

**THE FIRST MALAWI NATIONAL REPORT ON THE
PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION
PROGRAMME**

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Summary

Malawi, a country of 119,140 square kilometres and 9.8 million people, is ridden with drylands of the Rift Valley floor. Almost 29% of the population live in these ecosystems which has limited potential for rainfed agriculture, especially in maize production. It is the plight of the people living in these dryland of the Rift Valley floor that make the Convention to Combat Desertification relevant to Malawi. Malawi found it fit to ratify the Convention to Combat Desertification in June, 1996.

Since the ratification in 1996 a multidisciplinary national steering committee has been established whose function is to provide leadership in the national action planning and implementation process of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). So far the Committee has undertaken some sensitisation campaigns of the UNCCD, produced some issues papers and ready for the first stakeholders conference. Meanwhile some initiatives are being studied with a view to incorporating them in the National Action Programme. Several policies have been reviewed and new laws enacted with a view to empower local communities in sustainable development and access to benefits accruing from investment of their time. These policies include Agriculture, Environmental Management, Forestry, Fisheries, Water Development.

Financial allocations to Departments and line Ministries are declining due to debt servicing and a shift of policies, especially decentralisation. This is happening at a time when proliferation of NGOs is taking place, some of whom are being supported directly by the traditional donors. In order to respond to some financial gaps, an Endowment fund has been established with a window on Combating Desertification. The fund will finance community orientated activities including research, management and development of natural resources as well as expanding alternatives to wood fuels and sustainable sources of employment and income, especially for women.

1. Background

Malawi occupies the Southern part of the East African Rift Valley, lying between 9 degrees and 17 degrees south of the Equator. It has an area of 119,140 square kilometres of which 20% is water. It is land locked by Mozambique in the south and east, Zambia to the west and Tanzania to the east and north. Topography is immensely varied, from the Rift Valley floor almost at seal level to mountains rising to 3,000 metres. Tied in with this are wide ranges in climate, vegetation and economic activity.

The Rift Valley floor is generally dry, receiving 800mm or less in six (6) weeks. The vegetation is dry *Brachystegia* woodlands with acacias dominating. The soils are either stony and shallow or heavy cotton soils.

The 1998 population census indicate a total population of 9,838,486 with almost 29% living in the dry lands, mainly in the Rift Valley floor districts. Almost 50% of the population are women while half are youth (0 to 17 years). The intercensal rate of population growth is at 1.9% per annum. This is a 1.3% decline from the previous growth rate which was attributed to an influx of Mozambican refugees.

The Rift Valley districts depend on the Lake Malawi and shire river for their livelihood. Millet, Sorghum and irrigated rice are the most suitable crops, but due to poor agricultural policy up to 1994, maize is grown despite disappointing yields which range from 0 to 0.2 tonnes per hectare. Woodfuel continue to provide over 90% of domestic energy, despite declining wood supply, especially in the drylands.

2. Strategies and priorities established within the framework of sustainable development plans and policies

Malawi's economy is very fragile and lacks the flexibility to adjust to external shocks because of a narrow production base. Agriculture continues to dominate the production structure, contribution over 35% of the GDP, within 25% being accounted for by small holder farmers.

A significant contributing factor to the fragility of the economy has mainly been the poor performance of macro-economic and fiscal policy failures and unfavourable external trade environment. The macro-economic policy regime, within the frame-work of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) have greatly influenced the outcomes of sectoral policies governing land, agriculture, forestry and environmental management. Unfortunately the economy has not substantially improved the benefit of the majority of the major economic actors, the small holder farmers who depend heavily on land and its ecosystems.

The sharp drop in the value of exchange rate of the Malawi Kwacha which was a critical requirement of the SAP has led to significant decline in per capita earning and the rural poor have been adversely affected. The poor have had to extend the area used for agriculture to marginal areas in order to survive the declining per capita farmland in customary land areas. The overdependence on wood fuel energy has worsened the environmental situation.

The deterioration of the country's natural resources and the environment is a great concern to the government and all the sectors of the Malawi nation because of various economic losses and social impacts that result from degradation.

Several policy and legislative measures were put in place in the last two years in order to better manage natural resources. However the National Environmental

Action Plan (NEAP) of 1994 described three main failures in the system to be contributing to degradation. These are

- (1) Weakness in legislation
- (2) Lack of proper co-ordination among sectoral agencies responsible for enforcement and policing of legislation.
- (3) Absence of coherent and comprehensive enforcement mechanism.

For example the discounted economic cost of soil erosion, deforestation, water resources, degradation and fisheries amounted to over 10% of the GDP by 1994 and it represented a substantial income loss to the country.

Since the NEAP, recent efforts to implement the proposed recommendations include the preparation of and adoption of the National Environmental Policy and the Environment Management Act which have established the overall policy and legislative framework to guide the review of sectoral policies so that they are consistent with the principles of sustainable environment management and development. The empowerment of local communities in the management of their natural resources is a strategic guiding principal in the formulation of the new policies.

The overall development policy of Government, now, is to reduce poverty. This is poverty of knowledge, health, wealth and culture including religion. Poverty alleviation programme has been prepared and is being financed from a Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF). It is focusing on supporting free primary education, free primary health care and improving road network and boreholes in rural areas. The Poverty Alleviation Programme and the vision 2020 process provide a framework for transforming the economic structures in order that they contribute positively toward raising the living standards to a level where people have equitable access to basic needs and services and to gainful employment. In this context the framework aims at:

- Efforts to diversify Malawi's economy from overdependency on agricultural production and to raise the contribution of other sectors in the economy;
- Implementation of sound macro-economic policy measure as a basic requirement and support measures of safety nets.
- Increasing smallholder agricultural productivity, as one of the measures to reduce poverty thereby greatly assisting in the conservation and protection of natural resources and the environment.

3. The consultative process in support of the preparation and the implementation of the national action programme and the partnership

To implement the NEAP the government embarked on the preparation of the Environmental Support Programme (ESP) in 1994/1995. The main goal was to ensure integration of environmental concerns in the socio-economic development of the country. The main objectives guiding the ESP are

1. To support key policy reforms.
2. To strengthen institutions involved in natural resources and environmental management and to implementing core investments related to environmental protection.

Another tool was the development of the Environmental Management Program where different stakeholders e.g. Health, Land and Physical Planning, Forestry, National Parks and Wildlife, Fisheries Environmental Information System , Environmental Impact Assessment and Municipalities bring up programs of environmental concern. The programme is being co-ordinated by Department of Environmental Affairs with funding from World Bank. Each stakeholder implement their programs while environment assess progress.

One of the critical statutory requirements in the Environmental Management Act is that projects likely to adversely affect the environment must undergo an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This is not meant to curtail development, but to ensure that development programmes and projects do not degrade the environment, and to fully incorporate mitigative measures in the project cycle. A prescribed list of such projects is being prepared for publication and circulation.

The government continues to work with its development partners, including the international community to strengthen its environmental education, awareness and communication programme, while strengthening efforts to reduce poverty which has been recognised as a major contributor to environmental degradation, especially in drylands.

In order to maintain effective co-ordination, a system of Environmental Focal Points (EFPs) has been established. The focal points act as major sources of information not only for the future state of the environment but also in identifying solutions to the country's environmental problems including those related to development of drylands. Therefore, close communication between them need to be strengthened.

4. Institutional Measures taken to Implement the Convention

In order to integrate NEAP into and implement the Convention to Combat Desertification, a number of institutional measures are underway. The notable ones are:

(a) *Review of policies and Acts*

New policies have been formulated, namely, Environment management, Forestry, Fisheries, Water, Agriculture, Wildlife, Population and Education. A policy on energy is being formulated. The most significant feature of all these policies is the empowerment of local communities in sustainable management and development, especially in the management and user rights of natural resources. Appropriate Acts are in place to back up these policies.

(b) *Decentralisation of government functions and authority*

With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) functions and authority of the Central Government are being devolved to local authorities such as district assemblies and city assemblies. District development committees (DDC) of which traditional chiefs, members of parliament and ward councillors are members, are being strengthened in terms of their functions, structure, support staff and financial resources. District development plans are being approved by the DDC who now have a District Development Fund from which project financing are being made. At the grass roots level there are various village development Committees such as Village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMC). These Committees are responsible for administration and development of forestry, irrigation or water at village level.

(c) *Strengthening the role of non governmental organisations (NGOs)*

Since the return of multiparty Democracy to Malawi in 1994, there has been a proliferation of NGOs from ten (10) to one hundred and seventy five (175), especially in the natural resources sector. The role of NGOs in sustainable development at grassroots cannot be overemphasised. There have been advances to formulate a code of conduct for the NGOs and a draft bill governing NGOs is ready for presentation to Parliament. It is

hoped that these legal tools will catalyse further growth and development of NGOs while protecting the masses from ill intentions of briefcase NGOs. Malawi has two main NGO Co-ordinating bodies, one is the Council of NGOs in Malawi (CONGOMA) and another is the Co-ordinating Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment (CURE), which is also an NGO focal point for UNCCD. NGOs are being strengthened through capacity building and direct funding from donors.

5. The participatory process in support of the preparation and implementation of the National Action Plan

The process is being managed by a national Steering Committee comprising Forestry (Chair), Environmental Affairs (Secretariat), Agriculture and Irrigation, Water development, Meteorology, Energy and Mining, Local Government and District Administration, Co-ordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment, Education, Academia, Information, Women and Children Affairs, National Economic Council, Tobacco Association of Malawi (TAMA), Agricultural Research and Extension Trust (ARET) and Animal Health and Industry.

The National Steering Committee has undertaken awareness campaigns to all the twenty six (26) districts, targeting at District Development Committees, especially its Advisory organ. This Advisory organ is called District Executive Committee which is comprised of professionals in different sectors. These professionals are now busy sensitising people down to the grass roots in each district and ensuring that planning and implementation of development plans in dry lands of Malawi embrace UNCCD framework.

It is these change agents who have been equipped with participatory tools of planning and implementation. The tools include participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and Gender. Ongoing development programmes and projects reflect community participation decision making and implementation in

- Raising of tree seedlings and establishment and management of Village Forest Areas (VFAs).
- Construction and management of boreholes, school blocks, clinics, roads and bridges.
- Production and marketing of some agricultural and non wood forest products such as milk, juices from *Adansonia digitata* (Malambe) and *Tamarindus indica* (Bwemba).

- Diversification of crops for staple and cash. These include cassava, sweet potatoes, *Papurika* and *Soya*.

6. Measures taken and planned within the framework of the National Action Plan

The economy is liberalised enough to enable every individual to engage in any economic activity. In this regard any economic development is acceptable so long as it does not damage the environment. Thus, the Environment Act demands that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) be conducted before undertaking any development on any piece of land. However, the assessment has been simplified and mainstreamed in the sectors, thereby enabling sectoral officers to conduct their own assessments. It is hoped that in the long run economic development will be compatible with good environmental management, particularly desertification.

In order to improve knowledge of desertification some publicity materials are being produced including articles for both print and electronic media; conducting field days in dryland areas and inclusion of CCD messages on CCD Day and Environment Day, World Forestry Day and World Water Day.

The environmental management project referred in Section 3 above, is funding Climate Change Studies with a view to improving monitoring of drought and assessment of its effects. In addition, Department of Relief and Disaster Preparedness conducts assessments on needs of communities following droughts and floods with a view to provide short term relief.

7. Financial allocations from National budget

The financial allocations to Government Ministries from the national budget have been declining, in real terms, in the last two years. This is due to several factors. The obvious ones include a shift in policy towards Poverty alleviation and decentralisation, debt servicing and devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha (MK). Table 1 presents the 1998/99 financial allocations for the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Environmental Affairs. As you can see these comprise less than 2% of the National budget while the proportion for debt serving is almost 27%. This leaves 73% for operational expenses, most of which go to education, health, agriculture and transport sectors.

In response to declining resources, especially to natural resources sectors, an ENDOWMENT TRUST Fund has been established. The objectives of the fund include support to local community initiatives in sustainable natural resources management and development. The Endowment Fund has a window for supporting activities of the Convention. In this regard fragile ecosystems such as the drylands are given high priority.

Table 1 : 1998/99 Approved Budget for the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Environmental Affairs

Approved Budget (MK)

DEPT	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL NATIONAL BUDGET
Ministry HQ	12,753,583	0.12
Forestry Dept	142,618,493	1.4
Fisheries	12,377,835	0.12
Environmental Affairs	2,524,801	0.024
Total Ministry	170,274,712	1.60
Public Debt	2,885,000,000	27.19
National budget	10,609,932,931	

Source : Estimates of Expenditure on Recurrent Account for the Financial year 1998/99 as laid before Parliament on 26th June, 1998. Budget Document No IB

8. Benchmarks and Indicators

The benchmarks and indicators utilized to measure progress and assessment so far are

- National Steering Committee of CCD is in place;
- Environmental Management Act and other Acts are in place;
- Environmental Support Programme has been established;
- Environmental Management Project in response to NEAP is under implmentation;
- Review of policies to include Environmental issues is underway.