

BY THOKOZANI CHENJEZI

ONE of the country's prominent environmentalists has said Malawi needs more research on ecosystem health if the country is to be guided properly on management and sustainable utilisation of natural resources.

Professor Sosten Chiotha said time has come for Malawi to realise that neglecting environmental management has a cost through amplification of natural disasters.

In an interview Tuesday, Chiotha said the impacts of climate change are made worse by environmental degradation which in turn is undermining food security.

"What is needed is to strengthen research and routine monitoring of ecosystem health of key ecosystems and hence the need

for funding environmental research and monitoring on a regular basis," Chiotha said.

He added that research will guide proper management and sustainable utilisation of natural resources and safeguard the ecosystem services that are essential for the livelihoods of Malawians.

Chiotha also said Malawi is still struggling with soil fertility challenges despite the problem being identified in the first Development Plan for Malawi (1962-1965).

He said the Plan drew attention to ten challenges of which three relate to soil fertility, namely failure to use farmyard manure, non-application of chemical fertilizers and lack of appreciation of the benefits of crop rotation.

"Other challenges are small land holding sizes and scarcity of agricultural credits. These challenges persist today and in some cases have become worse," he said.

Quoting the Malawi State of Environment and Outlook Report (SOER) -2010, Chiotha said per-

# Environmentalist calls for funding of ecosystem research

capita land holding has declined from about 0.4 of a hectare to about 0.2 of a hectare between 1970 and 2007.

He further quoted the 2010 SOER as showing that land holding sizes are highly skewed with the poor at the lower end of the land holding scale.

"The small landholding suggests that the possibility of crop rotation is far more remote now than was the case during the period of the first Malawi development plan," he said.

Meanwhile, government has

launched the National Campaign for Manure, Irrigation and Fodder with Agriculture Minister Alan Chiyembekeza complaining that farmers are adopting the manure initiative at a low pace.

Chiyembekeza complained about the low turn-up of farmers practising manure farming despite several interventions to encourage them on the benefits of manure resulting into the country producing less than three million metric tonnes of maize against the total estimated agricultural population of 18million.