



Organisation

Malawi Water Partnership

Summary

To implement policy change is a process that takes time. During this time, it is possible that the people involved change, resulting in a loss of knowledge. In Malawi, action was taken to combat institutional memory loss by involving as many high-level decision-makers as possible and by organising awareness raising workshops. This demonstrates that it is possible to avoid the loss of knowledge when key decision and policy-makers change.

Background

Development interventions requiring policy changes take time. Yet, while a development intervention is on-going, the people involved often change. This poses the risk of losing the experiences and lessons acquired along the way. To ensure sustainability and avoid the loss of knowledge when new governments are elected and key decision and policy-makers change, specific steps are needed to strengthen institutional memory over time. The IWRM process needs to be institutionalised among relevant organisations and across government departments.

Efforts to manage implementation of IWRM more effectively and efficiently have been hampered by inadequate capacity, un-harmonised policies and laws, inappropriate catchment management practices and poor coordination among stakeholders. The water-stressed status of Malawi is a serious threat to the development of the country and has the potential to reverse the development gains already achieved by the nation. Water shortages will seriously affect efforts of the Malawi Government to achieve growth and development goals set out in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). This is largely because the MGDS is about using more water for farming, tourism, industries, navigation, electric power generation to promote economic development. The declining water-availability situation will now become the major limiting factor for development of the country.

Water allocation among competing potential users will become critical and trade offs will have to be made in order to ensure that the scarce water resources are used in activities that will result in maximising benefits for the nation. The trans-boundary nature of the water resource also means that Malawi will need to develop very close dialogue and consultations with the neighbouring countries in order to ensure that water development in the respective countries does not negatively affect the development agenda of Malawi. While a joint commission of cooperation exists with Mozambique, Malawi needs similar consultation mechanisms with Tanzania and Zambia. Issues of common interest will be both the water resources management plans in neighbouring countries; as well as to start dialogue on the cross-border water transfer potential from neighbouring countries to Malawi.

IWRM/WE offers an approach that can enable Malawi to effectively address national and international

water resource challenges by promoting integrated management of natural resources and promoting consultations of various stakeholders in water and water-related fields.

Actions taken

The Malawi Water Partnership solved the issue of institutional memory by involving as many high-level decision-makers as possible. Early on in the process the Malawi Water Partnership organised awareness raising workshops for all senior civil servants which are the permanent secretaries in charge of water related sector ministries. Each of these permanent secretaries then briefed their ministers on the initiative.

Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development in close collaboration with the Malawi Water Partnership (MWP), has developed this Integrated Water Resources Management and Water Efficiency (IWRM/WE) Plan. Key stakeholders comprised of individuals, institutions and organisations from relevant sectors participated at various stages of the process or were consulted for information or opinions. The Plan has been developed with the goal of ensuring the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources by maximising economic and social welfare without compromising the sustainability of environmental systems.

The Strategic Framework of the Plan included the five priority areas which are critical in the success of IWRM/WE in Malawi. The priority areas were identified through a consultative and collaborative process. These are:

1. Policy, legal and institutional environment (the “enabling” environment)
2. Co-ordination and Managing Implementation
3. Integrated Catchment Management
4. IWRM Institutional Capacity Building;
5. Sustainable Water Resources Utilisation.

For each priority area, Action Plans have been developed with specific time-bound interventions to tackle the five priority areas. The Action Plans describes the goals, objectives and interventions for each strategic area.

Outcomes

As a result of this approach, the national IWRM Programme benefited from sustained institutional memory at higher political levels. When the minister in charge of water was changed, there was no loss of knowledge as the new minister already knew about the programme.

For example, in one case the permanent secretary responsible for gender affairs participated in an IWRM planning workshop arranged by the Malawi Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development with support from the Malawi Water Partnership. A few weeks later the President appointed the permanent secretary from the Ministry of Gender as the new permanent secretary for the Ministry of Water.

When a delegation from the Malawi Water Partnership went to see her to discuss the IWRM programme, she confidently supported the initiative, with which she was already familiar.

Lessons Learned

Institutional memory enhances the sustainability of development interventions during and after initial development efforts. Therefore a comprehensive and coherent plan to ensure institutional memory should be developed and implemented at the start of an IWRM Planning process.

Institutional capacity of MWP needs to be scaled up to facilitate the implementation of the various projects under the IWRM plan and beyond.

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