

Policy harmonisation and collaboration amongst institutions – A strategy towards sustainable development, management and utilisation of water resources: Case of Malawi

V. Chipofya^{a*}, S. Kainja^b, S. Bota^c

^a*Centre for Water, Sanitation, Health and Appropriate Technology Development (WASHTED),
University of Malawi – The Polytechnic, Blantyre, Malawi
email: vchipofya@poly.ac.mw*

^b*Malawi Water Partnership PAWD Project Office, Lilongwe, Malawi*
^c*Natural Resources College, Lilongwe, Malawi*

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Abstract

A number of water resources management policies and legislations have been enacted in Malawi. The policies and legislations have been regulatory in nature. The Water Resources Act (1969) and the subsidiary Water Resources (Pollution Control) Regulations provide the main regulatory framework for water resources management. However, the Water Works Act (1995) is the main authority for establishing water supply and water-borne sanitation delivery services. Government introduced the 1994 Water Resources Management Policy and Strategies (WRMPS). This policy and strategies have been reviewed by the 1999 and 2005 WRMPS. The introduction of the National Environmental Policy and the call for harmonisation of natural resources management policy, legislation and institutional roles, warranted the review. This provides a conducive and enabling environment for sustainable Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). The policies and legislation of other sectors benefiting and affecting the water field need to be in harmony with those drawn for water resources management.

Keywords: Harmonisation; Legislation; Policies; Water resources

1. Introduction

Water resources management basically involves the monitoring and assessment of water quality and

quantity, the development and protection of water resources, the provision of water services and ensuring that water laws are strictly adhered to by all users. Water resources management may be defined as man's control over water as it passes through its natural cycle, with balanced attention to maximising economic,

* Corresponding author.

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social and environmental benefits. The goal of sustainable IWRM is, therefore, to conserve water resources in both quality and quantity for the benefit of the present and future generations.

Pressure on water is increasing due to increase in population. Land use is intensifying, causing increased land degradation and eventually degradation of the water resources. This causes an increase in demand for water and a range of potential and actual threats to the quality and quantities of water available. In addition, water supply and water-borne sanitation services are inadequate to meet the needs of some communities. This calls for action from water sector and water related sector organisations as well as the user communities in the proper planning, development and utilisation of water resources to achieve the maximum benefits while at the same time ensuring their sustainability.

2. Water policy and legislation

A number of water resources management policies and legislations have been enacted in Malawi. The policies and legislation have been regulatory in nature. The Water Resources Act (1969) and its subsidiary Water Resources (Pollution Control) Regulations provide the main regulatory framework for water resources management. On the other hand, Water Works Act (1995) is the main authority for establishing water supply and water-borne sanitation delivery services [1,2].

Government introduced the 1994 Water Resources Management Policy and Strategies (WRMPS) [3]. This policy and its strategies have been reviewed by the 1999 and 2005 WRMPS funded under the Natural Resources Management and Support (NATURE) programme [4,5]. The introduction of the National Environmental Policy and the call for harmonisation of natural resources management policy, legislation and institutional roles, warranted the review. This provides an enabling environment that is conducive for sustainable and integrated water resources development and management.

The policies and legislation of other sectors benefiting and affecting the water field need to be in harmony with those drawn for water resources management. One such importance Act is the Environmental

Management Act, which serves as an umbrella legislation with its aim focused on enforcing sustainable development of the natural resources. It is also important for the national water resources legislation to be in harmony with those of the neighbouring countries in the region. The signed Protocol on Shared Watercourse for the SADC region (2000) provides a framework for harmonisation of policy and legislation among the SADC and Zambezi River Basin member states [6].

The revision of the policy and legislation on water resources management entailed the revisiting of institutional roles of the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development – the lead water ministry in the country, and harmonising them with other government departments and agencies involved in the water sector, and also other organisations whose undertakings are linked to water resources development and management. This ensured that policy and legislative reforms were documented and implemented without duplication or dormancy in any essential water environmental resources management services.

3. Existing framework for water resources management

The water sector in Malawi comprises several levels of responsibility. *These* range from national policy formulation through the administrative and management units down to service providers in the construction, operation and maintenance of water supply, water-borne sanitation and any other water based or related fields. These levels of responsibility are assigned to different government institutions and parastatal organisations to lead the sector amidst many challenges to where it stands today.

4. Evolution of the water and sanitation sector

Water as a distinct sector in Malawi is relatively new and still developing. The process to develop a distinct sector in Malawi, like many other countries in the world, has evolved over time in response to the growing need for better management and development of water resources to meet the growing demand.

During the colonial and federal administrations there was no real effort to develop water resources for social-economic development or to meet the needs of

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