Strengthening environmental education and public awareness for sound environmental management

Executive Summary

Environmental education and public awareness is a key to sound environmental management. This can be achieved because it creates awareness of the importance of the environment to the social economic growth of the country. However, environmental education and public awareness has not been fully used to promote sound environmental management because the school curriculum is not integrated with the environmental issues; few environmental education and public awareness teaching and learning materials; teachers; trainers; reporters; journalists etc are not oriented and expensive mode and channel of communication. Therefore environmental education and public awareness can be improved by integrating environmental issues in the school curriculum at all levels; institutionalizing environmental education in the media houses and strengthen community programs.
Introduction

Environmental education is a process that provides learners with awareness and knowledge about the environment (typically including the relationship of humans to the natural world), and fosters development of the skills, attitudes and motivations to enable learners to make informed decisions and take responsible actions that incorporate environmental considerations.

The ultimate goal or outcome of environmental education is the creation of environmentally literate citizens. This is important because solving today’s challenging local and global environmental issues and moving society towards sustainability cannot rest only with “experts” but will require the support and active participation of an informed public in their various roles as consumers, voters, employers, business and community leaders.

Environmental education focused on children and youth is a particularly important strategy because it’s an opportunity to intervene at a key developmental stage of life and because children can be an important influence on the environmental behavior of their parents.

Approaches to environmental education

The process of environmental education can occur through formal, non-formal, and informal approaches or settings. The formal environmental education is linked with the formal education system and generally takes place in a school context. The school curriculum integrates environmental issues which is implemented by well defined teaching and learning materials and reoriented teaching staff. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in collaboration with the various education institutions is responsible for implementing the formal environmental education programmes.

In the case of non-formal environmental education, it is organized educational activity outside the formal school system, and includes environmental education activities or programs provided by community organizations, youth groups, museums, zoos, and nature/interpretive centers, etc. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Management, Ministry of Tourism, National Parks and Wildlife, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and various media houses both electronic and print are responsible for the informal environmental education.

Conclusion

Environmental education is important in the achievement of sustainable development. Unfortunately, environmental education has currently not been fully applied to address environmental issues. There is a strong need that this should be increased if sound environmental management and sustainable development is to be achieved.

Implications and recommendations of environmental education and public awareness

The inadequate environmental education in Malawi has contributed to environmental degradation in various environmental sectors and this includes;

- Increased illegal waste dumping in the locations and other undesignated areas;
- Increased water pollution in rivers/streams passing through cities, towns, district headquarters and urban areas;
- Increased loss of some species of biodiversity and reduction of habitats of others;
- Increased loss of forestry resources;
- Increased reduction of fish landings because of non observance of legislation and
- Increased soil loss leading to siltation of rivers.

If government can improve environmental education and public awareness through improvement general education levels, incorporation of environmental education in school curricula, integration of environmental education into adult literacy classes and institutionalizing environmental education in the print and electronic media houses, then sound environmental management and sustainable development will be improved.