

POLICY BRIEF

WILDLIFE POLICY



Volume 6, Issue 5



This Policy Brief has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union, through the Capacity Building Programme for Non State Actors in Malawi. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA), Coordination Union for Rehabilitation of the Environment (CURE) and the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM) and can under no circumstance be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

Background and Introduction

Malawi possesses remarkable biodiversity with exceptional range of mammals, birds, fish and butterflies, among others. Within five national parks, four wildlife reserves, three nature sanctuaries and numerous forest reserves, Malawi has conserved over 21% of its total area. These protected areas represent fine examples of the country's biological diversity. They are a huge potential in contributing to the economy through the tourism industry. Key problems facing the wildlife sector include high population densities resulting on pressure on the resource base, encroachment, poaching, human-wildlife conflict, problem-animals, loss of biodiversity and a decline of wildlife populations. Furthermore, the management of protected areas had for so long been affected by previous management philosophy which concentrated on command and control measures and made protected areas 'no go' areas for local communities.

In an attempt to address these challenges and also consistent with the evolution of other related environment and natural resources management policies and legislation, Cabinet approved the Wildlife Policy in May 2000. The policy aspires for a more inclusive approach to wildlife management. The policy acknowledges the significance of stakeholders in their contribution towards the protection of Malawi's wildlife and its use. These stakeholders principally include local communities, the private sector, government institutions, nongovernmental organizations and international development partners. Thus, in laying out the objectives for national parks and wildlife, the policy seeks to allow for sustainable use of wildlife resources in order to contribute to the national economy particularly to enhance rural development.

Policy Objectives and Guiding Principles

The Wildlife Policy puts much emphasis on building constructive relationships between government and local communities in the management of wildlife. Its overall goal is "to ensure proper

conservation and management of wildlife in order to provide for: sustainable utilization; equitable access to the resources; and fair sharing of the benefits from the resources for both present and future Malawians.” The policy takes a more inclusive approach to wildlife management. Among other things, the guiding principles adopted under the policy include:

- (i) The vesting of wildlife ownership in the people of Malawi and that wildlife should be protected, conserved and managed for their benefit. It further provides that those that use the land on which wildlife occurs are primary custodians and utilization rights shall accrue to them;
- (ii) Fair sharing of benefits and costs associated with the use of wildlife in protected areas amongst local communities, park management, Treasury and wildlife entrepreneurs; and
- (iii) Promoting community empowerment and gender equity.

Wildlife Management in Protected Areas

The policy seeks to bring about significant changes in the management of wildlife. For example, the management of protected areas was previously under the exclusive mandate of central government. However, the policy now proposes collaborative management allowing participation of local communities living close to protected areas. The policy acknowledges that the participation of these communities is essential for good management. It further provides that arrangements and mechanisms should be agreed for each protected area for purposes of the fair distribution of the benefits amongst surrounding communities. Strategies to implement this include:

- a) Improve law enforcement capabilities: sensitize communities on the need for such laws; establish rules of engagement during anti-poaching campaigns;
- b) Develop and implement guidelines for involving local communities, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector in planning and executing management activities; and

- c) Establish guidelines for awarding and monitoring concessions to private tourism operators. Support local communities to actively benefit and participate in ecotourism.

Wildlife Management on Customary Land

As regards wildlife, on customary land, the policy provides that communities have the responsibility for wildlife management since up to 60% of wildlife habitat occurs on customary land. The strategies outlined on management of wildlife on customary land are based on principles of community-based wildlife management. Some of the key strategies include:

- a) Strengthen our advisory capacity in the field of community-based wildlife conservation and management;
- b) Assist communities to develop and implement schemes for managing wildlife resources on their land;
- c) Support capacity and institutional building at community level;
- d) Develop enabling legislation for Multiple Use Wildlife Areas (MUWA) and encourage its implementation; and
- e) Assist communities to establish MUWAs on their land where suitable.

In line with these strategies, DPNW is mandated to allow sustainable use of natural resources in order to contribute to national development in general and to rural development in particular. In this respect DNPW is expected to determine the consumptive and non-consumptive use to be permitted in each protected area and agree on benefits and beneficiaries in collaboration with local communities, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector.

Implementation Arrangements

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife has the mandate to protect Malawi's wildlife resources and regulate its use. It manages 12 protected areas. In 2009 DNPW developed National Benefit Sharing Guidelines. The guidelines present operational

procedures for implementing collaborative management, principally resource use and revenue sharing.

At community level DNPW implements its activities through community based organizations called Natural Resources Committees at Group Village headman level and associations at zone level.

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