CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY STRUCTURES LEADING IN SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN THE LAKE CHILWA BASIN

A Lake Chilwa signpost mounted in Machinga

Sustainable utilization of natural resources is a key factor for conserving biodiversity. And in the case of Lake Chilwa, participatory fisheries management is a means to ensure sustainable fishing practices are adhered to.

George Duka, is the Chairperson of Swang'oma Beach Village Committee (BVC) in Group Village Headman Chimbalanga, Traditional Authority Chiwalo in Phalombe district.

George Duka speaking during a panel discussion held in Phalombe

During a District and Community Dialogue on the Implementation of Biodiversity Protection Measures in the Lake Chilwa Basin held in May, 2025, Duka highlighted how his committee works with the Government to patrol the lake, sensitize fishermen about sustainable fishing practices and the support in enforcing the fisheries management laws.

While acknowledging the commendable work the BVC does, he noted the challenges they face with the community.

"We are faced with community resistance by adamant fishermen that stand their ground and refuse to adhere to the laws", he lamented.

He added that the 2023 Cyclone Freddy induced floods washed away their vessel which was used for patrols.

Hope, however, remains in ensuring people conserve with benefits.

A beehive mounted in a forest in Zomba

The Community-led Planning and Management for Biodiversity Protection and Resilient Communities in the Catchment Area of Lake Chilwa, Malawi Programme financed which CISONECC and partners are

implementing with financial support from Jersey Overseas Aid (JOA), the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) and Trócaire is enhancing stakeholder collaboration; peer learning; the economic empowerment of the communities and capacities for natural resources management.

A rice field for a VSLA group in Machinga

Alas! Law is still needed to curb illegal fishing practices and foster community-led catchment management initiatives. Several stakeholder dialogues on biodiversity protection held by CISONECC in years one and two of the Programme had stakeholders calling for the review of the 1997 Fisheries Conservation and Management Act.

Stakeholders at dialogue on biodiversity conservation and natural resources management held in a January, 2025

The review of the 1997 Fisheries Conservation and Management Act commenced in 2013. The Amendment Bill was earmarked to be passed by the immediate past in the 1st Meeting of the 51st Session of Parliament that ended in April, 2025. Unfortunately, this did not take place despite appearing on the order paper for 10 days consecutively.

The enactment of an amended law would go a long way in supporting sustainable fisheries reform. A revision of the penalties would deter offenders; improve governance issues and strengthen fisheries management initiatives.

A photo of participants during the dialogue

A call to action was made: Stakeholders need to hold hands with the community structures, Government and conservation actors so that we do not rob the future generations of Malawi's aquatic products!