



OVERVIEW OF FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IN MALAWI*



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Introduction

The fisheries sector contributes substantially to food security and livelihoods in Malawi with nearly 85% of the population living in rural areas. The sector also contributes substantially to animal protein supply and food security and constitutes a major source of income and livelihood for a large proportion of Malawi's population.

Characteristics of the Fisheries

The main source of fish production is **Lake Malawi** (24,208 km²), producing almost 40-50% of the total annual landings. Other water bodies include **Lakes Malombe** (390 km²), **Chilwa** (1,800 km²) and **Chiuta** (200 km²), and **Lower Shire River** (820 km²).

The fisheries in Malawi are broadly divided into two categories, namely subsistence and commercial.

- Subsistence fisheries are pronounced in all water bodies where most fish caught is for consumption and little sold for cash economy, fish traps, hook and line, fishing baskets and spears are the main fishing gears used in this fishery.
- The commercial sector is divided into small-scale and large-scale commercial.



Figure 1. Main water bodies in Malawi (NSO 2005)



Trends in fish production

Generally, the fisheries have experienced considerable decline in the 1990s after a relative stability in the preceding years. The catches have declined from an average of 60,000 metric tonnes in the period of 1976-1990 to **49,000 metric tonnes** in 1991-2003.

This decline is mainly caused by a combination of complex factors some of which include localised overfishing in some inshore stocks of Lake Malawi, climatic influence that results in drying up of Lake Chilwa and weak capacity to enforce fisheries regulations.

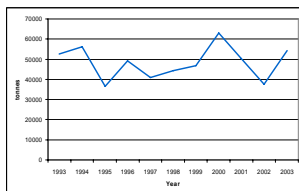


Figure 2. Average annual fish catch (tonnes) by species for all water bodies



Number of fishers and boats

In the last decade, the number of **fishermen**, **fishing gears** and **fishing crafts** has increased by **27%**, **124%** and **30%**, respectively.

Summary

Fisheries and aquaculture are an inseparable part of Malawi's food supply and social cohesion. The fisheries provides an important source of export earnings for the country and provides opportunities for economic growth. At the same time it clear that resources have to be managed carefully to ensure long term sustainability as witnessed by decline in catches from some of the main water bodies in Malawi.

Main Commercial Species

Water body	Main fish species	Brief description
Lake Malawi	Tilapia	Tilapia comprises four species belonging to the genus <i>Oreochromis</i> . Historically, these species supported large and small-scale fisheries especially in southern Lake Malawi and catches peaked at 8,000-9,000 tonnes in the late 1970s. Catches then started to decline in subsequent years and in early 1992 the total landed was 5,000-6,000 tonnes. Since 1992 catches have declined to less than 2,000 tonnes .
	Catfish	Catfish belonging to the genera <i>Bagrus</i> and <i>Bathyclarias</i> form two important components of the catfish group. More than 3,000 tonnes of catfish were landed in 1970s, the catches dropped to less than 1,700 tonnes in 1999.
	Haplochromine	This is the complex fish species group that consists of many populations of cichlids apart from Chambo. The total landings of haplochromines have fluctuated between 17,000 and 30,000 tonnes between late 1980s and late 1990s.
	<i>Engraulicypris</i> sp	<i>Usipa</i> (<i>Engraulicypris sardella</i>) is a small pelagic cyprinid with erratic yields. The catch landings fluctuate between 1,000 and 20,000 tonnes between 1976 and 2000. Biological studies indicate that the stock has a high reproductive output and natural mortality rate.
Chilwa-Chiuta system	Tilapia, Catfish and Minnow	The cyprinid of the genus <i>Barbus</i> (<i>Matemba</i>), catfish of the genus <i>Ciaras</i> (<i>Mlamba</i>) and Tilapia of the genus <i>Oreochromis</i> (<i>Makumba</i>) are the most important commercial species in this system. They constitute 85% of the total landings. The annual catch from this system has ranged from 9000 to 29,000 tonnes.
Lower Shire	Tilapia and Catfish	The catch of the Lower Shire River system is dominated by the catfish of the genus <i>Ciaras</i> and two Tilapia cichlids of the genus <i>Oreochromis</i> . The catches from this system have been erratic from 1976 and late 1990s ranging from 3,000 to 11,000 tonnes.

Aquaculture

In terms of fish farming, **4,600 fish farmers** owning **9,500 ponds** exist in the country.

Large-scale commercial fish farming is being undertaken by a few investors in the private sector most notably **Sugar Corporation of Malawi** and **NALI Company Limited**.

Combined production from both small-scale and large-scale fish farmers in Malawi is was around **800 tonnes** in 2002, which is 1.5% of the total output from capture fisheries and an increase of 28% from 1995.

The major fish species currently in use are *Tilapia rendali* (chilunguni), *Oreochromis shiranus* (makumba), *O. karongae* (chambo) and *C. gariepinus* (mlamba).



Malawi Department of Fisheries

The **Department of Fisheries (DoF)**, which was established by an Act of Parliament in 1946, is mandated to protect and conserve the national heritage of Malawi, through appropriate research and application of appropriate control mechanisms.

The Department has six functional programme that include Management and Administration, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation; Extension and Development; Aquaculture; and Training. It has 322 professional and technical staff.

Policy and Strategy

Malawi's Vision 2020, Poverty Reduction Strategy paper (PRSP) the Fisheries Policy, the Fisheries Act, the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), Community-based Natural Resources Management Strategy, the National Environment action Plan (NEAP), the Ministry of Mines, Natural Resources and Environment's Strategic Plan (2002-2006) the DoF's Strategic Plan (2002-2006) and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development have the same underlying goal of poverty reduction through sustainable development and economic growth.

The objective of the current **National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy** of 2001 is to manage the fisheries resources for sustainable utilization, protection, and conservation of aquatic biodiversity. The policy provides an integrated framework for fisheries and aquaculture development in Malawi.

Articles governing the management and utilization of the fisheries resources are contained in the 1997 **Fisheries Conservation and Management Act**. The Act stipulates the institutional framework including community participation in fisheries conservation and management and also provides tools for dealing with violators of regulations governing the fisheries conservation and management.

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