

POLICY BRIEF

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY



Volume 6, Issue 3



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 is endowed with a diversified natural resource base, which includes some of the most fertile soils for agricultural use in Southern Africa. The country has closed forest resources covering about 30% of the land area, abundant water resources and a remarkably diverse flora and fauna. If properly utilized, these resources can provide the basis for sustainable socio-economic development of the country. However, these resources are subject to increasing pressure exacerbated by the high population growth and low level of environmental awareness. There is alarming degradation of the environment causing significant loss of soil fertility, soil erosion, serious deforestation, water depletion, pollution and loss of biodiversity.

Concerned with the increasingly trend in deterioration of the country's natural resources and environment and in attempt to narrow the gap between the degradation of the natural resources



and the environment on one hand and sustainable production and economic growth on the other Government of Malawi adopted a National Environmental Policy (NEP) in 1996. However, by 2004, it was noted that although Government had already taken significant steps to implement the provisions of the NEP, a lot needed to be

done. Besides many sectoral environment and natural resources policies and legislation had been adopted and enacted since then and experience revealed that there were policy gaps, conflicts and duplications which adversely affected effective implementation of the policies. These developments and experiences prompted Government to revise the NEP. The NEP was perhaps the first ever clear statement from Government of Malawi of its principles for environment and natural resources management in the country. As a framework instrument the NEP is a key instrument and standard for environment and natural resources policies and legislation and should act as a guide for all sectoral activities. More specifically the NEP sought to: -

- (a) Promote efficient utilization and management of our natural resources;
- (b) Facilitate rehabilitation and management of essential ecosystems and ecological processes (biological diversity);
- (c) Enhance public awareness on sound environmental management; and
- (d) Promote cooperation between Government, local communities, and women groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector in the management and sustainable utilization of the natural resources and the environment.

Policy Objectives and Strategies

The NEP's intention is to contribute towards achieving sustainable development. As such it incorporates poverty reduction, food security, human and environmental security and related issues. The overall policy goal is to promote sustainable social and economic development through the sound management of the environment and natural resources. Some of the goals which the NEP seeks to meet include:-

- Enhance public education and awareness of various environmental issues and public participation in addressing them;

- Promote community, NGO and private sector participation in environment and natural resources management;
- Promote the use and application of local knowledge and norms that facilitate sustainable environment and natural resources management;
- Promote co-operation with other Governments and relevant regional and international organizations in the management and conservation of the environment; and
- Facilitate policies and legislation development and regular review promote sustainable management of the environment and natural resources.

The NEP also provides a number of important guiding principles for policy development and implementation. Some of the key principles include: the right to a clean environment for every person and their duty to maintain and enhance the environment; role of women, children and youth in management of the environment; and importance of incorporating environmental management principles in development planning and decision making processes at all levels. In pursuing its efforts to address the challenge of balancing environment and development, the NEP provides two important economic policy issues and instruments. As a framework policy, the NEP also identifies guiding principles and outlines strategies for cross-sectoral issues. These include: creating and strengthening institutional mechanisms; creating a legal framework; ensuring that national and district development plans integrate environmental concerns; developing, increasing public and political awareness and understanding of the need for sustainable environmental management; mobilization of resources in the private sector and community participation; integrating gender, youth and children concerns in environmental planning decisions; ensuring that population growth does not lead to environmental degradation; minimizing adverse impacts of climate change and variability; managing, conserving and utilizing biodiversity and promoting sustainable use of the land resources of Malawi.

As a framework instrument the NEP is expected to guide a number of lead agencies in so far as their activities affect the environment and natural resources management. Key sectors identified in the NEP include: agriculture and livestock; forestry; fisheries; national parks and wildlife; water; energy; industry; mining; and tourism. The NEP provides objectives, guiding principles and strategies for each one of the sectors.

Implementation Arrangements

Environmental management has an overarching influence on all sectors of natural resources management as such implementation of the NEP needs to be viewed from a broader sectoral scope. The Environmental Affairs Department within the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Natural Resources coordinates environmental programmes, oversees the impact assessment process, and monitors development plans in Malawi. Environmental Affairs also operates through its 28 Environmental District Offices across the country. Village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMC) are local institution responsible for implementation.

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