent secured it is better to as expressed by one of the urban planners to "plan as if there is no money". That way the planning would be based on what is achievable within the existing capacities and resources of the community.

At the same time, as shown in previous case studies in this series, community planning initiatives are often limited to rather small interventions. There are also few donors available that are interested in funding slum upgrading activities. Slum upgrading is not prioritized on the national agenda and many see it as too complex to engage with. For larger projects communities therefore need to actively engage with their City Councils to try to hold them accountable to their duties under the Local Government Act. This situates participatory planning in the larger context of governance and moves the discussion into issues as the capacity of City Councils and how they prioritize, distribute, and manage their resources. While the prospects for implementation of phase III of the PSUP as a whole is not fully clear at the moment it seems crucial now that at least some funding for implementation of projects in Salisburyline is secured. Either through the Local Government, who has now accepted the plan as its own, or through external funders.The planning process itself seems to have been a success both in terms of participation, learning, and the production of maps and designs for projects. If this can now be taken to the next stage Malawi could have an example of a slum upgrading process which followed participatory planning at the community level while at the same time educating the next generation of urban planners in community planning.

SOURCES

Interviews with Salisburyline community leaders and members, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, CCODE staff, Mzuzu City Council officials, and Mzuzu University students and staff.

Kamlomo, D. and Kabanga L. (2014): Local Economic Development and Participatory Land Use Planning

Manda (2013): Reflections on Planning Education in Malawi, *Education and Society in Southern Africa,* Vol. 1 No. 1 pp.58-74

SDI-AAPS (2012): SDI-AAPS Community Planning Studios - Malawi Studios report (draft), http://www.sdinet.org/media/upload/documents/SDI_AAPS_Studio_MALAWI_-AUG_2012.pdf

MHPF, SDI, AAPS, CCODE and Mzuzu University (2012): Learning Differently – Malawi Community Planning Studios, http://www.sdinet.org/media/upload/documents/Malawi-Studio_Booklet-Jan13-fnl.pdf

Mzuzu University (2013): Situation Analysis for Salisburyline Informal Settlement

UNDESA (2011): World Urbanization Prospects, the 2011 Revision, http://esa.un.org/unup/

UN Habitat (2012): Malawi: Mzuzu Urban Profile, http://www.zaragoza.es/contenidos/medioambiente/onu/issue06/1138-eng.pdf

A special thanks to Dominic Kamlomo, M.A.Z. Manda, and Lucky Kabanga at Mzuzu University, and John Chome at UN Habitat for advice and comments.

Case Study 6
Participatory Budgeting Blantyre

Is this participatory budgeting?

Some lessons learned from the 2013 and 2014 Blantyre process

March 2015

BLANTYRE

This case study is the sixth 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 Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, 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 from Blantyre focuses on the Participatory Budgeting processes conducted in 2013 and 2014.

Photo: Part of Blantyre city   Source: BCC

Blantyre is the oldest urban centre in Malawi and its commercial capital. Following the national population census the city had a population of 661, 256 in 2008. Today Blantyre is estimated to have reached over one million inhabitants (UNDESA 2011). The city covers an area of 220 square kilometers and has the highest population

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN BLANTYRE

The medium and high income classes are the only ones with access to serviced land in Blantyre. Consequently, over 65 per cent of the population live in densely populated informal settlements where they struggle with issues as access to water, electricity, sanitation, health services, education, and security (UN Habitat 2011).
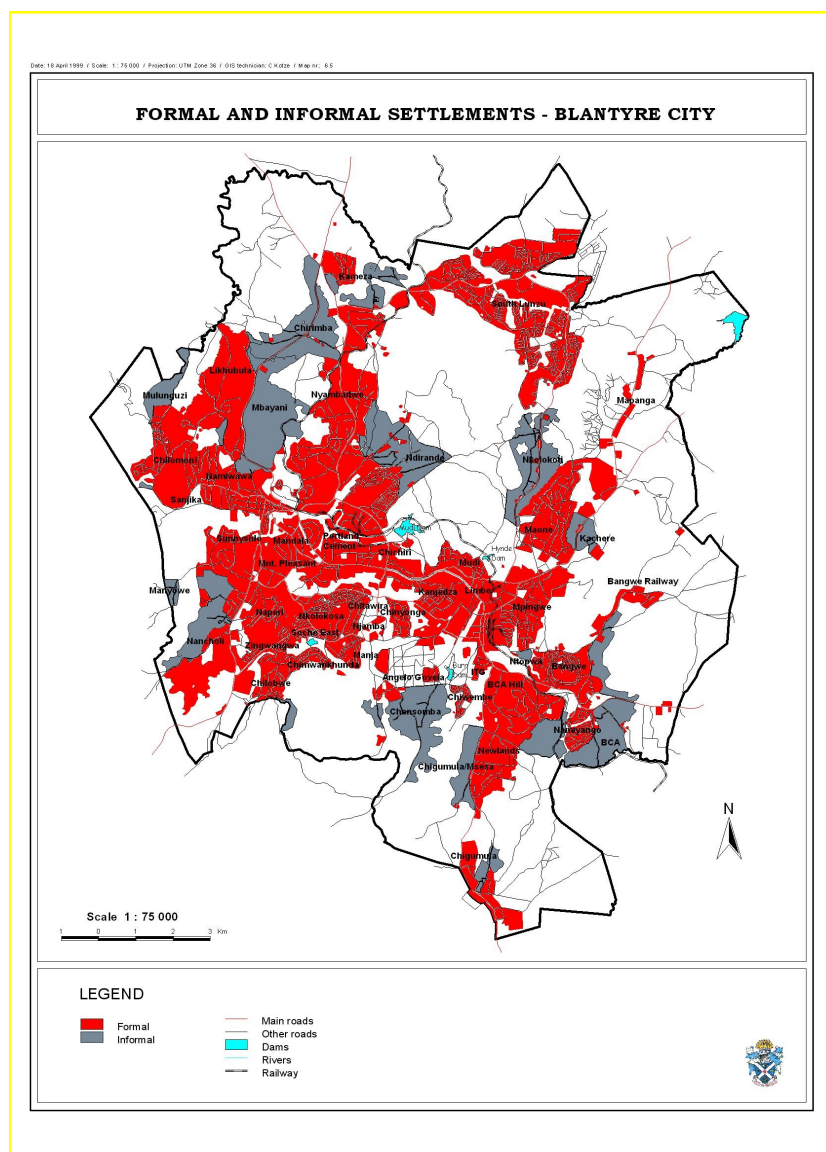
Source: Blantyre City Council

THE STARTING POINT

To address some of the issues experienced by people in the city, the Blantyre City Council initiated a participatory budget process in 2013. Participatory budgeting is seen as increasing popular participation following up on the Constitution and the decentralization process as envisaged in the 1998 Local Government Act.

Participatory budgeting was pioneered by Porto Alegre in Brazil in 1989 and has been promoted as good practice for including marginalized groups in decision making. It has also been replicated successfully in a range of other places. The objective of participatory budgeting is to give the citizens opportunities to present demands and priorities for their areas and through discussions and negotiations influence the city's budget allocation (UN Habitat 2007). In Porto Alegre the participatory budgeting resulted in improved public welfare services for the people and improved project implementation.

Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre

(based on Bhatnagar et al. undated)

Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre involves three parallel streams of meetings: neighborhood assemblies, "thematic" assemblies, and meetings of delegates for citywide coordinating sessions. These meetings continue throughout the year.

The city government presents their accounts from the previous year and investment plan for the current year, as decided in the previous year's meetings. Then a debate starts for the next year. The debates continue for nine months, and each district gives two sets of rankings, one set for requirements within the district and the other set for efforts which affect the whole city. A public debate decides the criteria for allocating investment budget among districts. These criteria can be population, an index of poverty, a measure of shortages (such as a lack of pavement or the lack of a school), the assigned priorities, and so on. Priority is given to progressive distribution of the resources, regardless of individual representatives' demands, so that poorer areas receive more funding than the well-off ones. In different cities in Brazil the share of participatory budgeting of total budget allocations have varied from 17 to 50 % increasing over time. Sometimes thematic committees are also formed to substitute the more area based representation.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN BLANTYRE

In Blantyre the process started with a participatory budget meeting called by the City Council in 2013. This first round received critique from civil society actors for not being an actual participatory budgeting process. Even though the meeting was announced in the newspapers, there was no systematic representation from the various city areas. Furthermore, the plans presented were not based on community priorities, but were mainly developed by the city bureaucrats.

The participants also did not receive any documents in advance so it was difficult for people to comment on specific budget posts. Participants therefore felt ill-prepared to contribute with constructive comments out over some minor interventions representing the areas and interests of those present.

In 2014 the civil society actors had hoped that the critique from the previous year's process had been taken into account. However, the meeting proceeded much the same way and did not improve on bottom-up planning, systematic representation, information sharing and preparations, or follow-up. Furthermore, the meeting did not report on what had been performed *compared* to what was stipulated in the previous year's budget meeting.

Photo at Participatory Budget Meeting in 2014. Source: Hilde Refstie

REPRESENTATION

Blantyre did not have Community Development Committees (community level representation) in place at the time of the study. The City Council therefore had a meeting with the Members of Parliament (MPs) to give input to the budget. This was seen by community representatives as problematic in several ways. One is that no minutes were presented from this meeting. Another is that the MPs did not participate at the public meeting. Third, several community members felt that MPs are too far removed from priorities made in communities, and worried that projects might be distributed according to party political lines.

" MPs just do things themselves without asking the people. We came to the [participatory budgeting] meeting but we were just invited to hear what was already done. I don't think MPs can know what is going on in the villages. They only talk to people from their party. They can give us a shirt when we want trousers. The MPs cannot contribute anything, because they cannot know what needs to be done without approaching people."

(Interview community member informal settlement 02.04.2014)

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING OR BUDGET MEETING?

Participatory budgeting meeting Blantyre 2014.   Source: Hilde Refstie

Few if no final decisions were made during the meeting. Suggestions were rather met with assurances from the administration that they would take them into consideration when the final budget was developed. Since the participants have few ways to keep the administration accountable for the final allocations made, several of the participants interviewed felt frustrated. There was no funds envelope to be directly distributed through participatory budgeting as have been the case in Porto Alegre and processes elsewhere in Kenya and Tanzania.

The participatory budgeting process in Blantyre therefore had two major weaknesses: One was the way communities were represented, and the other how the process and meetings were implemented giving participants little influence on the actual budget allocations. The process in Blantyre therefore seemed more similar to a budget presentation meeting than a participatory budgeting process.

"People are complaining that the budget does not reflect community priorities."

(Group discussion community representatives informal settlement 30.03.2014)

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING GUIDELINES

Although a budget presentation meeting is an important step towards more participatory governance it does not qualify to be called participatory budgeting. Issues of groundwork, representation, transparency, opportunities for impacting resource distribution and opportunities to hold the budget implementers accountable are essential criteria for participatory budgeting.

Participatory budgeting is therefore advised to first start with developing the systems for representation, criteria for distribution of resources, and clarifications on roles and responsibilities of the various actors throughout the budgeting process. The National Local Government Finance Committee in Malawi produced their Guidelines on Participatory Budgeting for Local Authorities in Malawi with technical and financial support from GIZ in April 2013. The guidelines are supposed to "serve as a reference document for Local Authorities to involve communities or their representatives in developing and implementing budgets. (p1)"
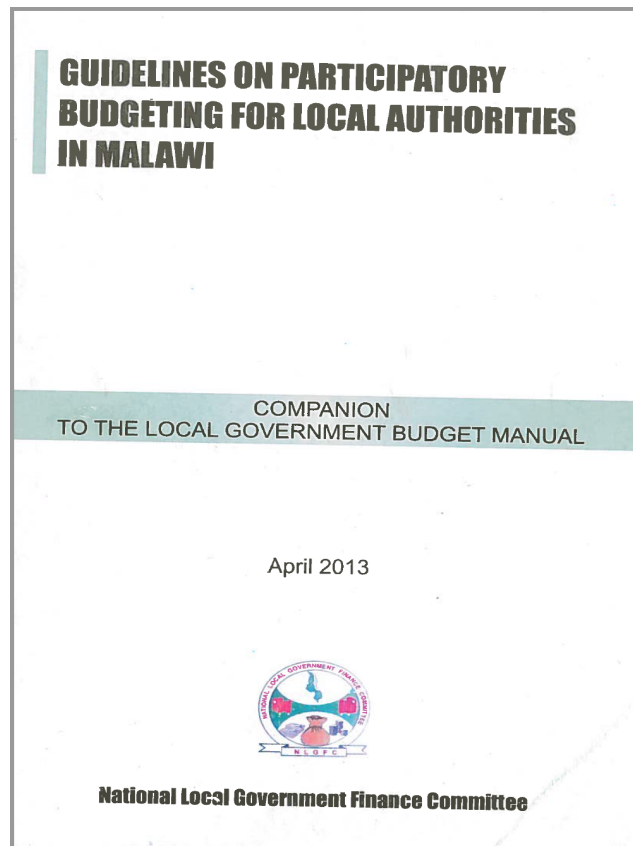
INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION

The participatory budgeting guidelines are very broad and lack many of the essential steps of participatory budgeting. As they stand now they encompass everything from partial once off consultations to actual participation of citizenry in budget allocations decisions. The guidelines suggests that participation should at a minimum take place through existing structures such as Urban Neighborhood Committees, Area Development Committees, Urban Executive Committees and Urban Council Consultative Fora. However, these structures were not in place at the community level in Blantyre and several other cities and towns. While the participatory budgeting process in Blantyre opened up for some direct participation from organizations and individuals, it did not meet the minimum criteria for representation as set out in the Guidelines.

Blantyre is now in 2015 reported to have Community Development Committees formed in all 23 wards and City Councillors in place. This provides an excellent opportunity to anchor the budget process in locally defined priorities. However, it would also be important to save some space for community representation through civil society as has proved crucial in participatory budgeting processes elsewhere.

And while inclusive representation is one important element, this paper has pointed out several other challenges with the participatory budgeting process in Blantyre that would need to be addressed if it is to be called truly participatory.

Media interviewing after the Participatory Budgeting meeting in 2014 in Blantyre. Source: Hilde Refstie

SUMMARY CHALLENGES

♦ Participatory budgeting as a process can easily be manipulated, undemocratic, and divert attention from social justice issues if there are no set minimum criteria.

♦ The process, if done properly, is expensive and the financial resources for Participatory Budgeting are limited.

♦ Without a dedicated fund envelope open for redistribution criteria set by participants, the process will never be more than a budget consultation meeting.

♦ The budgeting needs to be based on existing community planning processes and be developed during a series of meetings where the participants can hold the City Council and each other accountable for the decisions made.

♦ Involving groups as the poorest of the poor and youth remains a challenge. Participatory budgeting therefore risks serving only a few influential groups.

♦ It can be difficult to make priorities and decisions in a PB meeting, especially when several interventions are set up against each other. It is after all often a zero-sum game where some allocations needs to be prioritized at the cost of others.

♦ The participatory budgeting process has to be seen in connection with larger issues as citywide and nationwide resource distribution and social justice.

♦ The Local Councilors now in place presents an excellent opportunity to develop more thorough participatory budgeting processes

SOURCES

* Interviews with community leaders and members in two informal settlements in Blantyre, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, CCODE staff, Blantyre City Council officials, and Polytechnic University staff.

* Malawi Participatory Budgeting Guidelines

* Bhatnagar et. al: Participatory Budgeting in Brazil, The World Bank

* UNDESA (2011): World Urbanization Prospects, the 2011 Revision, http://esa.un.org/unup/

* UN Habitat (2011): Malawi: Blantyre Urban Profile, UN Habitat

* UN Habitat (2007): Participatory Budgeting in Africa, a Training Companion for Anglophone Countries, Nairobi

This report was prepared by Hilde Refstie, Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU) in close collaboration with CCODE, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, and the Urban Research Institute.

Case Study 7: ISUP Lilongwe

Some lessons to be learned

Informal Settlement Upgrading Project in Chinsapo and Mtandire, Lilongwe

Prepared by Hilde Refstie and Wonderful Hunga
August 2015

PURPOSE

This study is the seventh 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 Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, The Research Institute (TRI), 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 aim to explore planning in a wider governance context.

This specific case study from Lilongwe focuses on the Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme (ISUP). While ISUP was the main project dealing with informal settlements under the Lilongwe City Development Strategy umbrella, it faced major challenges. The project was only partially implemented and was stopped in June 2013, two years before the planned end-date. The project was never evaluated, and with the closing of the project`s Informal Settlement Upgrading Unit at the City Council there were few opportunities to reflect on lessons to be learned. This study will attempt to summarize some lessons based on project documents, observations, and interviews conducted with several of the key actors in 2013. While the study will not be able to capture all aspects of the process we hope it can stimulate some discussion and reflection that can help when planning future slum upgrading processes.

The ISUP was meant to represent a paradigm shift for Lilongwe City Council from a prescriptive top-down approach to planning and development to a more inclusive and community-driven approach in transforming the city

(Lilongwe City Assembly, 2011).

LILONGWE CDS

In 2007 the city of Lilongwe decided to start developing a City Development Strategy (CDS) with the aim to provide a strategic direction for the city's development. The process started out with a capacity assessment conducted as part of a mentoring partnership with the South African city of Johannesburg. The CDS itself was finalized and launched by the Lilongwe City Council in 2010. This CDS is the first to be developed in Malawi and includes long term visioning and goal setting as well as short term actions and interventions. The CDS process won an award from UN Habitat Malawi in 2011 and was rewarded the international Guangzhou award on urban innovation in 2012 for effective urban management and partnerships.

Left: Photo from Lilongwe City Centre   Right: Lilongwe City Council representative accepting the Guangzhou award.

The CDS concluded that approximately 76% of Lilongwe`s population live in informal settlements and/or sub standard housing. It therefore suggested to establish an informal settlement unit at the City Council. Another important activity was to "develop a mechanism by which community participation processes influences policy-making, resource allocation, planning and administrative action" (Lilongwe CDS: 127). One of the initiatives that was emphasized was therefore the Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This programme is listed as a direct outcome of the City Development Strategy process (ISSUU 2013) to specifically address goals under the Land and Shelter theme.
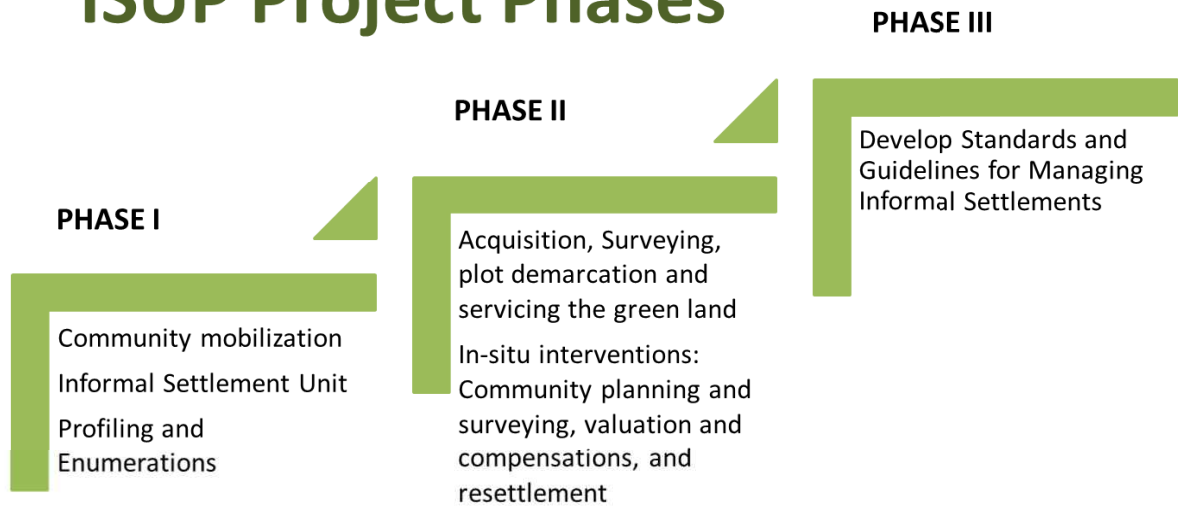
ISUP

The Informal Settlement Upgrading Project (ISUP) was based on a 2,5 million USD grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The aim of the project was "to improve the livelihood of the vulnerable and marginalized sector of the population that lives in informal settlements within the city of Lilongwe" (ISUP proposal 2010). The project was led by the Lilongwe City Council (LCC) and implemented by various partners as the Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE), Water Aid, and Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP). At the national level the Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development was to be involved throughout the project.

Water Aid was the implementing partner focusing on access to water, CISP on women entrepeneurship, and CCODE on general slum upgrading. The specific activities of the project are outlined in the table below:

Objective	Activity
Ensure full community participation, ownership and sustainability of the project	∗ Community mobilization ∗ Informal Settlement profiling and enumerations
Ensure availability of technical infromation for proper project planning, designing, and implementation	∗ Establish an informal settlement unit ∗ Informal settlement profiling and enumerations ∗ Participatory community planning meetings ∗ Undertake resettlement of affected communities
Ensure the provision of tenure security and basic services in both new and existing areas	∗ Bring interventions; accessible roads, portable water, sanitation facilities, tenure security etc.
Ensure the availability of Standards and guidelines for managing informal settlements	∗ Draft and develop standards and guidelines on the management and control of all informal settlements in the city

OPERATIONALIZATION

ISUP Project Phases

PHASE III

Develop Standards and Guidelines for Managing Informal Settlements

PHASE II

Acquisition, Surveying, plot demarcation and servicing the green land

In-situ interventions: Community planning and surveying, valuation and compensations, and resettlement

PHASE I

Community mobilization

Informal Settlement Unit

Profiling and Enumerations

The project was to be implemented in three phases and was originally planned to be a citywide process targeting all the informal settlements in Lilongwe. However, when realizing that this would require much more resources than was available, the project was scaled down to the two settlements of Chinsapo and Mtandire. The hope was that lessons from these two settlements could be used to scale up the approach at a later stage. As was mentioned in the introduction, the project faced several challenges and was ended in June 2013, two years before the planned end-date. The next sections will attempt to explore some of the reasons for this. They will mainly be structured around five themes: Governance, communication, coordination, capacity and resources.

Chinsapo settlement, Photo: Hilde Refstie

GOVERNANCE

The overall objective of the project was to "sustainably improve the quality of life of the informal settlement dwellers by leveling out the challenges that hamper timely delivery of quality services, through a participatory and community centered process. (Lilongwe City Assembly 2001:3)." To do this the project set out to build a partnership between community networks, NGOs, the Local Government, and other stakeholders.

As part of the ISUP a much needed Informal Settlement Unit (ISU) was set up at the Lilongwe City Council (LCC) in 2011. The LCC administration was to manage the project and this was therefore the logical place for the unit. However, the City Council is bound by slow and tedious bureaucratic procedures, something that was reported to have delayed the project significantly.

Generally I would say the biggest challenge has been the bureaucratic systems of the City Council. Delays in with the City Council have delayed the project.

(Interview City Council officer 09.04.2013)

Also, while the unit was envisioned to become institutionalized as a focal point for informal settlement upgrading in Lilongwe, it was never fully integrated in the city planning department. The unit had its own staff and focused solely on the project. The ISUP staff also collected higher salaries than their colleagues in the City Council, something that created tensions and further divisions between the units. The result was several challenges with coordination which was experienced as problematic both by the unit and the CC administration.

While the Informal Settlement Unit struggled with coordinating the various partners of the project, this type of meeting point to connect with the Council was much appreciated by the organizations and community representatives interviewed. It was therefore disappointing when the unit was dissolved together with the project instead of being institutionalized as an informal settlement unit for the city. Lilongwe City Council now no longer have any dedicated unit dealing with informal settlements where community members can connect with the Council in a systematic way.

COMMUNICATION

Communication and information sharing was a challenge in the project already from the beginning. For example, loans for housing was the main issue prioritized by the communities. CCODE therefore planned to use the funds accordingly and mobilized people to come up with the necessary deposits for housing loans. While the donors had suggested some areas of joint interests which focused more on infrastructure and service delivery, they had also emphasized that interventions should follow community prioritization. It was therefore surprising for the partners when they were informed by the B&M Gates Foundation that ISUP would not fund development interventions benefitting individuals, only initiatives serving the community as a whole. This reflects some of the communication issues between the partners. Since the community representatives had already started engaging on housing, the project was set up for a rocky start. However, the community representatives in Chinsapo and Mtandire adapted their approach and started out with a more thorough information gathering exercise that was to lay the basis for identifying interventions.

Some of the projects identified and prioritized by the community groups were bridges, schools and health clinics. However, this was also not accepted by the donors. They saw the projects as risky and not sustainable as there were no guarantees that maintenance costs and salaries would be covered beyond the five-year frame of the project. While this is responsible behavior on behalf of the donors, the narrow application of the funds should have been very clear from the outset. Instead the project was framed and understood as following the needs and priorities made by the community groups.

Building ISUP Water kiosks in Chinsapo, Photo: Hilde Refstie

COMMUNICATION

Communication was a challenge also at the city and community level. In Chinsapo for example, the Informal Settlement Network created by the project had decided on upgrading the market. However, when the construction started, the vendors at the market, who had previously agreed to move, demanded compensation for temporarily losing their stalls. The City Council refused to pay and blamed the NGOs and the urban poor networks for not having sorted this out in advance. The result was that construction stopped completely.

"In Chinsapo we had agreed on no compensation for the market so now we are stuck."

(Interview Local Government official 09.05.2013)

This situation created some dismay on the part of the City Council administration who questioned the way CCODE and the Federation had organized the community mobilization. CCODE and the Federation on their end argued that they had agreed with the community leaders who had talked to the vendors. However, when the CC administration came in to work on the construction the vendors changed their minds as they saw the City Council as a Government entity that should provide compensations. Issues like this contributed to weakening the relationship between the CC administration and the other partners in the ISUP.

Chinsapo project. Photo: Nevas Chirwa CCODE

COORDINATION

The project started out with a major mapping and enumeration exercise. This approach is inspired by the work of Slum Dwellers International, a global network of slum dwellers which the Federation and CCODE is affiliated to. Mapping, enumeration, and information gathering are in this approach used not only to gather data to be used as a basis for identifying needs, but also to mobilize communities.

While the settlement profiles, mappings and enumerations proved useful in mobilizing the communities, the survey process was very time consuming and faced several challenges. One was the accuracy of the data collected. Sometimes the questionnaires were not filled in correctly. Another delay was to get the questionnaires printed and administered. The whole process ended up taking almost one year, and by that time the information had still not been entered into a database. While the idea behind the survey was good, both in terms of community mobilization and information gathering, the process took too long and the information was not ready in time to be used as a basis for planning. The slow progress frustrated the partners and was a contributing factor to the project being ended earlier than the planned end date.

Other partners like Water Aid was also waiting for the enumeration and survey exercise to be finalized so they could use it as a basis for constructing water kiosks. However, when realizing it would take too long it was agreed for them to start implementing their portion of the project with their implementing partner Circle for Integrated Community Development (CICOD).


Drawing up measures for roads and drains project Mtandire. Photo: Hilde Refstie

CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

After the donors decided to end the project, CCODE, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, and students from Mzuzu and Polytechnic University worked intensively to design and cost the small projects identified by the communities in the two settlements. Since the ISUP was the first project of this type in Lilongwe it was difficult to estimate many of the costs in advance. The projects turned out to be more expensive that first anticipated. It also became clear that it was never realistic to expect that the programme would be replicated in other settlements in Lilongwe or elsewhere without more external funding.
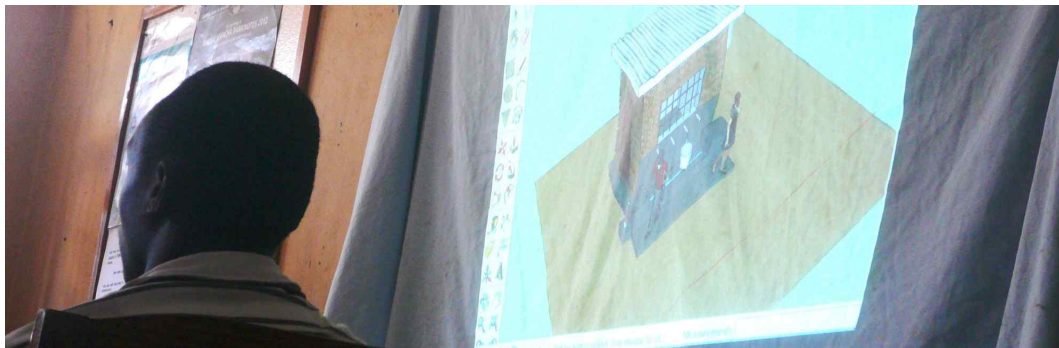
Student presenting a suggested water kiosk layout to community members. Photo: Hilde Refstie
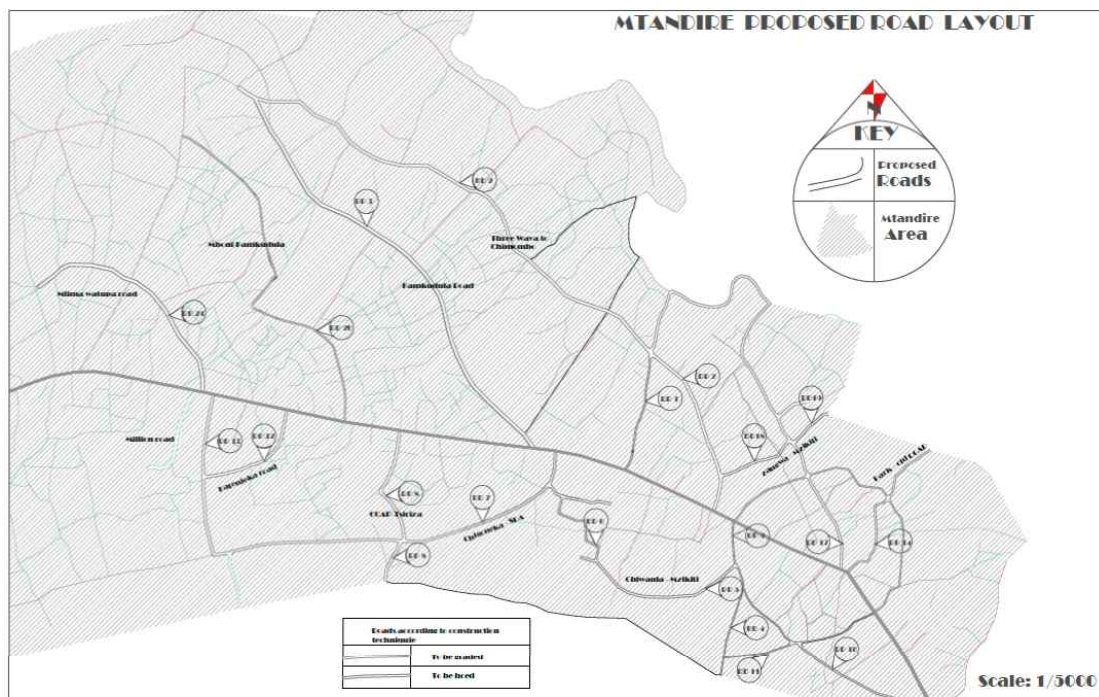
Plan developed for Mtandire showing the proposed road layout. Source: CCODE

CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

While the process became quite hectic, the partners in Chinsapo and Mtandire ended up implementing a whole range of the proposed projects as roads, drains, footpaths and water kiosks in an impressive way. While this shows that projects can be implemented within a relatively short time period partners wished they had more time to reach out to the general community to build project ownership. One problem that came about was for example that people filled the drainage channels outside their houses to make a dirt path they could walk or bike over. When the rainy season set in this led to flooding in large parts of the settlement.

Clogged drains in Chinsapo. Photo: Hilde Refstie

How it was "supposed" to be done: Small bridge that allows free circulation in the drains. Photo: Hilde Refstie

CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

Many of the challenges with governance, communication and coordination can be attributed to the way ISUP was managed at the city and organization level, but there were also issues at the community level. The community leadership in the two settlements insisted on being paid allowances and airtime for their participation in the project. Some even threatened to sabotage the project if funds were not provided consistently. While it does not seem unreasonable that people are compensated for their time, the process became for some more about accessing individual funds than ensuring the success of the project. Given that the NGO partners were dependent on the community leaders to get the project implemented within the tight timeframe it was difficult to negotiate this with the community leadership. It also set a precedent that has made it difficult to mobilize people in other settlements without providing the same levels of allowances.

"It [mobilization] should start as if there is no money, building on something that people have already owned"

(Interview urban expert 13.03.2014)

While some of the problems faced in the ISUP could have been solved with better governance, communication, and coordination, the challenges faced point to three root problems; the general lack of human and financial resources for slum upgrading, lack of political will, and divergent interests among stake holders.

Building of drains in Chinsapo. Photo: Hilde Refstie

CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

The lack of resources and divergent interests can be approached in two ways. One is to connect more with the formal systems of representation in an attempt to influence the general resource distribution in the country. While few funds exist for slum upgrading, some money is sitting with the Members of Parliament without reaching the communities. Another is to connect with the City Council planning units to work on issues of common interest that do not necessarily require much funding. Examples could be technical support to community initiatives, coordination of planning efforts, and adaptation of building and property regulations to the unplanned settlement context. A third approach is for communities to organize services and slum upgrading through self-organization and community funds.

Despite the challenges listed in this study CCODE and the Federation for the Rural and Urban Poor continue to be engaged with community groups in Chinsapo and Mtandire. With leadership structures in place and committees organized by clusters they should be better equipped to continue to work, at least with small-scale slum upgrading on their own. In this regards the programme have achieved some concrete longer term results. However, there are several lessons to be learned from the ISUP project.

Measuring roads in Chinsapo. Photo: Hilde Refstie

SOME LESSONS

- Project concept notes and proposals need to be concrete on what exactly can be achieved under the projects. This also needs to be communicated clearly to all project partners and community groups.

- A tentative costing exercise should be conducted at the earliest opportunity to avoid unrealistic expectations about what the project will be able to achieve.

- A risk and responses framework should be included at the proposal stage to anticipate challenges that will come throughout the project.

- Timelines needs to be realistic and anticipate the often slow and bureaucratic procedures of the City Councils and the time it takes to mobilize community groups.

- NGOs and CBOs need to engage more critically with community representatives and leadership to ensure transparency, accountability, and ownership to the project.

- The surveys of the settlements took too long and were not used as a planning tool. It might be an idea to keep the profiling, mapping, and enumeration, but reduce the survey to a sample survey.

- It is not realistic to expect slum upgrading projects to spread to other communities and scale up without major influxes of funding. However, how to maximize on ring effects and the momentum created by such initiatives should be part of a sustainability assessment early on.

- Project units for slum upgrading projects should be integrated within the City Council planning unit, and a contact unit for informal settlement work should be institutionalized.

- While it is understandable that donors want to exert pressure on processes that are seen not to work, the solution is not to suddenly pull out. Such behavior destroys trust amongst partners at many levels that takes ta long time to reconstruct.

- Evaluating slum upgrading projects and disseminating the results is essential for learning.

SOURCES

∗ Interviews with community leaders and members in Chinsapo and Mtandire, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, CCODE staff, Water Aid staff, Lilongwe City Council officials, The ISUP programme management unit, as well as participatory observation in the final stages of the project and review of project documents.

• Lilongwe City Council 2009: City Development Strategy - A shared Future 2010-2015, Lilongwe

• UCLG 2013: Mentoring Story: Lilongwe & Johannesburg experience 2008-2012
http://policytransfer.metropolis.org/system/images/468/original/jb_lilongwestory.pdf

This report was prepared by Hilde Refstie, Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU) and Wonderful Hunga at The Research Institute (TRI).