

Linking National Forest Programmes and Poverty Reduction Strategies

Malawi

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Acronyms

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	Gross domestic product
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IFMSLP	Improved Forest Management for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
NFP	National Forestry Programme
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSO	National Statistics Office

Summary of key recommendations

Overview

Approximately 52.4% of Malawi's population (6.3 million people) lives below the poverty line and 85% of all inhabitants reside in rural areas. The economy is dominated by agriculture which makes up about one-third of GDP and 80% of export revenues. Notwithstanding the heavy reliance of the rural population on forests and trees for fuelwood, timber, poles and traditional medicine, agriculture expansion and use of biomass to meet more than 90% of energy needs place significant pressure on these resources, especially on customary land. While recent data are not available, 1992 figures from the Forestry Department estimate forest cover to be close to 1.9 million hectares – down from 4.4 million hectares in 1972. This decline represents a loss of 2.8% or 125,000 hectares per year.

Population growth in Malawi is one of the highest in Southern Africa but estimated average life expectancy is about 39 years, largely due to HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Poverty is of central concern to government as it addresses the challenges associated with developing a market economy, improving education, tackling environmental problems, arresting the spread of HIV/AIDS, and tightening fiscal discipline.

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) is the country's current five-year plan (2006-2011) to achieve socio-economic growth and development. It stresses the importance of private sector investment but is silent on the role business should play in the country's development and on the contributions of forestry to national growth. The strategy recognizes that weak and uncoordinated management of natural resources is a major constraint, exacerbated by population growth, environmental degradation, and encroachment on forests and marginal lands. Key objectives for forestry include halting deforestation, improving productivity and value addition, increasing reforestation, strengthening enforcement, and introducing incentives for private sector participation.

The National Forest Policy of Malawi (1996) represents a departure from previous strategies which favoured forest protection rather than participatory management. In this regard, the policy provides the basis for communities to conserve and sustainably use forest resources, including trees on farms, to support livelihoods and reduce poverty. The document also notes the importance of involving the private sector in the utilization and management of forests and is explicit about the need for major institutional reform to bring about fundamental shifts in direction. The *Forestry Act 1997* embodies the spirit and intent of the National Forest Policy and contains provisions for the management of indigenous forests on customary and private land; the management of reserves and protected areas; and the establishment and maintenance of woodlots and plantations.

Malawi's National Forestry Programme (NFP) highlights the link between forest degradation and poverty, notes that women and children suffer the most from fuelwood shortages, and confirms a chronic imbalance in the supply and demand of forest products. It also notes that agricultural expansion is being made at the expense of forests, a situation that discourages smallholders from planting trees to diversify their sources of income and increase food security. The twelve strategies to achieve the stated NFP goal of "*sustainable management of forest goods and services for improved and equitable livelihoods*" reflect the key issues facing the sector and many of the priority actions identified are explicit about the impact their implementation will have on poverty reduction.

Strengthening the linkages between forestry and poverty alleviation

Forestry institutional framework

Although the Forestry Department owns and manages almost all industrial forest plantations and is responsible for implementing forest policy on customary forest land, privatization continues to be debated and remains an unresolved issue. Moreover, the Forestry Department has been slow to negotiate and enter into co-management agreements in forest reserves with local communities and the private sector despite the *Forest Act* calling for such action. Procedures are still highly bureaucratic, a situation which discourages wider participation in the sustainable management of forests as a means to reduce poverty.

Drawing on lessons learnt from pilot co-management schemes would provide the basis for expanding the approach to other forest reserves and protected areas in the country. In addition, experience from implementing concession agreements would help to determine the desirability and feasibility of intensifying privatization efforts. In this regard, the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi and the Privatization Commission should jointly assess the potential impact of transferring national forestlands to district assemblies and private investors so that informed decisions can be made on this issue.

If the Forestry Department were to develop a clear strategy which identified reforms to be undertaken, timeframes for implementation, and estimated costs, it would demonstrate its commitment to modernize and streamline operations. Such action would regain the support and confidence of international partners who have not actively supported the sector for more than 5 years.

Coordination within and across sectors

Frequent changes to Cabinet have resulted in the responsibility for forest management being moved to 6 different ministries in less than 13 years (November 1994 to May 2007). These reorganizations severely disrupt operations and hinder the Forestry Department's efforts to develop effective interventions to reduce poverty. They also make it difficult for authorities to engage in the development and implementation of policies and strategies in other jurisdictions which have an impact on the sector.

Although the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development oversees the implementation of the MGDS and its alignment with the budget, there is no central coordinating mechanism for sectors and stakeholders to exchange information and collaborate on poverty issues of common concern. With specific regard to the forest sector, the absence of a national forum is a serious obstacle to discussing and addressing issues collaboratively, including on ways to integrate forestry more broadly into national development policies and priorities. The NFP Forum performed this role as part of the Coordination Unit in the Department of Forestry but it has not been operational since the Unit moved to the Planning Department in 2002.

Given the critical importance of implementing the MGDS in a participatory and coordinated manner across ministries and with the range of stakeholders outside government, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development should be tasked – as a matter of priority – with establishing a high level committee whose main purpose is to ensure that policies and programmes to reduce poverty are consistent and coordinated across sectors. Highlighting the benefits of having such a mechanism in place would be a solid first step in convincing international partners to support this approach at the earliest opportunity.

Along the same lines, reinstating the national forum to implement Malawi's National Forestry Programme and using it to secure the involvement of a range of stakeholders both within and outside government would facilitate a multi-sector and collaborative strategy, including issues directly related to poverty reduction. This forum could identify common concerns, develop joint work plans, and lobby government and donors to adopt coordinated approaches in the development of policies pertaining to natural resources, ecotourism and co-management agreements.

Forestry contributions to gross domestic product

The contributions of forestry to GDP (an estimated 4%) are subsumed under agriculture and do not take into account the value of non-wood forest products, processed timber or the informal trade in fuel wood and charcoal. These omissions significantly underestimate the sector's importance to Malawi's economic development, including its potential to reduce poverty. The problem is compounded by the Forestry Department's reporting system which is not in a format that enables the National Statistics Office to use the information. It is also exacerbated by the absence of forestry officials in government discussions to improve national data collection and analysis – an exercise which is expected to result in major revisions to national accounts.

The Government's move to revise national account estimates provides an unprecedented opportunity for the Forestry Department to gather and present new data that demonstrates more accurately the sector's contributions to GDP. Since the Integrated Household Survey is one of the instruments that will be used, every effort should be made to ensure that future surveys capture vital information on the supply and use of forest resources. In the meantime, it would be important for the sector to collect, analyze and disseminate pertinent data to raise awareness of the economic, environmental, social and cultural value of forest resources to the country and, in doing so, build a convincing case to secure the support of decision-makers.

The memorandum of understanding between the Improved Forest Management for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (IFMSLP) and the Ministry of Agriculture, could serve as a model for the Forestry Department to forge similar alliances, including with the National Statistics Office, to formulate and insert forestry questions in annual welfare monitoring surveys and integrated household surveys which are conducted every five years. In addition, the Forestry Department's record keeping and reporting system need to be revised so that they are in a format which the National Statistics Office (NSO) can use. The proximity of the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi to the NSO (both located in Zomba) makes it a logical choice to lead efforts to increase collaboration in these and related areas.

Public Awareness and Communication

Because decision makers and the general public have limited access to forestry information, they are unaware of the sector's objectives to reduce poverty through sustainable forest management and many stakeholders do not know that the National Forest Policy of Malawi (1996) and the National Forestry Programme (2001) promote their closer involvement.

Efforts of the Forestry Department which have recently been made to improve knowledge, understanding and awareness of forestry documents should be further encouraged and supported by holding regular stakeholder meetings; organizing fairs such as the one which took place in Blantyre in May 2007 to promote forest enterprises; translating ten years of research findings into user-friendly material and manuals; and waging campaigns in the mass media to explain forest policy, legislation and regulations. Moreover, with the willingness of

the new political leadership in Malawi to address forestry issues, it is an opportune time for the Forestry Department, along with civil society, to arrange briefings for newly elected members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers on key forest management issues.

HIV/AIDS pandemic

The HIV and AIDS pandemic is significantly undermining Malawi's economic growth and efforts to reduce poverty. Valuable resources are being re-directed to care for the sick and to cover funeral expenses, irreplaceable knowledge and expertise is being lost, and hundreds of thousands of children and adults are left destitute. Since 2002, the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi has been studying the vulnerability of the forest sector to HIV/AIDS and on ways to mitigate their impact on those affected. At the district level, Forestry Officers are raising staff awareness, establishing linkages with AIDS Coordinating Committees, counseling workers and referring them to service providers. So far however, in the absence of an approved strategy, activities are ad-hoc and uncoordinated.

Once approved, Government and its partners should implement the HIV and AIDS strategy for the natural resources sector without delay, forging partnerships with the National AIDS Commission, NGOs, donors and communities to address priorities.

Other opportunities for forestry-based poverty alleviation

Monitoring and evaluation

Although Government put in place a rolling 3-year Medium-Term Expenditure Framework to help ministries better plan, senior management still tends to budget activities on a 12-month basis, submitting arbitrary estimates for the remaining period. A system to monitor and evaluate progress in implementing the MGDS has been developed and a steering committee meets quarterly to address emerging issues.

With specific regard to monitoring and evaluating day-to-day operations of the Forestry Department, high turnover in the planning unit has prevented moving beyond tracking specific projects. Thus, information on which to base management decisions is weak, as is the capacity to collect baseline data, set targets, or develop monitoring tools. Among other possibilities, there is scope to include forestry questions in annual welfare monitoring surveys and in integrated household surveys which are conducted every 5 years.

If a monitoring and evaluation system for the National Forestry Programme were established, stakeholders would be able to assess implementation, measure impact against objectives, including poverty reduction, and identify obstacles and constraints which hinder progress. The framework should provide for capturing activities at the household level – for example, walking distances to collect fuelwood – and should detail the data to be collected, the methods of collection and analysis, and the institutions involved.

Land Reform

Lack of secure tenure, coupled with open access on customary land, are key factors that drive deforestation in Malawi. Once all land is surveyed and registered as called for in the new land policy, open access will no longer be allowed, including in forested areas. Communities which register their village forests as customary estates can then use this land and the forest resources on it as collateral to obtain credit from financial institutions – an opportunity which was not available in the past.

If the Forestry Department and the Ministry of Lands strengthened their collaboration in the context of the land reform programme, forest issues would be considered more extensively than is now the case. As a starting point, the two authorities should agree on setting aside a certain proportion of land to remain or be converted to forests in any one region, district assembly or town, as is currently done on tobacco estates where 10% must be planted with trees. They should also gazette the forests that have been proposed as reserves as a matter of priority.

Enhancing the Role of Civil Society

The civil society movement has only recently emerged in Malawi but it is increasingly becoming involved in development work. Most non-governmental organizations focus on general issues related to the environment and natural resources rather than specifically on forestry. However, the Forest Governance Learning Group – a loose network of experts – convenes quarterly to discuss issues of concern. Members conduct some research and are engaged in advocacy work around the charcoal trade, small enterprise development, livelihoods and illegal activities.

If Government and the donor community strengthened their support to NGOs, these groups could better assist in the implementation of the National Forest Policy and the National Forestry Programme; more actively engage in reducing poverty through forestry based interventions; collate information gathered at the grassroots level from different areas of the country; and provide a sound analysis of data to enlighten policy formulation and implementation.

Participatory Forest Management

Although the *Forest Act (1997)* provides for co-management of forest reserves with local communities, few agreements have been signed to date even though experience elsewhere has shown that such arrangements can improve livelihoods by giving local residents secure access to forest services and products under clear and transparent conditions. Part of the reason for the slow progress is the absence of a strategy which specifies the objectives to be achieved and identifies where agreements should be put in place. Heavy bureaucratic processes are also preventing the swift conclusion of negotiations. By contrast, the shared management of wildlife resources among government, communities and the private sector is well advanced. However, experiences from these schemes are not often used to inform policy development and dialogue within forestry.

If the Forestry Department reconvened the National Working Group on Community-Based Forest Management which was established during the NFP planning phase, members could take stock of and apply lessons learnt in co-management not only in the sector but in other areas as well, such as national parks where schemes are fairly advanced.

Introduction

As part of a wider study in African countries, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) examined the extent to which the National Forestry Programme (NFP) is linked to the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). The main objectives of the study were to identify factors that fostered or hindered the establishment of effective linkages and to enhance the presence and influence of forestry in wider planning instruments with a view to strengthening financial, institutional and policy support for forestry-based poverty alleviation.

The team consisted of a forestry officer from FAO Rome, a staff member of the Forestry Research Institution of Malawi, and a national consultant from the Centre for Development Management in Lilongwe. They held discussions over a 2-week period with representatives from government and civil society. (See annex 2 for the list of persons met.) The timing of the exercise coincided with a national workshop of stakeholders to review and discuss a draft strategy to combat HIV/AIDS in Malawi's forestry and fisheries sectors. This session brought together more than 30 participants from around the country and the team took advantage of their presence to gather additional information pertinent to the study and to further highlight the importance of forestry in preventing and mitigating the impacts of the epidemic on infected people and affected households.

1. Policy processes related to forestry and poverty

1.0 Overview

Malawi is a landlocked country which, in 2006, was approved for relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries programme. Approximately 52.4% (6.3 million people) of its population lives below the poverty line and 85% of the estimated 12 million inhabitants reside in rural areas. The economy is characterized by (i) a high dependence on agriculture – about one-third of GDP and 80% of export revenues; (ii) a weak industrial base; (iii) an under-developed service sector (iv) and weak linkages within and across sectors. Notwithstanding the heavy reliance of the rural population on forests and trees for fuelwood, timber, poles and traditional medicine, the importance of agriculture for livelihoods and exports places significant pressure on these resources, especially on customary land.

Although population growth in Malawi is one of the highest in Southern Africa, estimated average life expectancy is about 39 years, largely due to HIV/AIDS and other diseases. When the current government assumed power in May 2004, the mean per capita income was pegged at US\$170. Poverty, therefore, is of central concern as authorities attempt to address the challenges associated with developing a market economy, improving education, tackling environmental problems, arresting the spread of HIV/AIDS, and tightening fiscal discipline.

While about one third of the country is considered forested, these resources are declining at a rapid rate due to agricultural expansion, excessive use of biomass to meet more than 90% of energy needs, and activities such as tobacco curing and brick making which consume enormous amounts of wood. While recent data on forest resources and deforestation are not available, 1992 figures from the Forestry Department estimate forest cover to be close to 1.9 million hectares – down from 4.4 million hectares in 1972. This decline represents a loss of 2.8% or 125,000 hectares per year.

1.1 Poverty reduction strategies and forestry

The Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (April 2002) considered natural resources, along with manufacturing, tourism and small-scale mining, as key elements to diversify agriculture and spur economic growth. With specific regard to forests, goals included decentralization and community-based management as a means to promote sustainable use and provide an additional source of off-farm income. Natural resources were also considered as part of the environment which was one of four cross-cutting issues – the others being HIV/AIDS, gender, and science and technology. The action plan in annex 1 of the strategy outlines objectives, strategies and activities in order of priority and identifies lead institutions, along with collaborators. The Forestry Department of the then Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs is listed as the office of primary interest for the sustainable utilization of forest resources. Nowhere else is it listed in the annex, either as stakeholder in other areas directly related to forest management, such as wildlife and tourism, or as partner in efforts to achieve environmental sustainability.

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) is the country's current five-year plan (2006-2011) to achieve socio-economic growth and development. It builds on the Malawi Economic Growth Strategy (July 2004) and replaces the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy which expired in 2004. The MGDS stresses the importance of private sector investment but is silent on the role business should play in the country's development and on the contributions of forestry to national growth.

The MGDS also takes into account the lessons learned from the limited impact which the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper had with regard to improving livelihoods and food security of poor and vulnerable groups. It identifies six priority areas to reduce poverty: agriculture and food security, irrigation and water development; the development of transport infrastructure; energy generation and supply; integrated rural development; prevention and management of nutrition disorders, HIV and AIDS. In addition, the document highlights the need to address issues of a more general nature related to health, education, gender, environment, governance, and the protection of its most vulnerable citizens.

The MGDS framework is divided into six themes: sustainable economic growth which covers the conservation of natural resources (fisheries, forestry and the environment); social protection; social development; infrastructure development; good governance and HIV/AIDS. The strategy recognizes that weak and uncoordinated management of natural resources is a major constraint in Malawi, exacerbated by population growth, environmental degradation, and encroachment on forests and marginal lands. Key objectives for forestry include halting deforestation, improving productivity and value addition, increasing reforestation, strengthening enforcement, and introducing incentives for private sector participation.

The Government approved a decentralization policy in the late 1990s which puts districts in charge of planning and managing local development. As such, they are an important entry point for integrating forestry into broader goals and strategies. Donors are contributing toward a local development fund from which sectors can draw resources for their programmes, based on priorities outlined in district plans. If forestry officers are to access these funds, they will have to demonstrate how the sector helps to reduce poverty and have the necessary skills to make this happen.

1.2 Poverty dimensions in forest policy, legislation and programmes

The National Forest Policy of Malawi, adopted in 1996, represents a departure from previous strategies which favoured forest protection rather than participatory management. In this regard, the policy provides the basis for communities to conserve and sustainably use forest resources, including trees on farms, to support their livelihoods and achieve the government's commitment to reduce poverty. The policy also recognizes the need to involve the private sector, not only in the utilization of forests, but in their management as well. Furthermore, the document is explicit about the need for major institutional reform to bring about these fundamental shifts in direction. When gaps were identified during the implementation of the National Forest Policy, the government issued a supplement in July 2003 to expand on aspects related to community based forest management, including access to resources, benefit sharing, the role of traditional leaders, and decentralization.

The *Forestry Act 1997* replaces the one dating back to 1942 which was narrow in scope and focused on control of resources. The newer legislation embodies the spirit and intent of the National Forest Policy, including the social and economic welfare of Malawians. Among other clauses, it contains provisions for the management of indigenous forests on customary and private land; the management of reserves and protected areas; and the establishment and maintenance of woodlots and plantations.

Malawi's National Forestry Programme (NFP) was developed through a nation-wide consultative process and was launched by the former President in 2001 as a framework for enhancing the management of forests and trees, alleviating poverty, and improving livelihoods. It highlights the link between forest degradation and poverty, notes that women and children suffer the most from fuelwood shortages, and confirms a chronic imbalance in the supply and demand of forest products. It also notes that agricultural expansion is being made at the expense of forests, a situation that discourages smallholders from planting trees to diversify their sources of income and increase food security.

The twelve strategies to achieve the stated NFP goal of “*sustainable management of forest goods and services for improved and equitable livelihoods*” reflect the key issues facing the sector and many of the priority actions identified are explicit about the impact that their implementation will have on poverty reduction. The NFP also makes it clear that the forest sector alone cannot tackle poverty but must play its part in pulling other stakeholders together. In this regard, the document provides the Forestry Department with a solid framework for collaborating with partners, including central government authorities.

1.3 Opportunities for strengthening linkages between forestry and improved livelihoods

1.3.1 Forestry institutional framework

The Forestry Department owns and manages almost all industrial forest plantations and is responsible for implementing forest policy on customary forest land. Thus, it is a much bigger player in the sector than private business. On customary land, local leaders are involved in forest management through Village Natural Resources Management Committees.

The pros and cons of privatizing Malawi's forest reserves and plantations, particularly national forests, continue to be debated in the country. Proponents believe that government

ownership overly restricts local access to resources and to opportunities for economic development. They are also of the view that privatization would improve efficiency, promote sustainable management of resources, and enhance financial benefits to local communities. Opponents contend that government ownership is the best means for protecting varied and fragile ecosystems, given the private sector's primary interest in development and profits which sometimes conflict with the principles and goals of sound management.

Based on preliminary research, the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi predicts that, in the short term, privatization would yield small one-time gains to the government treasury and benefits to private management firms and to communities where financial incentives induced commercial expansion of forest based activities. It would also likely result in increased tax burdens and economic contraction in areas where current state employment and expenditure levels exceed those in the private sector once the land is transferred. Another immediate impact might be the refusal of private investors and district assemblies to bid on national forestlands that are important for environmental protection but of limited commercial value.

The most critical challenge facing forestry administration and management in Malawi is bringing about the policy and institutional reforms required to respond to today's imperatives, including the privatization of firewood reserves and of timber forest plantations which were largely established for commercial purposes. A second issue is the slow pace of the Forestry Department to negotiate and enter into co-management agreements in forest reserves despite the *Forest Act* calling for such action. Procedures are still highly bureaucratic, a situation that reinforces the notion that the resources belong to Government and discourages communities from participating in their sustainable management as a means to reduce poverty. As long as the *status quo* is maintained, donors who have not supported the sector for the last five years are not likely to re-engage nor will the private sector be interested in getting more involved.

The Forestry Management Board which is a multi-sector body mandated under the *Forest Act* to provide advice to the Minister does not meet regularly due to limited resources and is not able to effectively carry out its mandate. Thus, it is prevented from playing an important role in raising forestry's presence and influence in poverty reduction policies and programmes. The *Forest Act* also provided for the establishment of a fund to manage and develop forestry in the country but Government later discontinued it due to alleged abuses and changes in public financial management policies which did not allow centers to retain and use part of the revenue they collect.

Priority actions

If the Forestry Department were to develop a clear strategy which identified reforms to be undertaken, timeframes for implementation, and estimated costs, it would demonstrate its commitment to modernize operations and thus pave the way for the sector to assume its rightful place in the broader policy spectrum. Such action would regain the support and confidence of international partners, including to revive the multi-sectoral Forestry Management Board.

In addition, the documentation and dissemination of experiences and lessons learnt from the co-management schemes which were piloted in the Chimaliro and Liwonde forest reserves would provide practical guidance when expanding these types of arrangements to other forest reserves and protected areas in the country. By the same token, knowledge gained from implementing concession agreements which the Government signed with Wood Industries Company and Raiply Malawi Limited for plantations in Chikangawa, Mulanje and Zomba would help to determine the desirability and feasibility of intensifying privatization efforts. In this regard, the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi and the Privatization Commission

should work together to collect data and assess the potential impact of transferring national forestlands to district assemblies and private investors so that informed decisions can be made on this issue.

If more stringent accounting procedures were put in place, in accordance with the *Finance and Audit Act*, it would be possible to argue for the re-instatement of the Forest Development and Management Fund so that the Forestry Department could have more resources and administrative capacity to function, for example to provide extension services to communities which rely on forests and trees on farms to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods.

1.3.2 Coordination within and across sectors

The Department of Environmental Affairs of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (formerly of the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Natural Resources) coordinates all activities related to the environment and natural resources. It routinely contracts an umbrella organization – the Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment to secure the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in addressing issues.

Within the public sector, coordination among departments in the same ministry occurs on a regular basis. For example, Directors in the then Ministry of Mines, Energy and Natural Resources met every month or two and discussions were usually chaired by the Principal Secretary. They talked about administrative issues, exchanged information on activities, challenges and successes in their respective departments, and identified opportunities for developing and implementing joint initiatives. However, collaboration across government ministries is weak even when mandates overlap or are similar.

Government has made frequent changes to Cabinet over the years, disrupting programmes and seriously hindering efforts to develop forestry interventions to reduce poverty. Table 1 below shows that forestry departments were subject to re-organization 7 times since 1985.

Table 1

MINISTRY	DEPARTMENT	YEAR
Ministry of Energy and Mining	Energy, Mining and Forestry	May 2007
Ministry of Mines, Energy and Natural Resources	Forestry, Fisheries, Energy, Mines and Environmental Affairs	January 2007
Ministry of Mines, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs	Forestry, Fisheries, Environment, Energy, Mines & Geological Surveys	2004
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs	Forestry, Fisheries, Environment, Geological Surveys, Mines, Energy Studies Unit	July 1999
Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Environmental Affairs	Forestry, Fisheries and Environmental Affairs	March 1998
Ministry of Natural Resources	Forestry, Fisheries, Parks and Wildlife	November 1994
Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources	Forestry, Mines, Parks and Wildlife	1985

Although the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development oversees the implementation of the MGDS and its alignment with the budget, there is no central coordinating mechanism for sectors and stakeholders to exchange information and collaborate on poverty issues of common concern. With specific regard to the forest sector, the absence of a national forum is a serious obstacle to discussing and addressing issues collaboratively among government, NGOs and donors, including on ways to integrate forestry more broadly into national development policies and priorities in central agencies and across sectors. The NFP Forum

performed this role as part of the Coordination Unit in the Department of Forestry but it has not been operational since the Unit moved to the Planning Department in 2002. With assistance from the National Forest Programme Facility, there would be another opportunity to revive the forum.

Moreover, the Forestry Department is often absent when policies and strategies which have an impact on the sector are developed and implemented by other jurisdictions – a situation which creates confusion and conflict. For example, agricultural policies that favour increasing the area to grow crops rather than improving productivity on existing land present a significant threat to forests. Negative impacts are also felt from ill-conceived policies on water, housing, roads, and infrastructure development which are designed to reduce poverty yet fail to take into account their effect on other sectors. Without independent impact assessments and processes to harmonize policies, the forestry sector could well lose out to such policies, especially given that coordination is already weak.

Donors, for their part, hold regular consultations among themselves and coordinate activities through a number of mechanisms such as the Common Approach to Budget Support, the Donor Assistance Group on Gender, and the Pool Donors for HIV and AIDS.

Priority actions

Given the critical importance of implementing the MGDS in a participatory and coordinated manner across ministries and with the range of stakeholders outside government, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development should be tasked – as a matter of priority – with establishing a high level committee whose main purpose is to ensure that policies and programmes to reduce poverty are consistent across sectors and are developed and implemented in a coordinated manner. Building a case which highlights the benefits of having such a mechanism in place would be a solid first step in convincing international partners to support this effort at the earliest opportunity.

Along the same lines, reinstating the national forum to implement Malawi's National Forestry Programme and using it to secure the involvement of a range of stakeholders within and outside government would facilitate a multi-sector and collaborative strategy to address forest issues, including those directly related to poverty reduction. This forum could develop joint work plans and lobby government and donors to adopt coordinated approaches when developing policies pertaining to natural resources, ecotourism and co-management agreements.

1.3.3 Forestry contributions to gross domestic product

Forests and trees outside forests supply about 93% of the country's energy needs, provide timber and poles for construction and industrial use, and are a source of non-wood forest products such as mushrooms and edible wild fruits. They also generate income, support wildlife and biodiversity, and provide environmental and recreational services. However, the sector's contribution to Malawi's gross domestic product (GDP), estimated at only around 4%, is neither well known nor appreciated.

Currently, the Forestry Department's reporting system is not in a format that enables the National Statistics Office (NSO) to use the information it gathers. Moreover, the department is not participating in current government discussions to improve national data collection and analysis, especially in sectors which are paramount to the country's development. For

example, NSO is conducting a National Agriculture Census and Livestock which will become the most reliable source of statistics on the sector. Results are expected to bring about significant revisions to national accounts – quite possibly changing agriculture's contributions to GDP.

The contributions of forestry to GDP are subsumed under agriculture and do not take into account the value of non-wood forest products, processed timber or the informal trade in fuel wood and charcoal. Thus, these omissions significantly underestimate the sector's importance to Malawi's economic development, including its potential to further reduce poverty. Because the government considers agriculture a top priority, the Department of Forestry could benefit substantially by collaborating more closely with the Ministry of Agriculture to maximize the efficient use of limited financial and human resources.

The Improved Forest Management for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (IFMSLP) – funded by the European Commission to enhance governance, service delivery, and multi-stakeholder involvement at the district level – is collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to harmonize monitoring systems. So far, two indicators have been integrated into the Food Security and Nutritional Policy (percentage of households utilizing planted trees and percentage of households involved in forest-based enterprises sourced from land under approved legal arrangement). The IFMSLP is also seeking to have other forestry indicators recognized which are already included in the policy and are related to the goals of the project such as the percentage of households that adopt irreversible coping mechanism during food shortages (for example, cutting firewood and burning charcoal), the percentage of households that adopt recommended technologies, including agro-forestry technologies, and the percentage increase in total food production, including under agro-forestry systems.

Priority actions

The Government's move to revise national account estimates provides an unprecedented opportunity for the Forestry Department to gather and present new data that demonstrates more accurately the sector's contributions to GDP. Since the Integrated Household Survey is one of the instruments that will be used in this exercise, every effort should be made to ensure that future surveys capture vital information on the supply and use of forest resources.

Until the system of national accounts credits all forestry transactions back to the sector, including those related to non-wood forest products, the Forestry Department and other stakeholders would do well to use every opportunity to raise awareness of the economic, environmental, social and cultural importance of forest resources to Malawi and its citizens. In this regard, a concerted effort to collect, analyze and disseminate pertinent data will help to build a convincing case and increase the sector's profile, including among decision-makers, to enhance support.

The memorandum of understanding between the IFMSLP and the Ministry of Agriculture, could serve as a model for the Forestry Department to forge similar alliances, including with the National Statistics Office to formulate and insert forestry questions in annual welfare monitoring surveys and integrated household surveys conducted every five years. In addition, the Forestry Department's record keeping and reporting system need to be revised so that they are in a format which the National Statistics Office can use. The proximity of the Forestry

Research Institute of Malawi to the NSO (both located in Zomba) makes it a logical choice to lead efforts to increase collaboration in these and other areas.

1.3.4 Public Awareness and Communication

Because decision makers and the general public have limited access to forestry information, they neither appreciate nor recognize the sector's linkages to poverty alleviation. They are also unaware of the sector's objectives to reduce poverty through the sustainable management of forest resources, as expressed in the 1996 Forestry Policy. Many stakeholders also do not know that the National Forest Policy of Malawi (1996) and the National Forestry Programme (2001) promote their increased involvement. While the NFP involved a range of players when it was formulated, consultations could not continue after donor funding terminated. However, the Improved Forest Management for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme is now attempting to revive regular dialogue with NGOs. Renewed activity under the agreement between the Forestry Department and the National Forest Programme Facility presents an additional opportunity to involve a broader segment of society in the national forest agenda.

Priority actions

Efforts of the Forestry Department which have recently been made to improve knowledge, understanding and awareness of forestry issues and documents should be further encouraged and supported, including holding regular stakeholder meetings; organizing fairs such as the one which took place in Blantyre in May 2007 to promote forest enterprises; translating ten years of research findings into user-friendly material and manuals; and waging campaigns in the mass media to explain forest policy, legislation and regulations. Assistance from the Facility to conduct these and other outreach activities would raise the profile of forestry and be instrumental in securing greater stakeholder involvement in the sector.

The collection of additional and better data on forestry, in collaboration with NSO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, will provide evidence the Department needs to secure a greater place for the sector in broader discussions. In this regard, the Department would benefit by building the capacity of the Forestry Research Institute to conduct research on the social aspects of forestry, in addition to the traditional technical areas.

The willingness of the new political leadership in Malawi to address forestry issues makes it an opportune time for the Forestry Department, along with civil society, to arrange briefings for newly elected members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers on key forest management issues in the country. Such meetings will increase the visibility of forestry and the role that the sector has in economic development.

1.3.5 HIV/AIDS pandemic

In 2003, the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi explored the role of forest resources in responding to the needs of households affected by chronic adult illness and/or loss of a prime-age adult. Findings indicated that the harvest and sale of forest products were important both in terms of treatment and in mitigating the economic impacts from the death of a breadwinner. During symptomatic stages of HIV infection, 60% of the households relied on forest products to alleviate symptoms. About 17% reported that they harvested and sold forest products (primarily firewood) to cover medical expenses, including admission fees, medicine, and transport to urban hospitals. The same study reported that, following the death of a breadwinner, 23% of households increased the harvesting of forest products both for their

own consumption (foodstuffs) and for sale (firewood, charcoal, thatch grass, mushrooms, and fruits). Also, the loss of a breadwinner appears to increase reliance on forests in the longer-term. Households which experienced the death of a prime-age adult in the previous three years were five times more likely to have increased collection of firewood than those which had not lost a breadwinner. Since forests provide a “free” source of capital, the harvest of additional firewood to sell suggests that households are adopting this strategy to cope with worsening poverty and food insecurity.

Without a doubt, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is undermining Malawi’s economic growth and its efforts to reduce poverty. Valuable resources are being re-directed to care for the sick and to cover funeral expenses, irreplaceable human capital in the form of knowledge and expertise is being lost, and hundreds of thousands of children and adults are left destitute. In spite of the catastrophic scale of the crisis, evidence shows that the prevalence of HIV in adults has stabilized over the past 5-7 years at about 14%. The government has established a National AIDS Commission to serve as the focal point for HIV/AIDS interventions and increased the number of patients receiving anti-retroviral treatment from 6,000 in 2004 to 100,000 in April 2007 – a figure which represents about 40% of those in need and is in line with national targets. Government also allocates 2% of other recurrent transactions for HIV/AIDS activities oriented to staff.

In 2004, the National AIDS Commission invited ministries and departments to develop proposals to combat HIV and AIDS in the workplace. As a result, the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Natural Resources applied for and received funding to implement a programme. In addition to the studies conducted by the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi, forestry officers at the district level are raising staff awareness, establishing linkages with AIDS Coordinating Committees, counseling workers and referring them to service providers. So far however, in the absence of an approved strategy, activities are ad-hoc and uncoordinated.

Box 1. Integrating forestry issues across jurisdictions – experiences from the health sector

HIV and Aids issues were once a monopoly of the health sector but are now being addressed across departments and ministries in the same way as gender, transparency, accountability and good governance. Because the Ministry of Health was able to convince decision-makers of the need for a comprehensive strategy that was not confined to the health sector alone, ten times more money was made available to fund HIV and AIDS interventions than the entire Department of Forestry received in a month. Greater response to the pandemic was made possible through a government-led approach which spanned across sectors and consisted of:

- building long-term partnerships with development agencies
- increasing donor and public financing
- establishing the National AIDS Commission to enhance coordination and monitoring
- waging mass media campaigns on the impact of HIV/AIDS and the need for action
- elaborating a collaborative work programme
- putting in place a supportive institutional structure
- developing processes for resolving management issues and for reviewing performance against jointly agreed milestones and targets.

Priority actions

Using a similar approach as the one used by the Ministry of Health (see Box 1) to build strategic partnerships, mobilize resources, and improve programme coordination, monitoring and evaluation, the Forestry Department would significantly increase the opportunities to address forestry issues across relevant jurisdictions and, in doing so, influence decisions other sectors make which affect the sustainable management of forest resources. Such action would raise the profile and influence of forestry across the country, especially in terms of its importance in reducing poverty.

Once approved, Government and its partners should make every attempt to implement the HIV and AIDS strategy for the natural resources sector without delay, forging partnerships with the National AIDS Commission, NGOs, donors and communities to address identified priorities.

Sector Level and Other Opportunities

1.3.6 Monitoring and evaluation

Although Government put in place a rolling 3-year Medium-Term Expenditure Framework to help ministries better plan, senior management still tends to budget activities only for the following 12 months, while submitting arbitrary estimates for the remaining period. A system to monitor and evaluate progress in implementing the MGDS has also been developed and the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development convenes quarterly meetings of a steering committee to address emerging issues.

Since Government is changing its fiscal year to run with the calendar, the first review of the MGDS will cover an 18-month period, i.e., from July 2006 until December 2007. Thus, ministries were able to submit new indicators to the technical committee on which to assess performance. Members were scheduled to meet in June 2007 and departmental planning units (not just at the ministry level) were invited.

In terms of monitoring and evaluating day-to-day operations of the Department of Forestry, the World Bank funded efforts to mount a system in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, high turnover in the planning team since that time has prevented moving beyond tracking progress of specific projects. Thus, information on which to base management decisions is weak, as is the capacity to collect baseline data, set targets, or develop monitoring tools.

Although quantitative indicators can be interpreted more easily and objectively – important considerations when analyzing trends over time – qualitative assessments also provide valuable information. Among other possibilities, NSO indicated there is scope to include forestry questions in annual welfare monitoring surveys and in integrated household surveys which are conducted every 5 years. Although the cost of developing a stand-alone questionnaire may be prohibitive, those associated with adding key questions to current instruments would be minimal.

Priority actions

The timing is ideal for the Department of Forestry to make significant headway in terms of demonstrating the sector's importance to the national economy and livelihoods by developing indicators and survey questions that would measure its contributions in these areas. The National Statistics Office has indicated its willingness to collaborate in this regard and the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi has the expertise to take the lead. If the sector fails to

act now, it will lose the opportunity to build its case at least for another five years until the next MGDS is prepared.

The establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system for the National Forestry Programme would allow stakeholders to assess implementation, measure impact against objectives, including poverty reduction, and identify obstacles and constraints which hinder progress. The framework should provide for capturing activities at the household level – for example, walking distances to collect fuelwood – and should detail the data to be collected, the methods of collection and analysis, and the institutions involved.

1.3.7 Land Reform

Lack of secure tenure, coupled with open access on customary land, are key factors that drive deforestation in Malawi. The new land policy which the Government adopted in 2001 calls for all land to be surveyed and registered. Once this task is completed, open access will no longer be allowed, including in forested areas. Instead, communities must register village forests as customary estates in order to receive title deeds. They can then use this land and the forest resources on it as collateral to obtain credit from financial institutions, an opportunity which was not available in the past. A pilot project in 3 districts in southern Malawi has the Government negotiating with willing owners to purchase land to resettle landless poor people who are then given 2 hectares to cultivate. The project also has a farm development fund for recipients to build homes and access new farming methods, including agro-forestry.

Priority Actions

If the Forestry Department and the Ministry of Lands strengthened their collaboration in the context of the land reform programme, forest issues would be considered more extensively than is now the case. By reaching agreement on a certain proportion of land to remain or be converted to forests in any one region, district assembly or town – as is currently done on tobacco estates where 10% must be planted with trees – forest products and services would be available in greater quantities to respond to the needs of poor people. The two authorities should also move with all due haste to gazette the forests that have been proposed as reserves in order to maintain the benefits that these resources provide to the environment and to communities who rely on them.

1.3.8 Enhancing the Role of Civil Society

Civil society organizations have only recently emerged in Malawi but the movement is becoming increasingly involved in development work. Most non-governmental organizations focus on general issues related to the environment and natural resources rather than on forestry *per se*. However, the Forest Governance Learning Group – a loose network of experts – convenes quarterly to discuss issues of concern. Members conduct some research and are engaged in advocacy work around the charcoal trade, small enterprise development, livelihoods and illegal activities. The Council for Non-governmental Organizations coordinates all NGOs in the country while the Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment coordinates those working on the environment and natural resources.

In December 2005, NGOs concerned with natural resources petitioned the government to explain why approved policies, legislation and guidelines on the environment and natural resources were not being implemented. The NGOs used research findings to highlight the

causes and impacts of over-fishing, deforestation, soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, land degradation, poaching and encroachment.

Priority actions

If Government and the donor community, including the National Forest Programme Facility, strengthened their support to NGOs, these groups could better assist in the implementation of the National Forest Policy and the National Forestry Programme; more actively engage in reducing poverty through forestry based interventions; collate information gathered at the grassroots level from different areas of the country; and provide a sound analysis of data to enlighten policy formulation and implementation.

1.3.9 Participatory Forest Management

Although the *Forest Act* (1997) provides for co-management of forest reserves with local communities, few agreements have been signed to date even though experience elsewhere has shown that such arrangements can improve livelihoods by giving local residents secure access to forest services and products under clear and transparent conditions. Part of the reason for the slow progress is the absence of an implementation strategy which specifies the objectives to be achieved and identifies where agreements should be put in place. Heavy bureaucratic processes are also preventing the swift conclusion of negotiations.

By contrast, the shared management of wildlife resources among government, communities and the private sector is well advanced. However, experiences and lessons learned from these schemes are not often being used to inform policy development and dialogue within the forestry sector.

Notwithstanding the above, the Improved Forest Management for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme noted earlier, is helping to better the lives of people in forest dependent communities through the development and implementation of sustainable management strategies in forest reserves and village forest areas on customary land. Because those who invest their time and resources in activities under the programme are the actual beneficiaries, the availability of forest products and services is expected to continue on a long-term basis.

Priority actions

If the Forestry Department reconvened the National Working Group on Community-Based Forest Management which was established during the NFP planning phase, members could take stock of lessons learnt in co-management not only in the forestry sector but in other areas such as national parks where schemes are fairly advanced. The Forestry Research Institute of Malawi, the Forest Governance Learning Group, the IFMSP and Community Partnership for Sustainable Resource Management could be asked to collaboratively undertake this task, possibly with the assistance of the National Forest Programme Facility which accords high importance to open and participatory processes.

2. Next Steps

The series of frequent government re-organizations have diverted efforts and resources away from programme implementation and service delivery, in addition to creating uncertainty in an administration already suffering from scarce human and financial capital. Although the

Forestry Department remains with the same ministry subsequent to the latest shuffle in May 2007, this responsibility is not reflected in the change in name to the Ministry of Energy and Mining. The omission further lowers the sector's profile not only within the government hierarchy but also in the eyes of the public at large and provides yet another reason for the Forestry Department to forge stronger partnerships with relevant NGOs and line ministries, in addition to central institutions: the *Ministry of Economic Planning and Development* which coordinates the preparation, monitoring and implementation of the MGDS; the *Ministry of Finance* which leads the budget allocation process; and the *National Statistics Office* which is in charge of data collection, analysis and dissemination.

With assistance from the National Forest Programme Facility, the Forestry Department and civil society organizations would be able to strengthen their collaboration to reduce poverty through forestry based interventions and increase awareness of the sector's contributions in this regard.

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Annex 1: List of persons met

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Mazlan Jusoh, FAO Representative in Malawi
George Mvula, Deputy Emergency Coordinator
Terri Ballard, Nutrition Advisor (on mission from Rome)

Department of Forestry

John Ngalande, Deputy Director
Thomas Makhamgra, Assistant Director
Nyuma Mughogho, Assistant Director
Alfred Louis Butao, Senior Assistant, human Resources Management
Teddy Kamoto, Principal Forestry Officer
Kasizwe Chirambo, Principal Forestry Officer (Monitoring and Evaluation)
William Mitembe, Principal Forestry Officer (Planning)
Edward Samu, Principal Accountant
Charles Gondwe, Publicity Officer

Ministry of Finance

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D. Kayambazinthu, Deputy Director

Improved Forestry for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme

Peter McCarter, Team leader
Mutemwe Kavalo, Imprest Accounting Officer

Department of Environmental Affairs

Raphael P. Kabwaza, Director

Department of Energy

Harry Chitenje, Deputy Director

Department of Lands

David Chikoti

National AIDS Commission

Robert Phiri

Department of Fisheries

Chikondi Pasani, Fisheries Officer

Ministry of Information and Tourism

Isaac D. Katopola, Deputy Director of Tourism (Planning & Development)

Department of Wildlife and National Parks

Ramosh Jiah, Deputy Director (Education & Extension)
Phineas Mbota, Assistant Director (Education & Extension)

Ministry of Economic Planning & Development
Ben Botolo, Director

Ministry of Child Welfare & Community Development (Planning)
Mr. Mphande, Director

Ministry of Agriculture
F. L. Kayuni, Agriculture Extension Officer

World Fish Centre
Joseph Nagoli, Fisheries Officer

National Statistics Office
Charles Machinjili, Commissioner
Mercy Kanyuka, Deputy Commissioner
Mr. Kanyanda, Economic Statistician
Mr. Gondwe, Economic Statistician

Local Government, including District Assembly
Ernest Kadzokoya, District AIDS Coordinator
Mr. Kambala, District Commissioner – Zomba
Chief Malemia, Traditional Leader

United Nations Development Programme
Etta M'mangisa, Programme Manager

European Union
Raniero Leto, First Secretary and Head of Rural Development and Food Security

Royal Norwegian Embassy (NORAD)
Leif Sauvik, Counsellor-Deputy Head of Mission

Department for International Development, United Kingdom
Jimmy Kawaye, Programme Officer

Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment
Ulemu Munthali, Programme coordinator

CARE Malawi
Francis Lwanda, Programme Manager

World Vision Malawi
Ethel Kapyepye, Co-ordinator

National Herbarium & Botanical Gardens of Malawi
Zacharia Magombo, Deputy General Manager

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