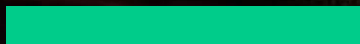




CITY PROFILING REPORT 2025

Lilongwe



Lilongwe

City Profiling Report 2025

The completion of this report benefited from the contributions of several individuals. Associate Professor Mtafu Manda externally reviewed the report. Katharine McKenzie conducted the internal editing, and Helen Grange undertook the sub-editing. Brandon Janse van Rensburg designed the layout and visual presentation. The report preparation also benefited from the guidance of Ian Palmer. The report was authored by Stuart Morrison and Owami Tshuma.

COVER PHOTO: City of Lilongwe in Malawiz.

Photo: <https://visitmalawi.mw>

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Lilongwe City Profile Report is part of the African Cities Profiling project, which aims to enhance our understanding of individual cities across the continent with a view to improving government effectiveness and empowering citizens to hold their governments to account. With Africa's rapid urbanisation, cities face significant challenges, including the growth of informal settlements and deficiencies in service delivery. Addressing these requires a comprehensive understanding of city dynamics and the factors influencing them.

The report supports local authorities by providing comparative data to facilitate learning from peers and incentivises improvements in underperforming areas. It also assists national governments in regulating and supporting local authorities. For citizens, the report offers accessible information on the developmental context of their cities, fostering transparency and engagement.

By profiling multiple cities using standardised measures, the project enables stakeholders – local authorities, national governments, and citizens – to compare cities, identify best practices, and foster mutual learning. This supports evidence-based decision-making and promotes improved governance to address urban challenges such as informal settlement growth.

This report for Lilongwe is one of 10 cities in the SADC region for which GGA is preparing city profiles, the others being: Bulawayo and Harare (Zimbabwe), Cape Town and Johannesburg (South Africa), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Luanda (Angola), Lusaka and Ndola (Zambia) and Maputo (Mozambique). The cities were selected as a blend of primary and secondary cities in the region. Where relevant, comparisons are drawn with these other cities. The report utilises available data to provide insights into key challenges and opportunities that shape the city's development.

2. URBAN GEOGRAPHY AND HUMAN SETTLEMENT

Lilongwe city is situated on a plain in the Central Region of Malawi and is named after the Lilongwe River that runs through it.¹ In the pre-colonial period, this area was part of the Maravi Kingdom and mainly consisted of small farms and fishing villages along the river.² In the 19th century, with migration and expanding farming activities, Lilongwe began to grow in prominence as a centre of trade for the surrounding farms. By the end of the century, it had become a colonial administrative post due to its position in central Malawi.

Tobacco was a key industry in the hinterlands of Lilongwe, stimulating its continued growth as a commercial hub during the 20th century.³ After almost a century of British colonial occupation, Malawi gained independence in 1964, and Lilongwe's position as the economic hub of the central region of Malawi was entrenched.⁴ This led to development and industrial projects across the city, and its growing importance as a commercial and administrative centre was affirmed when it was declared the official capital city in 1975.⁵ This further contributed to growth as more people moved to Lilongwe seeking greater opportunities and contributing to decentralised urbanisation in Malawi, aligned with the National Physical Development Plan, 1987.⁶

Today, the city is divided into four centres: Kanengo, Lumbadzi, Capitol Hill and Old Town.⁷ The aim was for each centre to have its own commercial, industrial and residential areas, to accommodate continual growth while addressing the colonial legacy of segregation.⁸ While this multi-nodal vision did not proceed as planned, the four centres have remained.

Each centre is further broken into 58 areas (Figure 1), with the Lilongwe River a defining feature of the city's

1 Strachan, K et al., "African Cities Research Consortium Lilongwe: City Scoping Study", *African Cities Research Consortium*. June 2021. https://www.african-cities.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ACRC_Lilongwe_City-Scoping-Study.pdf. (Accessed 04 March 2025).

2 Phiri, Kings M. "Pre-Colonial States of Central Malawi: Towards a Reconstruction of their History", *The Society of Malawi Journal* vol. 41, no. 1 (1988): 1-29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29778587>.

3 Strachan, K et al., "African Cities Research Consortium Lilongwe: City Scoping Study". *African Cities Research Consortium*. June 2021.

4 "Lilongwe," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 11 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lilongwe>. (Accessed 04 March 2025).

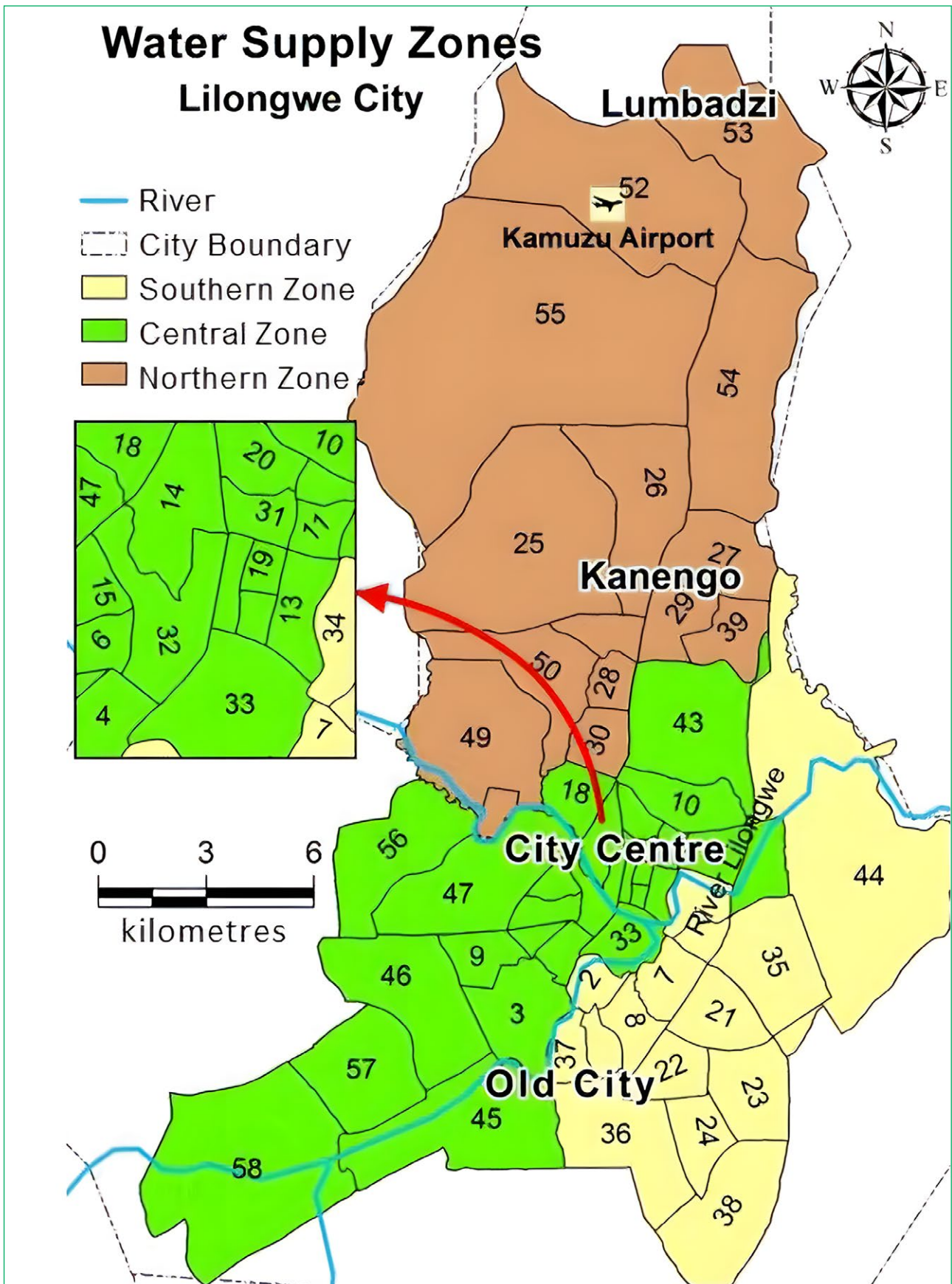
5 Brown, D, Manda, M and Mwalyambwile, T (2024). "Lilongwe: City report". ACRC Working Paper 2024-13. Manchester: African Cities Research Consortium, The University of Manchester.

6 Malawi Department of Town and Country Planning, "National Physical Development Plan: Policy document". (1987).

7 UN-HABITAT, "Malawi: Lilongwe Urban Profile." (Nairobi: 2011).

8 Lilongwe City Council, "Strategic Plan 2020/1 to 2024/5." (Lilongwe: 2021).

Figure 1: Lilongwe City with zones and areas¹¹



landscape.⁹ The early development that occurred around it reflected not natural geography, but racial planning policies that used the river as a divide. Currently, the total urban area of Lilongwe City is 136km² with a built-up area of 51km².¹⁰

While information on dwelling type is not readily available for Lilongwe, some studies¹² find that roughly 76% of the population lives in informal settlements. This highlights the challenges the city faces in addressing housing and infrastructure while experiencing rapid growth.

3. LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The structure of Lilongwe's local government is outlined in six documents, including:

- The constitution of the Republic of Malawi, 1997, chapter 14
- The Local Government Act, 1998
- The National Decentralisation Policy, 1998 and 2024 (amended version)
- Public Finance Management Act, 2022
- Malawi Implementation Plan 2030 (A key component of the plan focuses on local government)

Malawi's local government is underpinned by the principle of decentralisation as outlined in the Local Government Act¹³ and National Decentralisation Policy of 1998¹⁴ and 2024.¹⁵ Malawi's local government is a single-tier system, with each local authority being independent and overseen by national government.¹⁶

However, the process of decentralisation has been criticised, as many local authorities are not sufficiently resourced to

fully execute their mandate and because of national level interference in their operations, for example, by having members of parliament as voting members of local councils.¹⁷

Oversight of local government falls, at the highest level, to the Office of the President, which plays a key role in the facilitation of local government directives and priority areas.¹⁸ The National Assembly carries out oversight and legislative functions related to local government. Within the national government, the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture is responsible for coordination between the national government and local government authorities. The ministry's core mandate is to ensure that the developmental goals and vision of the national government are executed. It is also responsible for supporting local government to deliver services.

Currently, there are 36 local authorities (known as districts) across Malawi. They are categorised into four groups:¹⁹

- City councils: Four in Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba.
- District councils: 28, largely for rural areas.
- Municipal councils: Two towns that are identified as becoming urban centres.
- Town councils: Two with plans to expand this.

It is important to note that despite the different categories, all councils are on the same tier and function independently of each other. This means that Lilongwe City Council and Lilongwe District Council are two different councils responsible for different areas with no overlap.

3.1 FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Malawi's local government, as outlined in the Local Government Act of 1998²⁰, is responsible for a range of functions including:

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Tiwale, S, Rusca, M and Zwarteveen, M. "The Power of Pipes: Mapping Urban Water Inequities through the Material Properties of Networked Water Infrastructures - The Case of Lilongwe, Malawi- [Scientific Figure on ResearchGate](#)", *Water Alternatives* vol. 11 no. 2 (2018): 314-335.

12 Brown, D, Manda, M and Mwalyambwile, T (2024). "Lilongwe: City report". ACRC Working Paper 2024-13. Manchester: African Cities Research Consortium, The University of Manchester; UN-HABITAT, "Malawi: Lilongwe Urban Profile." (Nairobi: 2011), 12.

13 Malawi National Government, "Local Government Act, 1998," (1998).

14 Malawi National Government, "Malawi National Decentralisation Policy," (1998).

15 Malawi National Government, "Malawi National Decentralisation Policy," 2nd edition (2024).

16 Commonwealth Local Government Forum, "The Local Government System in Malawi," *Country Profile 2017-18* (2018): 118-123. https://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country_profiles/Malawi.pdf.

17 Nelson Jagero & Hardson H. Kwandayi & Annie Longwe, "Challenges of Decentralization in Malawi," *International Journal of Management Sciences, Research Academy of Social Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 7 (2014): 315-322.; Strachan, K *et al.*, "African Cities Research Consortium Lilongwe: City Scoping Study", *African Cities Research Consortium*. June 2021.

18 O'Neil, T and Cammack, D, "Fragmented governance and local service delivery in Malawi," ODI Report (May 2014). <https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/8943.pdf>.

19 Ibid.

20 Malawi National Government, "Local Government Act, 1998."

- Education services
- Health services
- Water and sanitation services
- Environmental services
- Social welfare
- Community and youth development
- Roads and street services, including management of urban roads
- Emergency services, including ambulance and firefighting services
- Maintenance and development of public amenities, including sports stadiums, local gardens and nature reserves
- Energy services, including coordinating the provision of electricity and alternative energy
- Land management
- Tourism

However, the extent to which local government actually undertakes these functions is limited. In the case of Lilongwe, the city is ‘de jure’ responsible for functions such as water supply, education and healthcare.²¹ In practice (de facto), these are managed by the central government, parastatals and non-state actors.

The limited extent of decentralisation relates partly to historical inertia, with the tradition being that services were run by central government. Following the establishment of democratic local government in the late 1990s, local authorities have remained under-resourced. Combined with strong patronage networks and overly politicised state-owned entities, this has limited the ability of Lilongwe City Council (LCC) to effectively implement its mandate.²²

3.2 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Responsibility for service provision in Lilongwe is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Urban service provision in Lilongwe

FUNCTION	INSTITUTION PROVIDING	NOTES
Water supply	Lilongwe Water Board	This parastatal is owned by the national government but works with the Lilongwe City Council to provide water
Sanitation	Lilongwe Water Board	
Electricity distribution	Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi (ESCOM)	Electricity distribution is supplied and distributed through the national electricity parastatal
Roads – distributor and collector	Roads Authority Malawi	
Roads – local (streets)	Roads Authority Malawi with some support from the Lilongwe City Council	In recent years the LCC has received roads grants to play a larger role in servicing roads. However limited funding and political influence by the Roads Authority are still major challenges ²³
Solid waste management	Lilongwe City Council, private companies and NGOs	The city council collects roughly a fourth of all the solid waste, the rest is collected by private companies, NGOs and community initiatives (see section 5.3)
Community services including sporting facilities, community halls, and parks	Lilongwe City Council	
Emergency and security services (fire, police etc)	National government, private companies with some coordination with Lilongwe city council.	The LLC is responsible for providing emergency services such as fire safety, however evidence suggests they do not provide or manage these services ²⁴
Primary health care	Central government responsibility	
Education	Central government responsibility	

21 Strachan, K et al., “African Cities Research Consortium Lilongwe: City Scoping Study”, *African Cities Research Consortium*. June 2021.

22 Brown, D, Manda, M and Mwalyambwile, T (2024). “Lilongwe: City report”. ACRC Working Paper 2024-13. Manchester: African Cities Research Consortium, The University of Manchester.

23 Strachan, K et al., “African Cities Research Consortium Lilongwe: City Scoping Study”.

24 Lilongwe City Council, “Services: Lilongwe City Council Services,” <https://lcc.mw/services/> (Accessed 09 Jul 2025). Lilongwe City Council, “Services: Lilongwe City Council Services,” <https://lcc.mw/services/> (Accessed 09 Jul 2025).

4. DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

4.1 POPULATION

The 2018 Malawi census²⁵ put the city population at around 0.99 million with an annual population growth rate of 4.3%.²⁶ Based on this, the 2025 population is estimated at 1.2 million people.

Between 1966 and 2018,²⁷ the population of Lilongwe increased at a rate of 7.9% per annum (Table 2).

Table 2: Population of Lilongwe, 1966-2025²⁸

YEAR	POPULATION
1966	19,000
1977	99,000
1987	223,000
1998	440,000
2008	669,000
2018	989,000
2025	1,294,000 ²⁹

Considering age distribution, Lilongwe has a young population. According to the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC), 48% of the city is under the age of 18.³⁰

Households

The 2018 census gives the number of households in Lilongwe as 230,000.³¹ This puts the number of households in 2024 at roughly 242,000 with an average household size of 5.35.³² Compared to other cities in the GGA sample of SADC cities, Lilongwe's average household size is

just above average. Luanda has the largest (6.7) and Johannesburg the smallest (2.8).

Population density

According to Global Human Settlement Layer (GHSL) spatial data³³, the population density of the city is 7,491 people per square kilometre. This is at the low end of population densities across the GGA sample of ten SADC cities, alongside Bulawayo.

In terms of Malawi's Local Government Act, the city of Lilongwe is established as its own district. It is surrounded by the Lilongwe District, with the city making up 37% of the Lilongwe District's population.³⁴

4.2 POVERTY

The International Wealth Index (IWI) measures poverty based on the position of households regarding assets, access to services and housing. Its score ranks from 0 to 100, with a higher score for wealthier households. The average value for Lilongwe in 2023 was 28.7,³⁵ placing it as the poorest of the ten SADC cities in the GGA sample. Lusaka follows with 55.1, while at the top end, Cape Town has an IWI score of 89.4.³⁶

An alternate measure of poverty is the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which estimates the incidence of poverty in Lilongwe city at 21.2, slightly higher than the other three cities in Malawi (Blantyre, Zomba and Mzuzu) but much lower than rural districts in Malawi.³⁷

Income poverty is also an important indicator, included in the Sustainable Development Goals as SDG indicator 1.1.1.³⁸ and measured as the proportion of people earning below \$2.15 per day (at 2021 prices). However, recent data on this indicator for Lilongwe could not be located, hence

25 National Statistical Office, "2018 Malawi Population & Housing Census: Preliminary Report." (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 2019).

26 The Lilongwe City Council puts this figure at 4.3% while World Population Review estimates population growth rate at 4.5%.

27 National Statistical Office, "2018 Malawi Population & Housing Census: Main Report." (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 2019).

28 Source for 1966-2018 figures: Malawi National Statistical Office, 2018.

29 Author's own calculations based on 2018 census figures.

30 Strachan, K et al., "African Cities Research Consortium Lilongwe: City Scoping Study", *African Cities Research Consortium*. June 2021.

31 National Statistical Office, "2018 Malawi Population & Housing Census: Preliminary Report."

32 Author's own calculations based on 2018 census figures.

33 European Commission, et al., "Stats in the City - the GHSL Urban Centre Database 2025." (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024). <https://human-settlement.emergency.copernicus.eu/ucdb2024visual.php>.

34 Author's calculations based on 2018 figures.

35 Global Data Lab, "International Wealth Index (IWI)," version1.1 (2023); Jeroen Smits and Roel Steendijk, "The International Wealth Index (IWI)," *Social Indicators Research* 122. (2015): 65-85.; Jeroen Smits, "GDL Area Database: Sub-national development indicators for research and policy-making," GDL Working paper. (2016): 16-10.

36 Ibid.

37 Malawi National Statistical Office in collaboration with UNDP. 2022. "The Second Malawi Multidimensional Poverty Index Report - November 2022".

38 Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The 17 Goals," *United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, n.d., <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (Accessed 06 March 2025).

data from the National Statistics Office of Malawi³⁹, which employs a different poverty measure, was used. It estimates the percentage of the population living in poverty⁴⁰ in Lilongwe city as 15.6%⁴¹, which is the highest across the four main cities in Malawi.

4.3 QUALITY OF LIFE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Human Development Index (HDI) compiled by the UNDP is a summary measure that combines indicators of life expectancy, education and income to provide a broad picture of human development.⁴²

The Global Data Lab's sub-national level HDI (SHDI) provides an index for Lilongwe of 0.52.⁴³ Compared to the other SADC cities, Lilongwe has the lowest SHDI score by around 0.1.

In terms of inequality, Lilongwe is on the lower end, with a Gini coefficient of 0.32 indicating a relatively egalitarian society. This is the lowest Gini coefficient across the SADC city sample, with Harare the next lowest with a Gini coefficient of 0.38 and Johannesburg and Luanda having the highest coefficients at 0.62 and 0.64, respectively.⁴⁴

4.4 EDUCATION

Despite the decentralisation policy, primary and secondary education functions and responsibilities largely lie with central government. On paper, primary education⁴⁵ is the responsibility of district and city local governments, but in practice, education is managed by the national Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Msiska, Chiweza and Chirwa⁴⁶ argue that within the education sector, decentralisation has varied from district to district. These functions are managed by Education District Offices, which

work alongside local government. While no literature dealing with decentralisation in Lilongwe could be found, based on the city budget, it is evident that Lilongwe city has minimal involvement with education activities, possibly associated with building maintenance.

Regarding education outputs, the Global Data Lab (GDL) calculates that the mean years of education for adults aged 20 and above in Lilongwe is 6.2 years.⁴⁷ In relation to other SADC cities in the GGA sample, Lilongwe is quite far behind, with the city average at 9.6 years and Luanda, the next lowest, at 8.3 years, while Johannesburg is the highest at 12.8 years.

Schools

In 2023, Lilongwe had 412 primary schools and 127 secondary schools.⁴⁸ Of the 539 primary and secondary schools, only 115 are public, with the balance private and owned by individuals or religious organisations. This is a striking indication of the limited role played by the state in education.

4.5 HEALTH

Malawi's healthcare system is made up of primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare. Primary healthcare facilities include health posts, under-five clinics, health centres and community hospitals. Secondary healthcare refers to district hospitals and Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM) hospitals. Tertiary healthcare refers to specialised hospitals. While policy provides for healthcare to be decentralised to district level⁴⁹, in practice District Health Directorates have limited control and authority over healthcare. As the World Bank notes, central government still plays a key role in managing much of the healthcare system.⁵⁰

39 National Statistics Office, *Malawi Statistical Yearbook 2023* (2024).

40 The poverty line in Malawi was K165 879 per person per year which at an exchange rate of 1,733 Kwacha to the Dollar is \$95 per annum (\$0.26 per day).

41 National Statistics Office, *Malawi Statistical Yearbook 2023* (2024).

42 <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>.

43 Global Data Lab, "Subnational HDI Database," version 7.0; Jeroen Smits and Iñaki Permyer, "The Subnational Human Development Database," *Science Data* 6 (2019).

44 Ibid.

45 This includes: Nursery and kindergarten, Primary schools and Distance Education Centres.

46 Msiska, Y, Chiweza, AL and Chirwa, M "Decentralisation and Education Service Delivery in Malawi," *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives* vol 3 no. 11 (2018): 15-25. <https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC-11d9bd7628#page=1.00&gsr=0>.

47 Global Data Lab, "Subnational HDI Database," version 7.0; Jeroen Smits and Iñaki Permyer, "The Subnational Human Development Database," *Science Data* 6 (2019).

48 National Statistical Office, "Statistical Yearbook 2023," (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 2024).

49 Malawi Government, "Malawi Decentralisation Policy," (1998): <https://npc.mw/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Decentralization-policy.pdf>.

50 World Bank Health, Nutrition & Population, "Public Financial Management in the Health Sector in Malawi: Opportunities to Strengthen Service Delivery at the Local Level," *Policy Brief (Washington: World Bank Group, 2021)*. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/614501624432539607/pdf/Public-Financial-Management-in-the-Health-Sector-in-Malawi-Opportunities-to-Strengthen-Service-Delivery-at-the-Local-Level.pdf>.

The Lilongwe City Council does not provide health care services⁵¹, with the Health Directorate only responsible for environmental health, including pest control, health education and health inspections.

Doctors

The number of doctors per 10,000 people is a measure of the healthcare service level. The Malawi Ministry of Health and Population estimated that in 2018/2019, there were 6.7 doctors per 10,000 people, significantly under the goal of 23 healthcare workers per 10,000 people.⁵²

Health outcomes

Using infant mortality as an indicator, the rate for Lilongwe was 49.4 per 1000 infants in 2020. This is slightly higher than the average for the SADC cities in the GGA sample of 48.9, with the highest rates in Dar es Salaam (73.5) and Maputo (60.5).⁵³

Lilongwe's under-five mortality rate per 1000 children was 59.8 in 2020, also slightly above the average under-five mortality rate of the 10 SADC cities in the GGA sample (53.4), with Dar es Salaam (94.2) having the highest rate.⁵⁴

Lilongwe's life expectancy in 2017 was 52 years. This is below the SADC city average of 58.7. Compared to other cities, life expectancy in Lilongwe is low and is only higher than Harare (44 years). In contrast, Johannesburg and Maputo have a life expectancy of 67 and 64 years, respectively.

5. ECONOMY

Historically, Lilongwe's economy was largely dependent on the agricultural sector, specifically tobacco which was grown in the rural areas surrounding the city.⁵⁵ However, with the establishment of Lilongwe as the capital city in 1975, the economy expanded and diversified with increased tertiary sectors (notably government and commercial activity).

There is limited available information on the breakdown of Lilongwe's economy by sector. What is known is that the tertiary sector makes up the largest section of the economy at roughly 78%. This includes public administration, retail and wholesale, financial services and tourism. Lilongwe has a relatively low level of secondary economic activity (light industry, transport and construction) at 9%. For a city, it retains a large proportion of primary activity (13%), which is likely to be mainly agriculture.⁵⁶

GDP per capita

Currently, Lilongwe has a GDP per capita of 1,100 USD.⁵⁷ This is the lowest GDP per capita of the ten SADC cities in the GGA sample. The average across the cities is 5,500 USD, with Maputo having the next lowest GDP per capita of 2,100 USD,⁵⁸ while Johannesburg has the highest (16,400 USD).⁵⁹

Employment

The most recent figures for people employed are from the 2018 Population and Housing Census which puts the number of economically active people in 2018 at 422,000 out of a population of 602,000.⁶⁰ Considering

51 Naluso, S & Kanyangale, M, "Decentralisation of the Health System Derailed by Organisational Inertia in Machinga, Malawi," *International Journal of Health Policy and Management* vol 13, no. 1. (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2024): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.7956>.

52 Malawi Ministry of Health and Population, "Harmonised Health Facility Assessment (HHFA) 2018/2019 Report" (2019). <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/417871611550272923/pdf/Main-Report.pdf>.

53 Global Data Lab, "Health indicators of the Global Data Lab," version 1.0 (2020). <https://globaldatalab.org/health/>; Jeroen Smits, "GDL Area Database: Sub-national development indicators for research and policy-making"

54 Ibid.

55 UN Habitat, "Malawi: Lilongwe Urban Profile," (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2011). <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Malawi%20Lilongwe%20Urban%20Profile.pdf>.

56 Strachan, K et al., "African Cities Research Consortium Lilongwe: City Scoping Study", *African Cities Research Consortium*. June 2021.

57 Author's own calculations based on national GDP.

58 European Commission, et al., "Stats in the City - the GHSL Urban Centre Database 2025."

59 Neffke, F; Li, Y; White, A; Leonard, B; Tuzcu, N; Soeltz-Szoets, W.K.; Barrios, D.; Morales Arilla, JR, Hausmann, R. *Metroverse*, 2021: <https://metroverse.hks.harvard.edu/city/3673/economic-composition>.

60 National Statistical Office, "2018 Malawi Population and Housing Census Main Report," (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 2019). <https://malawi.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/2018%20Malawi%20Population%20and%20Housing%20Census%20Main%20Report%20%281%29.pdf>.

the economically active population, there is limited information on the percentage unemployed with the most recent data available from the National Statistics Office for 2018 indicating a figure of 16% unemployment.⁶¹

6. ACCESS TO SERVICES

6.1 WATER SUPPLY

“At national level, the Ministry of Water and Sanitation, comprising three technical departments and a corporate office, provides policy direction, coordination, and management in water, sanitation, and hygiene matters. It also collaborates with other ministries at national level such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Local Government, Youth and Culture.”⁶²

Water supply to the City of Lilongwe is primarily the responsibility of the Lilongwe Water Board (LWB), a state-owned entity which, according to their website, serves the city of Lilongwe and surrounding areas. However, their annual report for 2020-21 states they served 931,000 people of an estimated population of 1,106,000 (84%). No data could be located on the number of customers served outside Lilongwe city boundary, but in seeking business outside the city boundary, the LWB overlaps with the Central Region Water Board, leading to conflict between the two state organisations.⁶³

LWB has been expanding its customer base rapidly. In 2025, they had 144,000 metered connections and 1,395 communal kiosks.⁶⁴ This can be compared to undated information on their website, providing a figure of 83,000 connections.

Based on national statistics for 2018, access to water supply in Lilongwe was split as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Access to water supply, 2018⁶⁵

LEVEL OF SERVICE	ACCESS (%)
Water piped into dwelling	14%
Water piped onto plot/yard	29%
Communal standpipe	27%
Point sources, including wells, boreholes & springs	21%

Total piped water access in 2018 of 79% can be related to the figure of adequate access to water reported by LWB of 92% in 2025.⁶⁶ This improvement is consistent with LWB increasing connections under the World Bank-funded Lilongwe Water and Sanitation Project.⁶⁷

Water production by LWB increased from about 30 million m³ in 2010/11 to 35 million m³ in 2020/21, while water sales remained at about 16 million m³. This was followed by a two-year slump in production and sales during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁸

Non-revenue water (NRW) is a key indicator of water utility performance, with NRW for LWB being 42% in 2020/21 according to their annual report, an increase from 39% in 2019/20. This is well above the benchmark of 30% for African water utilities, but close to the average of 38% for 15 utilities reported in a recent study by the African Development Bank.⁶⁹ Statistics reported by the international utilities benchmarking network, IBNET, confirm that LWB is a middle- to low-performing utility.⁷⁰ But it remains financially sustainable with a substantial profit of 25% in 2024.⁷¹

‘Communal standpipes’ referred to in national statistics (Table 3) are in fact communal water supply points run as

61 Malawi National Statistics Office, 2023, “Malawi Statistical Yearbook”.

62 Phyllis George Mkwelalamba and Joel Kabika. 2024. ‘SFD Report Lilongwe, Malawi, 2024’.

63 Prof. Mtafu Manda, University of Mzuzu. Personal communication. 2025.

64 Lilongwe Water Board. 2025. “Madzi Newsletter January-March 2025”.

65 Govt of Malawi Statistical Yearbook 2023.

66 Lilongwe Water Board. 2025. “Madzi Newsletter January-March 2025”.

67 World Bank. 2025. “Lilongwe Water and Sanitation Project- Implementation and results report. June 2025”. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099060825190041795/pdf/P163794-03113386-eeel-4c84-a033-1f709435dae3.pdf>.

68 Lilongwe Water Board. “Annual report 2020-21” dated December 2021 but including volume statistics to 2022-23.

69 Mtchera Chirwa, Michel N’Guessan, Benson Nkhoma, 2024. “African Water Utilities Performance Improvement Pathways Report; Report of the Water Development and Sanitation Department, African Development Bank Group”, Abidjan, Cote D’Ivoire.

70 <https://newibnet.org/utility-dashboard>.

71 Madzi newsletter reported a profit of MWK 9.48 billion on a turnover of MWK 37.95 billion in 2024.

kiosks where water is sold, typically in 20-litre containers. In the mid-2000s, a system was introduced where the kiosks are operated by water user associations⁷², which buy bulk water from LWB and resell it to consumers, with the associations employing an individual to operate each kiosk. There is continued concern from communities over the price of water.⁷³ This may have influenced the closing of kiosks by LWB, where they considered that water user associations were misusing funds.⁷⁴ There has also been some experimentation with automated water kiosks.⁷⁵

6.2 SANITATION SERVICES

Access to sanitation in Lilongwe is reported in national statistics as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Access to sanitation, 2018⁷⁶

LEVEL OF SERVICE	ACCESS (%)
Sewered	15%
VIP (ventilated pit latrine)	2%
Pit with concrete slab	40%
Pit with earth or sand slab	28%
Pit with no slab	11%
Other	2%
None (bush or field)	1%
	100%

If the first three service levels are considered 'adequate' in terms of WHO/JMP definitions,⁷⁷ then 57% of households had adequate sanitation in 2018. This is likely to have improved subsequently.

However, service levels in Table 4 do not align with other reports. The SFD report for Lilongwe, published by researchers at the University of Zambia, indicates that 45%

of households use pit latrines (dry pits) and 39% use 'flush toilets connected to septic tanks'⁷⁸, a total of 84%, which roughly correlates with the 83% of households with on-site sanitation given in Table 4. Here, 'septic tanks' are assumed to relate to both soak pits with a pour-flush arrangement and those with sewer connections to the home, with effluent from the pit draining into the surrounding ground. Both soak pits and pit latrines require desludging at intervals varying from one to 15 years.

Of the 84% of households using on-site sanitation, faecal sludge is managed as follows:

Safely managed:

- 55% do not have their pits emptied but replace them when they are full, with full pits properly closed off.
- 2% have their pits emptied with faecal sludge properly treated.

Unsafely managed:

- 9% have pits emptied, but with the faecal sludge not delivered to treatment or inadequately treated.
- 18% do not have pits emptied and abandon them without properly closing the abandoned pits.⁷⁹

Pit emptying services are provided by private operators who handle a large portion of faecal sludge removed from pits in the city. They include formal operators (who employ mechanical equipment such as vacuum trucks or cesspool tankers), and informal operators (who use crude manual techniques such as gulpers, barrels, drums and buckets).⁸⁰

The sewerage sanitation system is operated by Lilongwe Water Board (LWB), which took over this responsibility from the Lilongwe City Council toward the end of the 2010-20 decade.⁸¹ Three separate sewer networks drain to three wastewater treatment works, which are pond-based systems.⁸² LWB report 10,800 sewer connections

72 Water Aid. c2007. "Managing communal water kiosks in Malawi: Experiences in water supply management in poor urban settlements in Lilongwe".

73 Pihlak *et al.* 2019. "Everyday practices in the production of uneven water pricing regimes in Lilongwe, Malawi". Environment and Planning, Politics and Space.

74 Brown, D, Manda, M and Mwalyambwile, T (2024). "Lilongwe: City report". ACRC Working Paper 2024-13. Manchester: African Cities Research Consortium, The University of Manchester.

75 World Bank. 2020. 'Automated Water Kiosks Provide Continuous Water for Malawians During COVID-19'.

76 Govt of Malawi Statistical Yearbook 2023.

77 WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Group (JMP) considers both the existence of a proper slab over the pit with faecal sludge in or from pits or tanks properly managed for a service level to be 'adequate'.

78 Phyllis George Mkwelalamba and Joel Kabika. 2024. "SFD Report Lilongwe, Malawi, 2024".

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Lilongwe Water Board. 'Strategic plan 2020-2025'.

82 SFD report.

in 2025.⁸³ According to the SFD report, of the 15% of households provided with sewered sanitation, only 10% are satisfactorily treated, with the balance attributed to sewer overflows and poor treatment performance.

Sanitation is being improved partly with support from the World Bank under the Lilongwe Water and Sanitation Project, but current data (post-2020) on improved sanitation could not be located.

Overall, sanitation in Lilongwe is poor, and a major cause of cholera. The African Cities Research Consortium reports that Malawi recently faced “the worst cholera outbreak in two decades”. Between March 2022 and February 2023, 43,000 cases and 1,384 deaths were recorded, the majority from Lilongwe.

6.3 SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

The African Cities Research Consortium, using secondary sources from 2019 and 2021, reports that “Lilongwe generates an estimated 500 metric tons of solid waste per day, but less than one-third is collected. A lack of adequate resources, among other constraints, makes it difficult for Lilongwe City Council (LCC) to collect all the city’s waste. As a result, LCC only provides waste collection in a few formal settlements and industrial areas, leaving out the informal, unplanned and peri-urban areas that are home to 75% of the city’s population. Here, solid waste management is the responsibility of individual households, who dispose of their waste irregularly. Much is dumped along roadsides or in open spaces, riverbanks or drains around where people live, exposing residents to an unhealthy environment of polluted air and water sources”.⁸⁴ Poor solid waste management is confirmed by Kalisha and Munthali who state: “The solid waste collection rate in Lilongwe is currently low with 70% of waste lying unmanaged and disposed of in undesignated places and thus increasing health risks”.⁸⁵

Lilongwe City Council (LCC) provides a solid waste collection service for part of the city but has only four refuse vehicles. LCC also manages the sole landfill site at Area 38, 30-40 km from most areas, posing operational challenges.⁸⁶ A report reviewing progress with LCC’s strategic plan indicates that for 2020/21⁸⁷, about 40% of waste was collected by LCC and 60% by private firms.⁸⁸ Community-based initiatives to improve solid waste management in informal settlements include “Waste for Wealth”⁸⁹ and ARISE.⁹⁰ These have a strong emphasis on recycling and rely on transfer stations for non-recycled waste.

6.4 ELECTRICITY AND ENERGY

In 2015, the electricity sector in Malawi was restructured into two arms: The Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi, Ltd. (ESCOM), which manages the transmission and supply of electricity through the national grid, and the Electricity Generation Company (EGENCO). Malawi relies on hydroelectric power for 95% of its electricity, generated from the country’s four hydropower plants.

The balance is met about equally by diesel generators and solar. Insufficient generation capacity is exacerbated by frequent infrastructure and equipment breakdowns and fluctuating river levels.⁹¹

In 2022, ESCOM and off-grid providers served approximately 750,000 households, including 550,000 grid-served consumers and 200,000 off-grid consumers nationally.⁹² In Lilongwe city, the number of ESCOM connections in 2021 was 101,800. ESCOM has increased grid connections at a rate of about 10% per annum.

Providing for growth in households in Lilongwe and allowing for non-residential connections, it is estimated that 52% of residential properties can access grid electricity in 2025. An additional 3% using solar mini-grids and home systems gives a figure of 55% for access to electricity.⁹³

83 Lilongwe Water Board. 2025. “Madzi Newsletter January-March 2025”.

84 Luka, Z (2024). “Community participation and sustainable waste management in informal settlements: the waste for wealth initiative, Lilongwe”. ACRC Urban Reform Database case study. Manchester: African Cities Research Consortium, The University of Manchester.

85 Stephen Kalisha and Kondwani Mhntali. 2024. ‘Multi-Factor GIS Modeling for Solid Waste Dumpsite Selection in Lilongwe, Malawi’. Sustainability January 2024.

86 Ibid.

87 Lilongwe City Council: “Annual Progress Report” July 2020 to June 2021.

88 This excludes a figure for the special clean-up operation by LCC in 2020/21 using earth-moving equipment.

89 Luka, Z (2024).

90 Arise Consortium, 2024 “Increasing Access to Waste Management Services in Informal Settlements in Lilongwe City, Malawi”.

91 EPPSA. 2022. State of Knowledge - Energy Access in Malawi.

92 Government of Malawi and Global Energy Alliance. 2022. “Malawi Integrated Energy Plan (IEP) - Electrification”.

93 Ibid.

Although connections by ESCOM are increasing⁹⁴, the electricity supply sector in Malawi underperforms. Data from the UPBEAT electricity utilities database indicates that ESCOM had a negative current ratio (revenue divided by operating costs) from 2018 to 2022, and system losses were at 20%.⁹⁵ This is reflected in the ESCOM Integrated Strategic Plan⁹⁶, which noted in 2022, “ESCOM was not able to adequately deliver on its operational mandate, resulting in its failure to implement repairs and maintenance. This situation has reduced the availability, reliability and performance (efficiency, effectiveness and safety) of the network; ESCOM was facing insolvency, where it could not meet its short and long-term debt repayment obligations.” This required the Government of Malawi to provide funding to keep the utility functioning.

Household energy use

Looking at household energy use broadly, the source of energy for cooking is shown in Table 5.⁹⁷

Table 5: Household energy use for cooking and heating, 2018⁹⁸

ENERGY SOURCE	% SPLIT
Electricity	10.7%
Charcoal	74.1%
Firewood	13.2%
Other, incl solar, paraffin, gas and straw	2.0%
	100%

Charcoal is the dominant fuel used for cooking, as cleaner fuels such as electricity, gas and paraffin are too expensive for poor households. But charcoal use is associated with deforestation, particularly in Malawi’s Dzalanyama Forest

reserve, an important catchment for urban and agricultural water supplies. More than 60% of charcoal consumed in Lilongwe, is from illegal charcoal production and firewood collection in Dzalanyama, the main cause of deforestation in the reserve.⁹⁹

6.5 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Lilongwe’s information and communications technology sector is small.¹⁰⁰ The Ministry of Information and Digitalisation was established to drive ICT initiatives across the country and is responsible for coordinating the implementation of ICT policies, including the Malawi digital economy strategy (2021-2026) and the Malawi digital government strategy.¹⁰¹

Despite policy steps to create ICT infrastructure and systems, there remain many implementation gaps, largely due to a lack of funding. This is evident in the Local Online Service Index (LOSI)¹⁰², developed by the United Nations to measure the development of e-government systems at a local level. In 2024, Lilongwe scored 0.18 out of 1 and ranked 138 out of 194 cities.¹⁰³ This is the lowest of the 10 SADC cities in the GGA sample, the next being Lusaka with 0.21. Johannesburg is the highest with 0.60 (59th of the 194 cities).

ICT connectivity

Lilongwe also has the lowest percentage of people with access to various ICT technologies. The Global Data Lab (GDL) shows that people with access to the internet in 2020 was 15%, with the 10 city SADC average being 42%.¹⁰⁴ A stark digital divide exists across southern Africa: Cape Town has close to 90% access, while Harare and Maputo have between 40% and 50%.¹⁰⁵

94 Figure from 2010-2017 from Govt of Malawi Statistical Yearbook 2023.

95 <https://utilityperformance.energydata.info/utilities/ESCOM>.

96 ESCOM. 2023. “ESCOM ISP-27: Integrated Strategic Plan for 2023-2027”.

97 It can be assumed that electricity is the dominant source of energy for lighting.

98 Govt of Malawi Statistical Yearbook 2023.

99 Charles Nkoka, Reported by AUDA/NEPAD. 2022 “Malawian Trust to conserve Lilongwe city’s watershed in line with AFR100”.

100 IST Africa. “Current ICT initiatives and projects – Malawi,” (IST Africa, 2017). <http://www.ist-africa.org/home/default.asp?page=doc-by-id&docid=6995#:~:text=ICT%20Initiatives%20are%20currently%20ongoing,and%20the%20Land%20Information%20System>. (Accessed 23 Jul 2025).

101 Frank Makoza, “Analyzing policy change of Malawi ICT and Digitalization policy: Policy Assemblage Perspective,” *Working Paper ICTD*, No. 08/23. (Hamburg: 2023).

102 UN City Data, “e-government knowledgebase,” (2024). <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Data/City/dataYear/2024/dataCity/47>. (Accessed 22 Jul 2025).

103 LOSI scores range from 0 to 1 with 1 having fully developed e-government systems and 0 being none. The index includes the following indicators: institutional framework, content provision, services provision, participation and engagement, e-government literacy, and technology.

104 Global Data Lab, “International Wealth Index (IWI);” Jeroen Smits and Roel Steendijk, “The International Wealth Index (IWI);” Jeroen Smits, “GDL Area Database: Sub-national development indicators for research and policy-making.”

105 Ibid.

Only 54% of Lilongwe’s population has access to a phone, and 6% have access to a computer. In comparison, the SADC city sample average is 91% and 26% respectively.

Access to information

Access to the internet does not mean unhindered access to content on the internet. Freedom House measures the level of internet freedom, and compared to the SADC city sample, Lilongwe does relatively well, coming third after Johannesburg and Cape Town.¹⁰⁶ Despite this, Freedom House notes that significant challenges to internet access in Malawi include high costs and limited infrastructure.

6.6 ROADS

Nationally, roads fall under the Ministry of Transport and Public Works (MTPW), which includes a Policy and Planning Unit and a Roads Department, which, between them, provide road sector planning, regulation and oversight. The Malawi Roads Authority (RA) and Road Fund Administration (RFA), which report to the MTPW and the Ministry of Finance (MOF), respectively, are quasi-government entities responsible for ensuring that public roads are constructed and maintained using publicly raised and administered funds. These are sourced from fuel levies, a new toll programme and road-user charges, directed to the Malawi Road Fund.¹⁰⁷

Local authorities are responsible for the provision and maintenance of transport infrastructure within their jurisdiction, while the RA is required to coordinate with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) to prepare and implement an Annual National Roads Programme through service level agreements with district and city authorities. Due to technical and fiduciary capacity challenges, roads under the jurisdiction of local authorities are de facto maintained and rehabilitated by the RA.¹⁰⁸ That said, Lilongwe receives funds for road rehabilitation (through the Road Fund Administration), and there are moves to devolve responsibility to cities.¹⁰⁹ The extent of roads in Lilongwe is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Road lengths for Lilongwe city¹¹⁰

ROAD CATEGORY	KM	SPLIT
Trunk	96	2.3%
Primary	12	0.3%
Secondary	60	1.4%
Tertiary	316	7.6%
Residential & service	2,260	54.1%
Paths, tracks etc	935	22.4%
Unclassified	501	12.0%
Total	4,180	100.0%

The total road length per capita is 3.48 km, close to the average for the ten SADC cities in the GGA sample. Open Street Map data¹¹¹ shows 417 km of roads are paved, 10% of total roads, which is close to the average for the eight SADC sample cities, excluding Johannesburg and Cape Town, with much higher percentages of paved roads (63% and 59% respectively).

Trunk, primary, secondary and tertiary roads (11.6% of roads in Lilongwe City) are the responsibility of the Roads Authority (RA), with the remainder the responsibility of the local authority. However, as indicated, the RA plays a major role in maintaining and rehabilitating local authority roads. It is unlikely this applies to the network of unpaved roads in the city.

Paved roads, which make up the national road network in Malawi, are generally in good/fair condition (90%), but in urban areas, only 34% of paved roads are in good/fair condition.¹¹² No data was located for Lilongwe specifically, but 34% is used as indicative. Regarding the 90% of roads in Lilongwe which are unpaved (including unproclaimed roads and tracks), there is no data on road condition, but they are likely to be in poor condition generally.

¹⁰⁶ Freedom House, “Freedom on the Net 2023: Malawi.” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/malawi/freedom-net/2023>. (Accessed 22 Jul 2025).

¹⁰⁷ World Bank. 2023. ‘Malawi Transport Infrastructure Sector Assessment Program (InfraSAP)’

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ National Local Government Finance Committee. 2021. ‘Dissecting sources of revenue for local authorities’. <https://demo.gov.mw/nlgfc/index.php/business/miera/item/666-dissecting-sources-of-revenue-for-local-authorities>.

¹¹⁰ OpenStreetMap.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² World Bank. 2023. “Malawi Transport Infrastructure Sector Assessment Program (InfraSAP)” – Table 1.

6.7 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Based on the National Transport Master Plan, public transport trips in Lilongwe are split as follows: walk 65%; minibus 24%; cycle 8%; 'other' 3%.¹¹³ The report refers to "other supplementary modes as car taxis (both formal and informal), three-wheeler taxis, motorcycle taxis, bicycle taxis and pickup trucks" without specifying their share of trips.¹¹⁴ While this 2017 information is outdated, it remains useful but may not include recent trends, including the increasing use of kabazas (bicycle taxis) as an alternative means of urban transport. Kabazas and motorcycle taxis are often unregistered and operated by the least wealthy.¹¹⁵ The Master Plan data also does not include private cars as a mode of transport. A recent study by Kachali *et al.* indicates a preference for cars over public transport¹¹⁶, but this is likely to be aspirational only, as the level of car ownership in Lilongwe is the lowest of the eight SADC cities for which data is available, based on the limited information available.

Roads in Lilongwe are increasingly congested with bicycles, motorcycles, cars and minibus taxis sharing road space amid a lack of mass transit. This is addressed in planning documents with a bus rapid transit (BRT) system proposed for Lilongwe, along with greater emphasis on non-motorised transport.¹¹⁷

7. ENVIRONMENT

Climate change

Malawi is highly vulnerable to climate change, with a rising frequency of floods and drought.¹¹⁸ Lilongwe is particularly vulnerable to flooding, with a high concentration of informal settlements in close proximity to the Lilongwe River.¹¹⁹ A recent study by Msasa and Manda highlights the importance of sound building quality in flood-prone areas, with river floods reported in 2012, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, causing death, damage to buildings and displacement of households.¹²⁰

Carbon emissions

Lilongwe has a low carbon footprint. According to the latest data, Lilongwe emits only 0.12 tons of CO₂¹²¹ per capita per year, the lowest of the GGA sample by a large margin. For reference, the average across the 10 SADC cities sampled is 1.04 tons per year, with Johannesburg emitting the most at 3.2 tons of CO₂ per capita per year.¹²²

Air quality

Despite a high proportion of households using biofuels such as wood and charcoal as an energy source (section 4.4), air quality in Lilongwe is relatively good in relation to its peers in the GGA sample, with a PM_{2.5} concentration¹²³ of 12 µg/m³. This is well below the city average of 17 µg/m³. Cape Town and Dar es Salaam have the lowest concentration at 8 and 10 µg/m³, respectively, while Johannesburg has the highest concentration of PM_{2.5} particles at 42 µg/m³.

Water quality

Water quality in Lilongwe is a key challenge, as poor solid waste management systems have caused high levels of faecal contamination in the Lilongwe River and other groundwater systems.¹²⁴ This contributes to serious cholera outbreaks, as discussed in section 4.2.

113 Estimated from modal split pie graph, page 26 of National Transport Master Plan (2017).

114 Ministry of Transport and Public Works Malawi (MTPW). 2017. "National Transport Master Plan - Final Report".

115 World Bank. 2023. "Malawi Transport Infrastructure Sector Assessment Program (InfraSAP)".

116 Nelson Kachalia, Suzgo Kaundab and Witness Kuotcha. 2023. "Travel Demand Modelling for the City of Lilongwe, Malawi".

117 World Bank. 2023. "Malawi Transport Infrastructure Sector Assessment Program (InfraSAP)".

118 UNDP, "Malawi," *UNDP: Climate Change Adaption*. <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/africa/malawi>.

119 HS International and ALMA Consult, "Diagnostic and Pre-Feasibility Studies for Resilient Urban Development and Service Delivery in Lilongwe," *Detailed Diagnostic Studies Report, version 2* (Lilongwe: 2020). https://lcc.mw/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Main-Documents-Detailed-Diagnostic-Report_V2_OCT-2020.pdf.

120 Msasa, C. M. & Manda, M.A.Z.C., 2025. «Physical vulnerability of buildings to flooding in Lilongwe City, Malawi». UCL Open: Environment 7(1).

121 European Commission, *et al.*, "Stats in the City- the GHSL Urban Centre Database 2025."

122 *Ibid.*

123 *Ibid.*

124 Lilongwe City Council, "Sanitation and Drainage Improvement Strategy and Institutional Framework for Lilongwe City," (Lilongwe, 2021).

8. ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The administration of Lilongwe City Council is structured into the following directorates:

- Engineering Services
- Parks and Recreation
- Health Social Welfare
- Planning and Development
- Commerce, Trade and Industry
- Education, Youth and Sports Directorate
- Finance
- Administration
- Legal

Politically, the city is divided into 27 wards, each represented by an elected councillor.¹²⁵ The majority of councillors are from the ruling Malawi Congress Party. This includes the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.¹²⁶ Five non-voting members on the council represent various interest groups. The Council's responsibilities include passing by-laws, coordinating economic and infrastructure development, mobilising resources for the city, and promoting local democratic participation.¹²⁷

Four elected members of parliament represent the four constituencies in Lilongwe.

Relations between the central and local governments in Lilongwe are strongly influenced by the fact that the Lilongwe Council is largely made up of members of the ruling party. Political dynamics in Lilongwe are characterised by clientelism and patronage networks, which keep councillors in power.¹²⁸ This has undermined political participation at the local level.

Despite this, public perceptions of Lilongwe's governance arrangements are relatively favourable. The Afrobarometer Round 9 Institutional Responsiveness Survey provides a snapshot of public perceptions of Lilongwe's governance

quality (Table 7). Lilongwe's institutional quality score is low in absolute terms but typical of most SADC cities in the GGA sample, other than Dar es Salaam (higher) and Luanda (lower).

Table 7: Afrobarometer scores for institutional quality (ten cities including Lilongwe)

CITIES	COUNTRY	INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY INDEX (0-3, HIGHER IS BETTER)
Lilongwe	Malawi	1.0
Bulawayo	Zimbabwe	1.1
Harare	Zimbabwe	0.9
Johannesburg	South Africa	0.9
Cape Town	South Africa	1.1
Dar es Salaam	Tanzania	1.3
Luanda	Angola	0.8
Lusaka	Zambia	1.0
Maputo	Mozambique	1.1
Matola	Mozambique	1.0

Audit report

The Malawi National Audit Office conducts annual audits of all national entities and local councils. However, Lilongwe City Council has not received an audit since the 2020/2021 financial year, when they received an unqualified opinion, meaning "the financial statements give a true and fair view or are presented fairly, in all material respects, in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework."¹²⁹

Concerns raised included limited capacity in the financial department of the council and challenges in generating revenue to fully implement budgets. Despite the challenges, it seems an effort is being made to ensure better audit outcomes and greater financial sustainability.

¹²⁵ Lilongwe City Council, "Governance," About Us page. <https://lcc.mw/about-us/> (Accessed 11 July 2025).

¹²⁶ John Kasalika, "Lilongwe, Zomba cities usher in new mayors," Nation Online (2024). <https://mwnation.com/lilongwe-zomba-cities-usher-in-new-mayors/> (Accessed 11 July 2025).

¹²⁷ Lilongwe City Council, "Institutional Mandates," About Us page. <https://lcc.mw/about-us/> (Accessed 11 July 2025).

¹²⁸ Brown, D, Manda, M and Mwalyambwile, T (2024). "Lilongwe: City report". ACRC Working Paper 2024-13. Manchester: African Cities Research Consortium, The University of Manchester.

¹²⁹ National Audit Office, "Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of the City, Municipal and District Councils for the Year Ended 31st March, 2022." (Lilongwe: 2022).

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCES

The operating expenditure budget for Lilongwe City Council is detailed in Table 8.

Table 8: Budgeted expenditure for Lilongwe City Council, 2024¹³⁰

ACTIVITY	MKW M	US\$ M	SPLIT	PER CAPITA (\$/CAP)
Governance and administration	8,242	4.8	51%	3.97
Planning, regulation and development facilitation	777	0.4	5%	0.37
Economic and business development	2,385	1.4	15%	1.15
Environmental protection	111	0.1	1%	0.05
Public order and safety	304	0.2	2%	0.15
Community services	891	0.5	6%	0.43
Housing	185	0.1	1%	0.09
Health	458	0.3	3%	0.22
Education	520	0.3	3%	0.25
Roads and drainage	497	0.3	3%	0.24
Public transport		-	0%	-
Electricity distribution	234	0.1	1%	0.11
Water supply		-	0%	-
Sanitation		-	0%	-
Solid waste management	1,478	0.9	9%	0.71
Total	16,082	9.3	100%	7.74

Compared with other cities in the GGA sample, LCC has the lowest expenditure per capita, comparable with Ndola. This is consistent with Lilongwe's weak economy and the limited services provided by the council. Lusaka, with the same profile of services, spends US\$12 per capita, also far below economically stronger cities, which also provide a wider range of functions (Harare US\$529 per capita; Lusaka US\$1,235 per capita and Johannesburg US\$4,364 per capita).

Notably, LCC allocates a very high proportion of its expenditure to governance and administration (51%), compared to an average of 28% for the six other SADC cities where data is available. As LCC does not provide water, sanitation and electricity services, and only minimal health and education services, expenditure on these is low to minimal. However, LCC has a substantial obligation to maintain roads, yet spends little on this service and significantly less than its SADC peers.

¹³⁰ Lilongwe City Council, "October 2024 Financial Report". <https://lcc.mw/financial-report-october-2024/>.

The operating revenue budget for the City of Lilongwe is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Budgeted revenue for Lilongwe City Council, 2024¹³¹

REVENUE SOURCE	MKW M	US\$ M	SPLIT	PER CAPITA (\$/CAP)
Property rates	6,764	3.91	43%	3.25
Fines, licenses, penalties, levies & permits	5,935	3.43	37%	2.86
Other non-tariff revenue	1,449	0.84	9%	0.70
Service charges - Electricity		-		-
Service charges - Water		-		-
Service charges - Waste Water Management		-		-
Service charges - Waste Management ¹³²	1,478	0.85	9%	0.71
Transfers for operating costs	775	0.45	5%	0.37
Total	16,403	9.5	100%	7.89

Revenue is almost exclusively raised from own sources, with only 1% reflected as transfers from the national fiscus. This is in marked contrast with other SADC cities in the GGA sample, except for Zimbabwean cities, where there is also little assistance for municipalities to cover operating expenses.

As LCC does not provide water, wastewater or electricity, revenue from these services – available to Zimbabwean and South African cities – is not applicable. The sum raised from property rates (US\$3.25 per capita) is low, comparable to Zambian cities and consistent with Lilongwe’s relatively weak local economy. In contrast, Harare raises US\$255 per capita and Johannesburg US\$971 per capita.

Capital expenditure

LCC’s capital expenditure is primarily limited by the modest transfers from the national fiscus (Table 10).

LCC allocates a small amount (US\$0.15 m) from its own revenue for minor capital works. While this capital expenditure on the LCC budget from own sources and transfers is significant, the likelihood is that most larger infrastructure projects are funded by international development partners.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Solid waste management charges are not reflected separately in the budget so an amount is assumed equal to expenditure on solid waste management.

Table 10: Budgeted transfers for Lilongwe City Council's capital works, 2024

TRANSFER IDENTITY	USE OF FUNDS	BUDGETED AMOUNT 2024	
		MKW M	US\$ M
Water Structures Fund	Small amount – used for boreholes	48	0.03
Constituency Development Fund	Work on drainage, schools, sports fields, footpaths and road maintenance.	800	0.46
Infrastructure Development Fund	Small projects: drainage, clinic fencing, roads, streetlights.	328	0.19
City Roads Rehabilitation	Mix of minor road maintenance activity and larger road rehabilitation project.	6,084	3.51
Total		7,260	4.19

10. CLOSURE

Malawi has the weakest economy of the SADC countries, as measured by GDP per capita, and Lilongwe has the weakest economy of the 10 cities in the GGA sample. With the associated lack of financial resources, this leaves the city with relatively low service levels and relatively high levels of poverty.

The potential for the Lilongwe City Council to develop the city physically and socially is limited, firstly by the partial functions it has been allocated under national

policy. Like Zambian cities, Malawi's cities are not responsible for water, sanitation, electricity, health or education, for example.

Secondly, resource constraints hamper the performance of the municipal council, which has limited ability to raise own-source revenue and receives little financial support from the national government for its operating activity. Effective service provision is also set back by under-performing parastatals responsible for water, sanitation and electricity services.



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For bespoke research, contact our
Good Governance Africa advisory services team.

Contact us

Tel: 011 268 0479

Email: info@gga.org

Web: www.gga.org

