



## MALAWI SECONDARY CITIES PLAN

*Posted on January 19, 2023 by xavigonzalez*



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**Authorship:** The Malawi Government, through the National Planning Commission (NPC), launched the Malawi Secondary Cities Plan (MSCP) through which eight cities will be developed across the country, with technical leadership by [ORG Permanent Modernity](#).

On May 31, 2022, the Malawi government, through the National Planning Commission (NPC), launched the Malawi Secondary Cities Plan (MSCP). Through this plan, eight cities will be developed across all regions of the country. MSCP is the result of a three-year-long collaboration, technically led by ORG. They joined forces with multiple stakeholders, from government officials to private organizations and institutions, coming to support the 'Malawi 2063' Vision which includes long- and medium-term development plans for the country.

MSCP presents as key goals: 1) to identify catalytic locations for strategic investments through a data-driven analytical process guided by national agendas; 2) to establish a coordinated and comprehensive development promotion through strategic clustering of assets and projects; 3) to promote land-use efficiency in locations where land is on high demand; and 4) to diversify economic growth in rural areas through cross-sectoral programs.



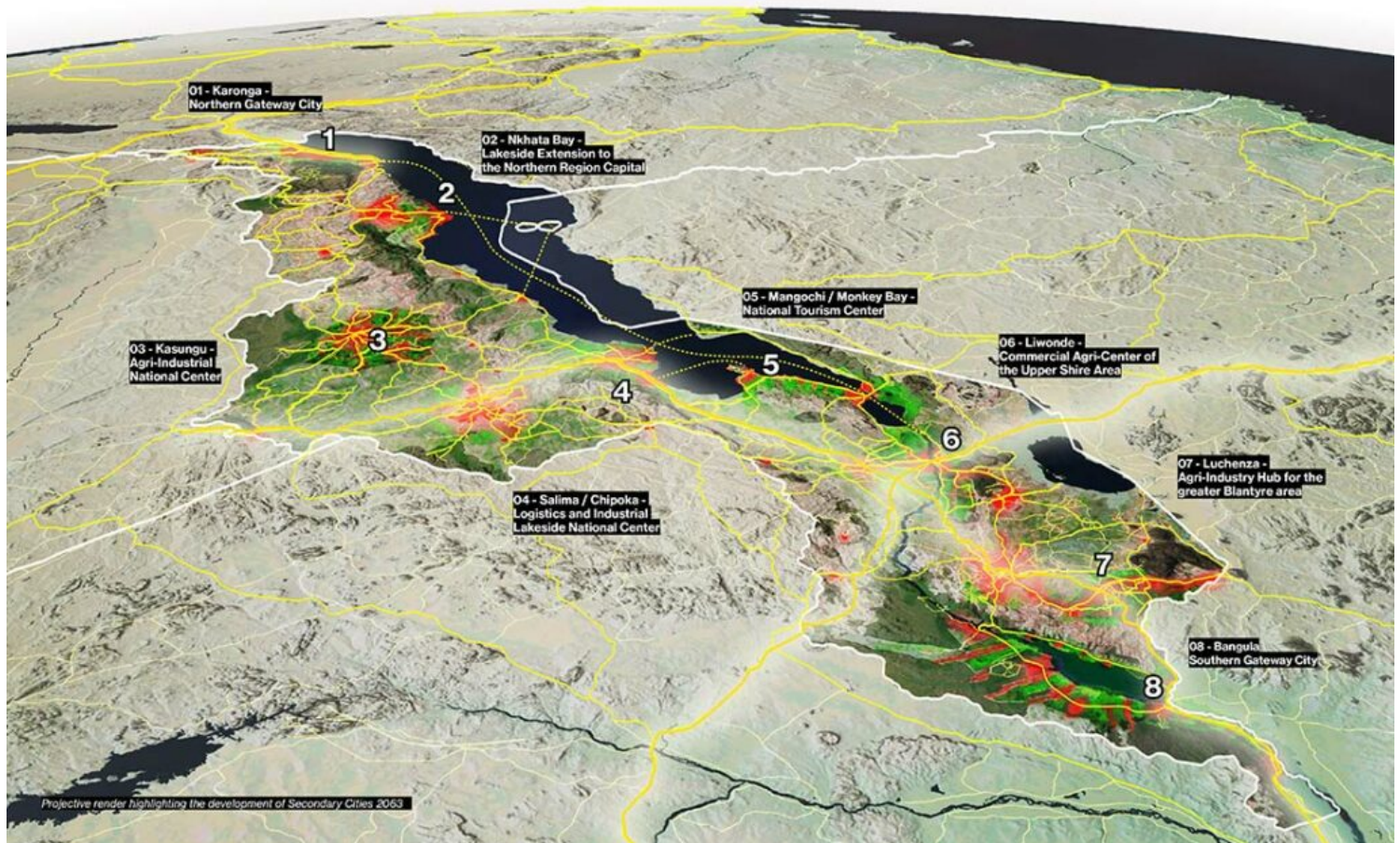
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## Background

Malawi has a population of over 18 million people, with an average annual growth rate of 2.9% (NSO 2018). The population is forecasted to grow to over 30 million by 2035, and 45 million by 2050, nearly tripling the estimated 16 million from 2010 in a period of 40 years. Considering the available arable land at around 40% of its footprint, it is estimated that Malawi will face a critical point soon, where family-owned farms (small holders) will not be able to provide for themselves. These facts and projections will only raise the level of current food insecurity in Malawi due to rain-reliant agricultural practices and growing environmental risks of floods and droughts. As a result, Malawi is experiencing two pressing trends related to land use planning: 1) a decrease in agricultural land

sizes of rapidly growing populations of rural farmers, 2) an increase of settlement land around existing urban centers, especially in areas where land is most suitable for agriculture.





## Proposal

Malawi requires a national shift towards new patterns of settlements, both urban and rural, that must be driven by land-use efficiency, infrastructural connectivity, environmental sensitivity, and diverse economic productivity. For this transition to succeed, urban and rural areas require land and population management plans as part of public policies, investments in transportation, water, and energy infrastructure, as well as private investments in commercial agri-business and industry. These policies and investments would catalyze a process of industrialization and modernization in strategic locations. In parallel, rural communities would require immense innovation to design replicable models of cooperative schemes connecting local villages and farmers to regional and

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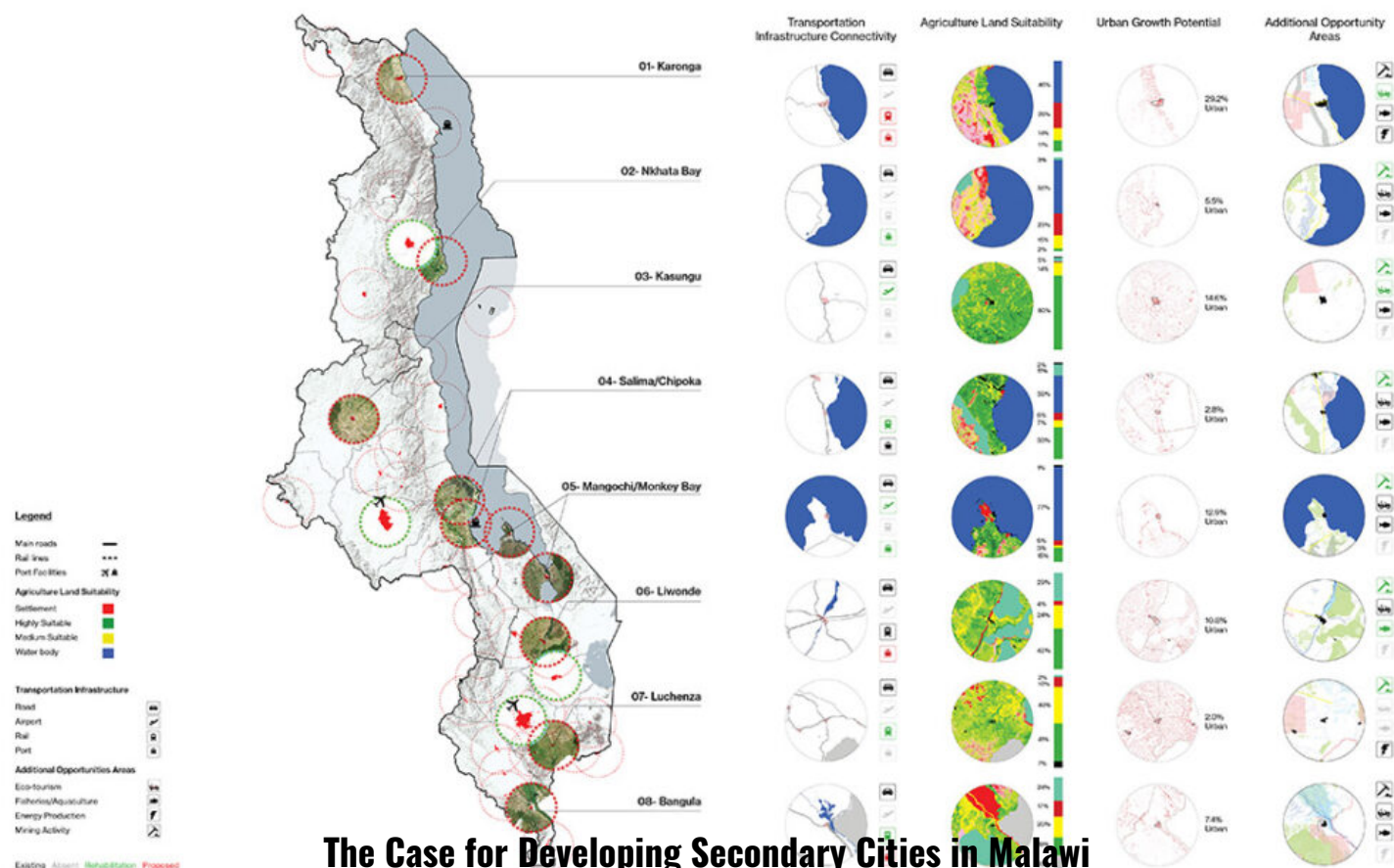
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Secondary cities are often overlooked in the context of development planning. Considering the common interpretations of the urban/rural binary, which suggest that people inhabit either cities or the countryside, secondary cities, or provincial cities, fall in between those categories, and realities there are often more nuanced and complex. MSCP comes with an agenda to highlight the critical role secondary cities should play in establishing infrastructural, operational, and cultural feedback between both ends of the binary cited above. Those cities, if planned well, could play multiple roles with respect to both the urban and the rural economies.





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## Multi-Scalar Spatial Analysis and Design

At the core of this analytical multi-scalar process of analysis is the application of multi-scalar design thinking. The proposals presented as part of this plan aim to bridge scales of analysis and policy from national and regional scales to watershed and district scales, down to the project level and back again. This agenda of alignment between top-down and bottom-up realities comes to the fore not only through the intentional positioning of investment clusters towards the development of secondary cities; it is further embedded in the actual implementation strategies of each cluster of investments, whether through phasing, financing, or partnership curation.

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## Prioritization for Development

In an environment where infrastructure offerings are severely lacking and budgets are highly constrained, it is imperative to maximize impact through project groupings and by designing infrastructure as multi-purpose provisions for a wide variety of beneficiaries and stakeholders. This agenda should ideally be implemented in a minimal set of locations, where groups of projects can emerge and build enough capacity and momentum to catalyze a local process of long-term development. Specifically, for the purpose of the master plans developed in those 'intersections' of opportunity, we propose investments in three key sectors, corresponding to the Malawi Vision 2063 pillars: urbanization, agriculture, and industrialization. Within each sector, we envision several

possible projects taking place, tailored to each locality as demand and context allow.



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