

THE RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS : IMPLICATIONS FOR MALAWI

Department of National Parks and Wildlife

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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

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What is the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands?

- ▶ The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty adopted on 2 February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea whose mission is “the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.
- ▶ As of November 2014, 168 nations have joined the Convention as Contracting Parties, and 2,186 wetlands around the world, covering 208,449,277 hectares, have been designated as Wetlands of International Importance.

What are Wetlands?

- ▶ As defined by the Ramsar Convention “ areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.
- ▶ The Convention uses a broad definition of wetlands. It includes all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and salt pans.

Importance of Wetlands

- ▶ Wetlands are vital for human survival. They are among the world's most productive environments; cradles of biological diversity that provide the water and productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival.
- ▶ Wetlands are indispensable for the countless benefits or “ecosystem services” that they provide humanity, ranging from freshwater supply, food and building materials, and biodiversity, to flood control, groundwater recharge, and climate change mitigation

Wise Use Concept

- ▶ At the centre of the Ramsar philosophy is the “wise use” of wetlands.
- ▶ Contracting Parties commit to work towards the wise use of all the wetlands and water resources in their territory, through national plans, policies and legislation, management actions and public education
- ▶ The Convention defines wise use of wetlands as “the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development”.
- ▶ Wise use can thus be seen as the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and all the services they provide, for the benefit of people and nature

Malawi as a Contracting Party

- ▶ The Biology Dept at Chancellor College carried out studies in 1996 towards the designation of the Lake Chilwa wetland supported by the British Govt.
- ▶ The Government of Malawi in 1997 became a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention with Lake Chilwa wetland declared a Ramsar Site through the Department of National Parks and Wildlife as the Ramsar Administrative Authority.

Criteria for Designation of Lake Chilwa Ramsar Site

- ▶ Specifically the criteria was based on waterbirds
 - ▶ **Criterion 5:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds
 - ▶ **Criterion 6:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird
 - ▶ Lake Chilwa annually supports about 153 species of resident and 30 species of palearctic waterbirds respectively
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Criteria for Designation of Lake Chilwa Ramsar Site

- ▶ Lake Chilwa annually supports about 153 species of resident and 30 species of palearctic waterbirds respectively.
- ▶ The varied habitats of Lake Chilwa wetland provide food, shelter and breeding areas for the waterfowl.
- ▶ The lake has about 23 species which attain the Ramsar criterion of 1% level of individuals per population.
- ▶ Examples of the species that score highest are
 - ▶ Pinkbacked Pelican (13%),
 - ▶ Blackheaded Heron (39%),
 - ▶ Grey-headed Gull (38%),
 - ▶ African Skimmer (26%) and Marsh Owl (18%)

Why an Intergovernmental Convention on Wetlands?

- ▶ The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was developed as a means to call international attention to the rate at which wetland habitats were disappearing, in part due to a lack of understanding of their important functions, values, goods and services.
- ▶ Governments that join the Convention are expressing their willingness to make a commitment to reversing wetland loss and degradation
- ▶ many wetlands are international systems lying across the boundaries of two or more States, or are part of river basins that include more than one State .
- ▶ Further, many of the wetland fauna, for example some fish species, many waterbirds, insects, mammals are migratory species whose conservation and management also require
- ▶ international cooperation

Why an Intergovernmental Convention on Wetlands?

- ▶ Wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, cultural, scientific and recreational value to human life.
 - ▶ Wetlands and people are ultimately interdependent. As such, the progressive encroachment on and loss of wetlands needs to be stopped, and measures must be taken to conserve and make wise use of wetland resources.
 - ▶ To achieve this at a global level requires cooperative, intergovernmental action.
 - ▶ The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands provides the framework for such international, as well as for national and local action.
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The Role of the Administrative Authority

- ▶ The Administrative Authority is the channel for communications between the Ramsar Secretariat and the Contracting Party and the main agency responsible for the application of the treaty.
 - ▶ The Administrative Authority consults and cooperates with as many other government agencies and non-governmental institutions in the same country as possible in order to ensure the best possible results in achieving the goals of the Ramsar Convention through the National Wetlands Committee.
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The Wetlands Committee

- ▶ Recommendation 5.7 of the Conference Of Parties (COP) and the Strategic Plan encourage Contracting Parties to establish National Ramsar Committees (or National Wetland Committees) which can provide a broader focus at national level for the implementation of the Convention, involving relevant government agencies, scientific and technical institutions, regional and local authorities, local communities, NGOs, and the private sector, to deal with such issues as: national wetland policies and management of Ramsar Sites
- ▶ To this end, in 1996, the National Wetlands Committee was established for Malawi

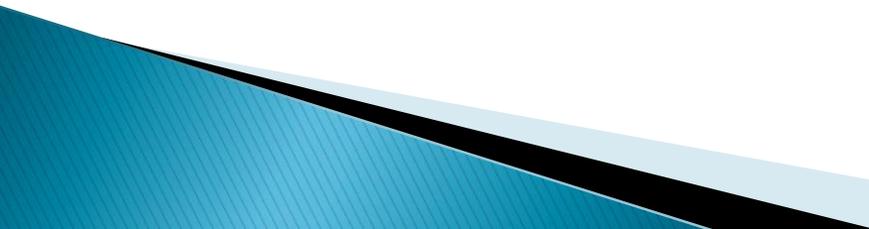
The Wetlands Committee

- ▶ Furthermore, the National Wetlands Committee has a role to adopt national wetland policies, involving a review of their existing legislation and institutional arrangements to deal with wetland matters (either as separate policy instruments or as part of national environmental action plans, national biodiversity strategies, or other national strategic planning);
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CRUCIAL ASPECT TO CONSIDER DURING THIS NATIONAL WETLAND POLICY DIALOGUE

- ▶ **Recommendation 4.4 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties urges that Parties review their legal mechanisms to ensure that the country's national, provincial, and local laws and institutions impacting upon the conservation and wise use of wetlands and wetland products do not conflict with one another or leave gaps or areas of clarity**
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CRUCIAL ASPECT TO CONSIDER DURING THIS NATIONAL WETLAND POLICY DIALOGUE

- ▶ **The 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties , Resolution VII.7 provides Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands.**
 - ▶ **There is a Ramsar Handbook (Number 3) developed by IUCN's Environmental Law Centre and other experts,**
 - ▶ **which provides a step-by-step blueprint for the establishment of a review team and its progress through the various stages required to assess the effectiveness of existing wetland-related legal and institutional measures for promoting wetland conservation and wise use,**
 - ▶ **including identifying sectoral legal and institutional measures which directly or indirectly affect wetlands**
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Implementation of the Ramsar Convention In Malawi

- ❑ A number of initiatives are being undertaken to implement the Convention by both government and non-governmental Organizations, the academia, local communities and other stakeholders that take cognizance of the Conventions Strategic Plan for 2009–2015 (Ramsar Handbook number 21)
 - ❑ The plan provides guidance, and how Contracting Parties should focus their efforts in implementing the Convention
 - ❑ The Convention promotes conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation
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Milestones

Guidelines for involving local communities and the private sector in planning and executing management activities developed.

- a) The National Parks and Wildlife Act was amended in 2004 to provide for local community involvement and private sector involvement in conservation and management of wildlife.
 - b) Notable is the establishment of the Bird Hunters Association (BHA) locally known as Mwayi Wa Mbalame Association (MMA) that consists of 20 village Bird Hunters Clubs that aims to promote sustainable utilization of birds in the Lake Chilwa Wetland.
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- ▶ Raising awareness of the importance of wetlands through commemoration of the World Wetlands Day.
 - Key Government Sectors, NGOs and local communities join hands in commemorating World Wetlands Day

Milestones cont'd

- ▶ The activities of the Convention are included in the Lake Chilwa Basin Climate Change Adaptation Programme (LCBCCAP) which is a five-year programme jointly implemented by Leadership for Environment and Development Southern & Eastern Africa (LEAD SEA); World Fish Centre and the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi (FRIM).
 - ▶ The overall goal of the programme is to secure the livelihoods of 1.5 million people in the Lake Chilwa Basin and enhance resilience of the natural resource base.
 - ▶ The programme is achieving this goal through the development and implementation of basin-wide climate change adaptations in support of the Malawi National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) that will enhance the capacity of communities to adopt sustainable livelihood and natural resource management practices.
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Milestones cont'd

- ▶ The Wildlife and Environment Society of Malawi (WESM–Zomba Branch) is involved in outreach campaigns on environmental education and awareness raising to the local people on sustainable utilization of the Lake Chilwa Wetland.
- ▶ Research in Lake Chilwa wetland
 - botanical, zoological and ecological studies
 - Currently, LEAD is coordinating studies in climate change under the Lake Chilwa Basin Climate Change Adaptation Programme.

Milestones cont'd

- ▶ Development of GAWI (Guidelines on Agriculture and Wetland Interactions) to analyze agriculture and wetland situation around the world in order to identify ways in which benefits can be maximised and risks of wetland loss and degradation minimized.
- ✓ In Malawi, a case study was undertaken particularly in Kasungu in Simlemba. The case study was based on five years of work undertaken in collaboration with Malawi Enterprise Zone Association (MALEZA), a Malawian NGO which has been working in the Simlemba area. The work focused on improving food security in general and building up community institutions to engage in development initiatives.

Challenges in implementing the convention

- ▶ No funding for the National Wetlands Steering Committee to regularly meet
 - ▶ Inadequate funding for the Secretariat (DNPW)
 - ▶ A small proportion of Malawi's wetlands are protected whilst the rest are open access and prone to overexploitation.
 - ▶ Key to achieving sustainable management of wetlands is through community participation which is constrained by lack of an enabling wetlands policy and legal framework to regulate sustainable use of wetlands.
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What needs to be done and Plans

- ❑ Develop specific Policy and legal frameworks for wetlands to guide wetland utilization and management.
 - ❑ Enhance participatory action planning
 - ❑ Plans of Designating the Elephant Marsh as a Ramsar Site through the Shire River Basin Management Program by enhancing Community Based Wetland Management.
 - ❑ Strengthening the coordination among private sector, government, NGOs and resource users
 - ❑ Capacity of the focal points both government and NGO to be enhanced (e.g. Wetland management, monitoring, assessment, resource material production)
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Thank you for your attention!

