



Covid 19 in urban Malawi

COVID 19 CHALLENGES and OPPORTUNITIES. Learnings for Planners.

Assoc.Prof. Mtafu Manda, PhD
Department of the Built Environment
Mzuzu University
www.mzuni.ac.mw

Outline

- Malawi background
- Covid-situation in Malawi
- Factors for spread of covid
- Challenges facilitating spread in Malawi
- Conclusion
- Learnings for planners

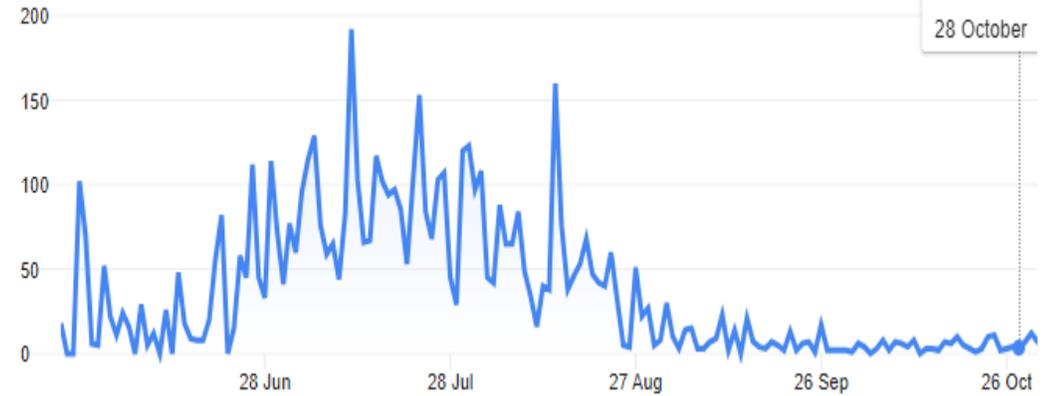
Malawi Information

- National Population 18 million
- GDP per capita is one of the lowest at \$390 making Malawi one of the poorest 10 nations
- Poverty is widespread with 70% living on < \$1.90/day
- Urban population <20% (about 3million). Growth rate is high at 4%
- There are 4 Cities all of them < 1.0 million population
- Over 60% of the urban population live in informal settlements



Covid Situation in Malawi

- Public Health Institute of Malawi report shows that between 26 May and 4 November, 2020, Malawi had:
 - Total cases 5933
 - highest cases were 192 reported on 12 July
 - Total recoveries 5323
 - Total deaths 184
- In main cities, the larger the city the higher the cases-implying higher levels of interactions
- The situation in rural areas is unclear due to lack of testing & reporting, otherwise 37 deaths would not tally with the large rural population



COVID STATUS IN MAJOR CITIES				
CITY	Total cases	Deaths	Recovered	Active
MZUZU	588	13	499	76
LILONGWE	1386	49	1157	180
BLANTYRE	2002	78	1858	66
ZOMBA	157	7	143	7
MALAWI	5933	184	5323	417

Factors for spread of Covid

- Many factors are known including:
 - high housing density-
 - Physical contacts-with infected people
 - Lack of observance of Social/physical distance etc
- However, in Malawi these are **compounded by local context:**
- Specifically, the reaction to covid-19 did not take the same route as that elsewhere where fear and panic were the order of things. Why?
- Malawi had its own challenges and these facilitated spread of covid: I cite **6 cases**

Challenges that facilitate spread of Covid-19

- **Democracy was paramount:**

- Covid-19 spread at the time when there were contested results of presidential and parliamentary elections. The courts had just annulled the elections prompting heavy campaigning for a rerun in June 2020.
- National political leaders actually dismissed covid-19
 - Vice president Chilima was quoted to have said: '**where there is covid people are dying, why are people not dying if there was covid in Malawi?**'
 - Former President, Joyce Banda addressed a rally: '**There is no covid in Malawi, God has spared us.**'
- Proposal for restrictions or lock down was construed as attempt to avoid polls
- New Govt directives of mandatory face masks of August has been ignored

- **Judiciary played its role**

- High Court judge ruled against deportation of Covid-10 positive Chinese arguing any such restrictions were unconstitutional and a violation of human rights

Challenges that facilitate spread of Covid-19

- **Forced evictions**

- Forced evictions of illegal street traders in Mzuzu into already densely congested markets at the very time the state was circulating messages about physical/social distancing

- **No fear of Covid-19 but hunger:**

- IPOR (2020) study reported that 82% of Malawians feared hunger more than covid-19
- Covid-19 would lead to food insecurity as majority of urban citizens must earn and spend, the fear of covid vanishes

[pic: Mzuzu Central market vendors without covid-19 protective measures]



Challenges that facilitate spread of Covid-19

- **Violent reactions to covid measures:**
- IPOR study showed 76% feared negative social sanctions, So:
 - Health personnel were chased or attacked
 - Health equipment set on fire at Football Association of Malawi facility in Mzuzu (**not in my backyard**)
 - Communities forced themselves to bury the dead
- **Inadequate understanding of gravity of covid:**
 - Malawi delayed to close its borders that would have prevented importing cases
 - Case of a positive Malawian who had travelled from Tanzania but escaped from hospital ward and travelled 300km to his village and openly interacted with others in bars and market.
 - 1000 migrants returned from RSA in April included 134 who tested positive. Many of these were among 400 returnees who escaped from a quarantine centre in Blantyre – hence the high number of cases in the city (Pic: deserted quarantine centre)



Conclusion

- Several high ranking officials in the public sector and senior politicians have died soon after the elections,
- **But, it is by mere luck** that Malawi still has low cases of covid-19:
- Many do not fear or indeed openly dismiss it
- It may be a matter of time before worst emerges
- As urban areas continue to attract migrants, many destined for informal settlements, spatial planning can make a contribution ahead of an emergency

Learnings for planners

- If density is the key challenge, and greatest threat is in the informal settlements, we know this is a result failure to deliver appropriate services related to safe sanitation;
 - developing rural and intermediate urban centres can mitigate the spread
- If hunger (poverty) is cause of lack of adherence to preventive measures, opportunities like urban farming alongside value addition can address food security, create jobs and incomes
- Governance will create an environment where citizens trust elected leaders without which public rejection of policies and bylaws will risk spread covid-19
 - Need to rethink evictions and forcing traders into congested markets
- Review of urban zoning practices that push the urban poor to live in dense [informal] settlements would support measures about social/physical distancing

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Thank you all