

Sanitation and Hygiene Research in Malawi, Blantyre City

1. Background

Urban sanitation has been one of the major challenges affecting people living within low income urban settlements, both in Africa and the world beyond. A lack of understanding on the main factors surrounding sanitation has resulted in limited impact of sanitation programmes. Community participation in identification of effective strategies has in most cases been overlooked in addition to a lack of community organization; overly sectoral and technical approaches; unaffordable technologies and payment systems; and poor community-government relations. It is from this background that with support from SHARE, Centre for Community Organization and Development (CCODE), and Malawi Homeless People's Federation (Federation) conducted an action research with the purpose of developing an evidence-based model for the realization of pro-poor citywide sanitation in Blantyre City. The following were specific objectives;

1. To develop a better understanding of the principal obstacles to city-wide sanitary improvement, and how they can be overcome.
2. To develop and test an approach to pro-poor city-wide sanitation strategies that can be widely adopted.

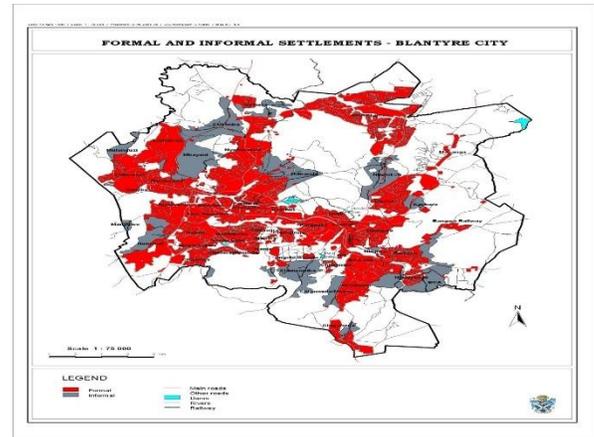
2. Implementation Strategy

2.1 Research Methodology

We commenced an action research with seven urban poor settlements using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies including 4037 household surveys, focus groups, a policy review and interviews with key informants across the seven settlements and the City Council.

2.2 Findings: The action research allowed a deeper understanding of sanitation challenges and possible interventions in support of the urban poor.

Figure 1: Map of Blantyre City



The study revealed very poor water and sanitation infrastructure, with widespread use of unimproved pit latrines and reliance on water kiosks. 69% of informal dwellers from the seven settlements sourced water from water kiosks, 24 boreholes, the majority of which were not operational, were identified across the seven settlements. The frequent breakdown of the existing water sources pushed households to use a range of unsanitary sources, such as contaminated streams and unprotected wells. The research also found that water connections in informal settlements were largely unaffordable to residents due to poor accessibility and high connection costs. There was also a lack of communication and coordination between the agencies, including government departments, community-based organizations and NGOs involved in water and sanitation in Blantyre.

On access to toilets, the study found that 26% of residents did not have access to their own toilet and relied on neighbours, public facilities or the bush. 91% of residents used unimproved pit latrines, and only 9% used improved facilities. The majority of residents experienced a collapse of pit latrines during the rainy season, and most could not afford sanitary draining of latrines, opting instead to dig new pits, on average, every two years. Lastly, 54% of households did not have hand-washing facilities.

Regarding waste management, Waste collection in the city was found to be erratic; up to 70% of solid waste was not collected. This has led to the widespread practice of illegal dumping and burning of waste.

A key finding regarding access to improved sanitation rests on the characteristics of land tenure in informal settlements. The study found that tenants, who make up 54% of households, are less likely to invest in improved water and sanitation facilities than property owners.

2.3 Programmes and Achievements

Following the research, interventions were introduced such as access to safe water through access to loan for tap water connections, as well as access to construction of household EcoSan toilets. This has allowed a total of 684 houses to access tap water. Currently, 248 houses have already paid for the service and are for waiting for connections while 821 houses have just submitted their applications and are waiting for assessment. Through interactions with the Water Board, households have been able to access water throughout the day, and allow women who carry the sole responsibility of fetching water to manage their time.

Construction of household EcoSan toilets, with a bathroom attached, a hand washing facility, and a soak-a-way-pit is also underway. To date, 637 household EcoSan toilets have been constructed.

2.4 Other Results following the Action Research;

Local residents are better informed and Federation leaders understand the situation in low-income informal settlements and are able to represent the needs to local authorities and other stakeholders.

A working relationship has been established between the Blantyre City Council, CCODE and the Federation to work together in the housing, water and sanitation sectors. The council also set up the Informal Settlement Unit (ISU) to work directly with the informal settlements in the city and in so doing demonstrated its commitment to scaling up action to address needs in these areas. There is now an agreement with the Blantyre City Council that staff will provide technical expertise for community-led

projects. Federation members were involved in the 2013 Council budgetary sessions.

Figure 2: Household EcoSan Toilet Being Constructed



3. Support Processes Undertaken

Community led processes (mobilization, profiling, enumeration and Mapping) were conducted to provide a situation analysis. A total of 41 informal settlements have been mobilized so far on water and sanitation. Out of these 30¹ were profiled; and 10 demarcated into clusters, numbered and enumerated. 4 settlements have been mapped and planned. This information has been used to develop Community Development Strategies which are used to guide development planning, as well as used to engage local authorities and other stakeholders. The City Council has allocated 2 sites for the construction of public toilets. 43 masons were trained (23 male and 20 female) in construction, as well as 9 female contractors.

The research process has helped promote a productive relationship between the communities and the local authority. Engagement of Ward Counsellor has also proved beneficial in sharing information and allowing the views of the community to be well captured and considered during planning.

¹ Nicholai, Manse, Balti, Chilomoni-Chibwana, Ndirande-Matope, Ntopwa, Ndirande-Makata-Somanje, Chigumula-Likotima, Machinjiri-Mapanda, Nkolokoti-Matenje, Chilomoni Sigerege, Chinupule, Chingomanje, Chopenga, Ndirande Makata, Mkwate, Mtambalika, Naitanda, Nkung'unda, Mpembukwa, Anderson, Ching'amba, Chinupule 1, Madulira, Kateleka, Manjombe, Mkwembe Taiwan, Mlenga, Ndirande Chakana, Ndirande Mlanga