

**Centre for Environmental
Policy and Advocacy**

PRESS RELEASE

Appeal to expedite revision of the Environment Management Act, 1996

Malawi continues to experience severe degradation of the environment and natural resources as a result of poor governance and stewardship. Over the recent decades there has been extensive deforestation causing massive soil erosion, decline in soil fertility, extensive siltation, frequent floods, surface and ground water depletion and pollution, proliferation of invasive waterweeds and loss of biodiversity, and thus loss of ecosystem goods critical to livelihoods. This is having far-reaching consequences including frequent power blackouts that obviously impact on performance in the country's economy and household energy needs and sustainable agricultural production.

To address the above challenges, some forward thinking was initiated in 2004 to revise the framework legislation governing the environment in the country, the Environment Management Act

The Environment Management Act 1996 gives responsibility for coordination and direction in the management of the environment to the Environmental Affairs Department within the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Environment. This department is one of the least funded and staffed departments of Government and is unable to provide sufficient leadership and voice to ensure compliance with environment and natural resources policy and legislation compared to other departments perceived to be money makers.

Environment and natural resources sector is regulated by a number of policies and legislation specifically dealing with forestry, fisheries, water, agriculture, land, mining, energy and wildlife. However, many of these policies and legislation suffer from perennial lack of implementation and poor coordination leading to inconsistent decision making and noncompliance. For instance, one department may say, "*do not cultivate along river banks and you must plant trees therein*", yet another department will advise, especially with increased incidences of dry spells and changes in rainfall patterns, "*promote winter or "dimba" cultivation and*

and the Environment among its nine priorities within priorities; and numerous advocacy efforts by civil society; Government has failed and neglected to enact the Environment Management Bill.

The foregoing, notwithstanding, environment and natural resources remain the bedrock of national wealth. Presently, the country needs to increase the usage of chemical fertilizers as a result of declining soil fertility thereby necessitating astronomical subsidies which divert funds from essential services such as health, education and infrastructure. In addition, the country has to spend huge sums of money to repair damaged infrastructure resulting from environmental degradation. A recent report by Malawi Poverty Environment Initiative: Economic Study 2010 commissioned by United Nations Development Programme indicates that Malawi would be richer by MK26.6 billion (US\$191 million) each year, going by the 2007 prices, if soil, forest, fishery and wildlife resources were used sustainably. This is equivalent to giving up 5.3% of GDP each year and more than the total funding allocated to the education sector and to the health sector in the 2009 National Budget.

In addition, despite the clear connection between environment and natural resources on one hand, and poverty reduction, economic growth and development on the other hand, official budgetary allocation to Environmental Affairs Department and government prioritization of programmes continue to reflect environment as a side show and environmental institutions no more than a nuisance.

The draft Environment Management Bill seeks to provide sufficient political and legal authority and voice to the coordinating institution so that it can compel compliance by various environment and natural resources management sector departments. The draft Bill further seeks to address inconsistencies, gaps and conflicts within environment and natural resources management policies and legislation so as to streamline decision making and ensure synergy. An Environmental Protection Authority proposed and agreed to by all stakeholders under the draft Bill would go a long way to improve environmental governance and stewardship. We believe that it is crucial for Government to facilitate the technical and political clearance of the draft Environment Management Bill so that it can be enacted and implemented. In particular, Government must budget sufficient resources for purposes of ensuring that the various provisions in the new Act are funded and functional to effectively contribute to achieving national development goals and in accordance with the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy.

Executive Director

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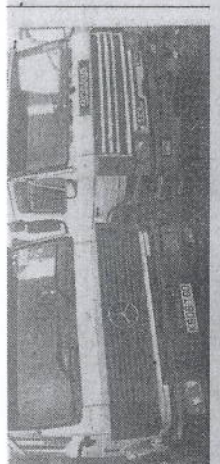
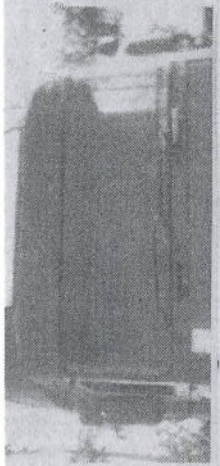
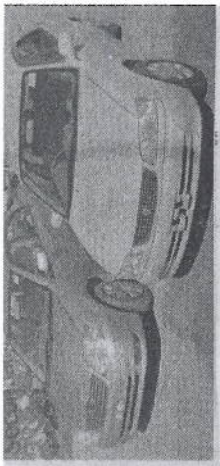
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