

POLICY BRIEF

NATIONAL FOREST POLICY OF MALAWI



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Background and Introduction

About 90% of the nation's energy requirements are satisfied by wood fuels derived from forests, with charcoal being a major source of energy in the urban areas. Forests also provide basic human needs for rural communities who comprise 80% of the population. Apart



from firewood they rely on forests for food, construction materials, agricultural tools, pharmaceuticals, employment and income. Forests also provide water shed protection, enhance water resources and habitat for fauna and flora. However, Malawi is facing one of the fastest deforestation rates in the world. Between 1990 and 2010, the country lost an average of 32, 950 hectares or 0.85% per year. In total, during these two decades Malawi lost 16.9% of its forest cover, or around 659, 000 hectares. Forest resources are particularly stressed in the Southern and Central regions where population pressures are greatest. The major factors influencing the situation are the rapid population growth, commercial logging and massive poverty which necessitate cutting down of trees for opening new land for agricultural cultivation and as sources of energy. In 1996, Government of Malawi adopted the National Forest Policy followed by a Community Based Forest Management – A Supplement to the National Forestry Policy in 2003. The Forestry Act was passed in 1997.

There are also Forestry (Community Participation) Rules, 2001 and Forestry (Amendment) Rules 2003.

The Forestry Policy (1996) sought to provide a remedy to the problems outlined above. It sets out to solve failure of the previous

policing style of forest management and public perception that naturally growing indigenous trees are open access resources. In particular it spelt out the need to involve local communities and the private sector in forestry management, the sharing of costs and benefits between the Department of Forestry and local communities, the regulation of forestry on all land categories and strengthening enforcement capacity and institutional coordination. The Forestry Department also developed the National Forestry Programme in 2000. The Programme was developed as a means to put the 1996 Forestry Policy and the Forestry Act (1997) into practice. It provides a framework of priorities and actions for improving the management of forest goods and services and for strengthening their contribution to livelihoods and the rural economy. While the main issue which the supplement to the Forestry Policy of 2003 dealt with was co-management and community management of forest resources. There had been apparent constraints in the implementation of both community management and co-management of forest resources.

Policy Objectives and Strategies

The preamble provides the then status of forestry resources in Malawi, importance of forests and sadly acknowledges that the Forestry Act is subservient to other legislation, especially legislation for sectors under which certain activities that adversely affect forests and growing trees can be undertaken. It states that trees can be cut down, without consultation with Forestry Department, in order to give way to the construction of a road, power line or railway. The policy provides specific objectives and strategies for achieving those objectives. The major thrust of the policy is to move from the hitherto top down forestry management style which concentrated on policing the few protected reserves by forestry officials towards a more participatory approach.

The goal of the National Forestry Policy is to sustain the contribution of the national forest resources to the quality of life in the country by conserving the resources for the benefit of the nation. While the general objectives of the policy are to satisfy peoples' diverse and changing needs, particularly those of the rural people who are the

most disadvantaged. The general objectives are aimed at: allowing all citizens to have regulated and monitored access to some forest products through enacting a law that removes restrictions to access to the use of forests and forest products and promote equity and participation by local communities; to contribute towards improving the quality of life through among others introduction of value adding processes, encouraging agro forestry and providing a stable local economy; and providing incentive measures that will promote community-based conservation and a sustainable utilization of forest resources. These incentives mainly relate to promoting individual ownership of forests, establishment of tree nurseries and managing a regular reward system.

The Forestry Policy has outlined 18 specific objectives and each one has a series of strategies. Among others the policy aims at providing for an enabling framework for promoting the participation of local communities and the private sector in forest conservation and management. Key among the strategies is to support activities of local level forest institutions such as Village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMC). The policy provides an enabling environment for access to all government controlled plantation resources by small-scale enterprises and processors using forest products. The policy promotes community-based conservation and sustainable utilization of the forest resources through promoting communal and individual ownership of forests, establishment of nurseries by communities/individuals and increases the diversity of species. Furthermore the policy provides for development and dissemination of improved technologies for the development and management of trees and forests. In addition, it also provides for the development of a forestry extension service to support community programmes.

The policy also identifies and provides strategies for training needs and research and development of usable technologies in collaboration with local and external organizations. In the face of considerable challenges, the policy finally comprehensively considers alternative income generating activities and energy sources so as to divert attention away from forest products.

Implementation Arrangements

Specific tools have been developed in order to improve forest governance and rural livelihoods. These include the Standards and Guidelines for Participatory Forestry; and Guide to the Registration of Local Forest Organizations.

The government institution responsible for forest management is the Forestry Department located in the Ministry of Energy, Mining and Natural Resources. Its principal functions include forest reserve management, forest policy development and planning, plantation management, training, research and extension. The Department is structured as follows: Forestry Headquarters in Lilongwe; Forest Research Institute of Malawi based in Zomba; Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife located in Dedza; Forestry Plantations, located at Chikangawa; three Regional Forest Offices (North, Centre and South); and 28 District Forestry Offices, performing dual functions of reserve and plantation management as well as forest extension services under the mandate of district councils. The main local village level institution responsible for forest management is the VNRMC.



Well protected forests along Mzimba road in the Northern Region

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