



POLICY BRIEF

**HARMONISATION
OF FOREST AND LANDSCAPE
RESTORATION (FLR)
POLICIES AND LAWS
IN MALAWI**

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KEY MESSAGES



Strong Policy Foundations for FLR

Malawi has made commendable progress in aligning its policies, laws, and regulations on land, forestry, and natural resources with Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) principles. This solid policy foundation provides a promising platform to scale up FLR efforts, particularly if implementation is strengthened through **more inclusive and decentralised approaches**.



Opportunities to Enhance Implementation

While implementation gaps persist, they offer clear opportunities for improvement. Enhancing **inter-sectoral coordination** and sustainable resource mobilisation can unlock the full potential of Malawi's FLR-supportive policies and translate them into tangible landscape restoration outcomes. One critical gap is the **management of Invasive Alien Species (IAS)**, which threaten both agricultural productivity and ecosystem resilience. Most policies either do not mention IAS or lack clear strategies for their control.



Momentum for Harmonised and Inclusive Governance

Despite existing policy and institutional conflicts, there is growing recognition of the need for harmonised, landscape-based governance and inclusive decision-making. This creates **momentum for reforms** that can better pilot locally-relevant solutions, and promote **cross-sectoral collaboration** to drive sustainable restoration efforts across the country.

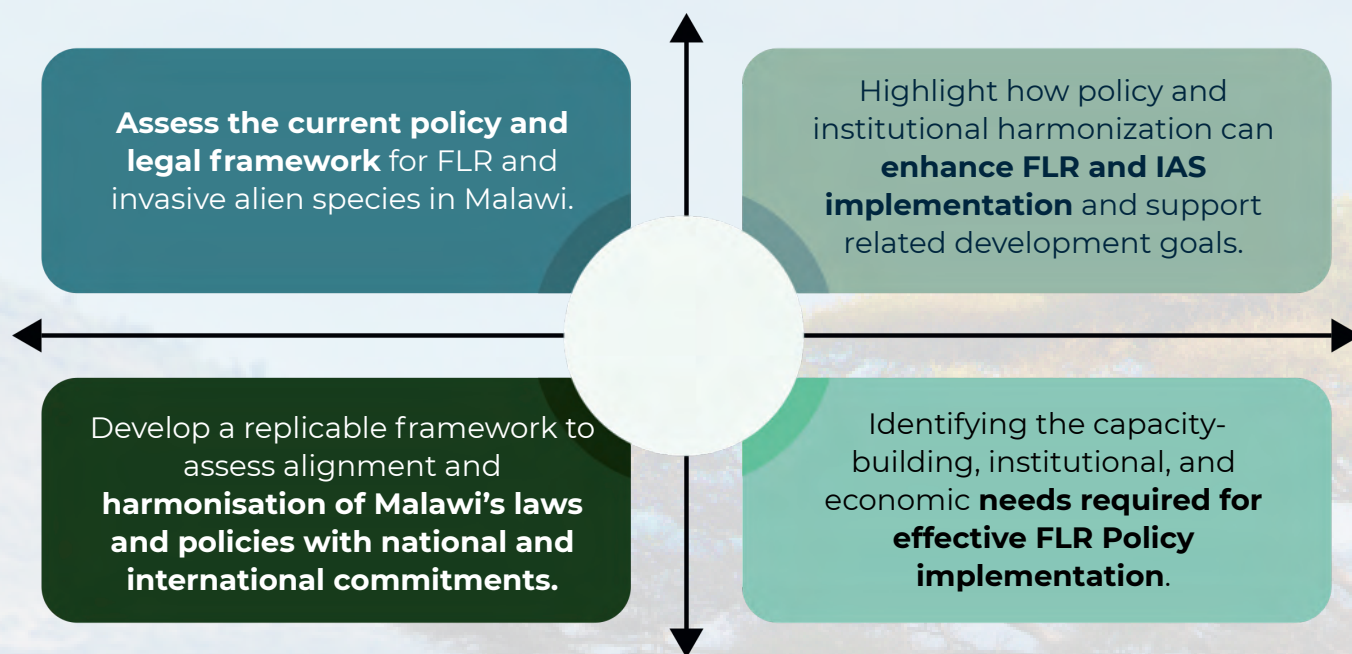
INTRODUCTION

The policy brief presents the findings of a comprehensive assessment of how Malawi's domestic policies and laws support large-scale Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) and the management of invasive alien species. The brief also presents the gaps between the promises inherent in various FLR-supportive policies and laws and their actual use in practice.

As and conflicts among sectoral policies and laws and makes recommendations for enhancing the harmonisation of these policies and laws. The harmonisation of laws and policies for Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) in Malawi is critical for realising large-scale restoration goals and combating invasive alien species (IAS).

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The overall objective is to **inform on the extent to which Malawi's laws and policies align with the FLR approach**. The specific objectives are:



The policy review was based on the FLR Principles namely focus on landscape; engage stakeholders; restore multiple functions for multiple benefits; maintain and enhance natural ecosystems within landscapes; tailor to the local context, and manage adaptively for long-term resilience. In addition to FLR principles, the identified policies and laws were reviewed against the success factors that are key to creating a supportive policy and legal environment for successful FLR implementation. These are motivation for action; enabling conditions; and mobilization of resources for FLR implementation.

The assessment used Bardach's eightfold policy analysis model (Bardach, 2012) to analyze the identified

FLR-supportive policies and legal instruments for their alignment with the FLR approach.

The model first identifies and clearly defines a problem or an issue for which each policy and its associated legal instrument is aimed to address, linking it with FLR principles and features of FLR-supportive policies and assessing how these contribute to the FLR process. A total of 40 national policies, strategies, and laws were analysed across sectors including forestry, agriculture, water, land, biodiversity, climate change, and decentralisation. This step was followed by key informant interviews with key stakeholders in the relevant sectors to gain insights and assemble evidence about the analyzed policies and legal instruments.

KEY FINDINGS

Alignment

Nearly all policies, laws, and regulations on land, forests, and other natural resources **align closely with the principles of FLR** and support FLR implementation and management of invasive alien species. Nevertheless, **the results showed that policy conflicts exist between a wide range of sectoral FLR-supportive policies and laws.**

Significant implementation gaps stem from **centralized planning, weak inter-sectoral coordination, limited local input, low public awareness, sustainable financial resources, poor enforcement, and lack of local FLR demonstration projects** — all of which hinder large-scale FLR implementation.

Implementation Gaps

Conflicts

Malawi's FLR efforts face major challenges due to conflicting sectoral policies, overlapping authority between national and local governments, misalignment between governance structures and landscape boundaries, lack of pilot projects, limited sustainable financing mechanisms, and weak policy response to invasive alien species:

i) Policy conflicts and Govenal Gaps

The 2024 agricultural policy revisions—the National Irrigation Policy, National Agriculture Policy, and Agriculture Land Resources Management Policy—have addressed long-standing conflicts between agricultural development and environmental sustainability. All three support Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) by promoting sustainable land use, climate resilience, and environmental safeguards. However, governance gaps persist. The National Decentralization Policy (1998) calls for devolution of forest management to local authorities, but the Forestry Act (1997) centralizes licensing authority under the Director of Forestry.

This overlap in mandates creates confusion, weakens local ownership, and undermines effective implementation at the community level.

ii) Policy conflicts with traditional practices

The Customary Land Act (2016) establishes Customary Land Committees (CLCs) for land administration but excludes village heads from their composition, despite their significant influence over land matters. This exclusion risks resistance or sabotage from traditional leaders. The Act also recognizes only gazetted Group Village Headmen (GVHs), overlooking many ungazetted leaders who still hold

KEY FINDINGS

authority. Such exclusions may undermine community support and long-term investment in FLR, which depends on secure and accepted land governance.

iii) Governance systems vs. boundaries of landscapes

Current governance systems are divided by administrative boundaries—regions, zones, districts, and municipalities—that often do not match the natural boundaries of landscapes. This misalignment hinders the implementation of large-scale FLR initiatives. While we cannot abandon decentralized governance, we can strengthen cross-boundary networks that connect stakeholders across jurisdictions, sectors, and scales. Multi-actor landscape arrangements play a vital role as they serve as network hubs, enabling collaboration and partnership. Strengthening these networks is essential to bridge existing governance structures with the socio-ecological realities of landscapes.

iv) Local reference studies / projects

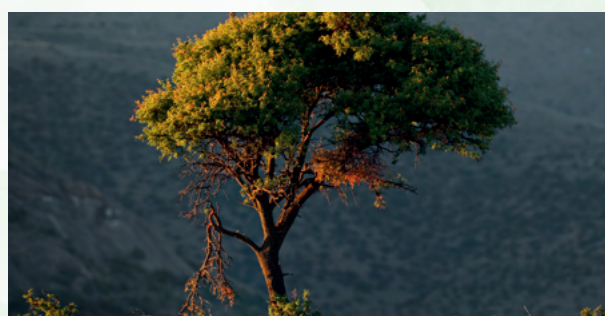
Experience in Malawi shows that piloting new policy and legal instruments before they are fully implemented provides locally contextualised evidence and useful lessons about their technical feasibility, economic viability, and social acceptability. This has been demonstrated by the piloting of titling and registration of customary estates provided under the Customary Land Act, 2016, and the Customary Land Regulations, 2018 (CEPA, 2021; NPC, 2021).

v) Promote sustainable financing mechanisms

Scaling up investment in landscape restoration will require a sustainable financing mechanism that integrates a package of financing mechanisms from the public development finance (targeting the agriculture and forestry sectors) and public climate finance (targeting mitigation and adaptation) with the private capital. The deployment of the mechanism can enable multiple issues to be addressed and the diverse needs of local actors to be met.

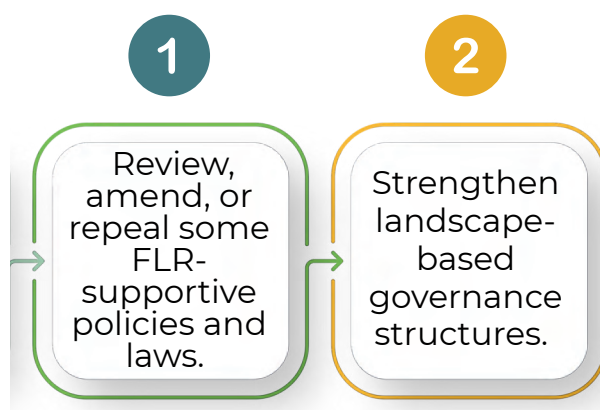
vi) Invasive Alien Species (IAS)

IAS pose a serious threat to FLR by displacing native vegetation and reducing ecosystem resilience. Malawi hosts about 30 IAS—17 plant, 10 invertebrate, and 3 fish species. In areas like Phalombe, they have spread across over 40% of cropland. In Nyika National Park and Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve, pests such as the cassava green mite, larger grain borer, and spotted stalk borer are major concerns. Despite growing evidence of their impact, most national policies lack clear strategies or action plans to address IAS, limiting effective response and long-term FLR success.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND LEGAL HARMONISATION

Measures to address Policy Conflicts



1

Outdated policies and laws should be reviewed or repealed to align with principles of FLR and with the other FLR-supportive policies and laws. Specifically, section 82 of the Forestry Act that gives power to the Director of Forestry to issue licenses for extraction of forest produce from all types of forest land including customary land requires repealing.

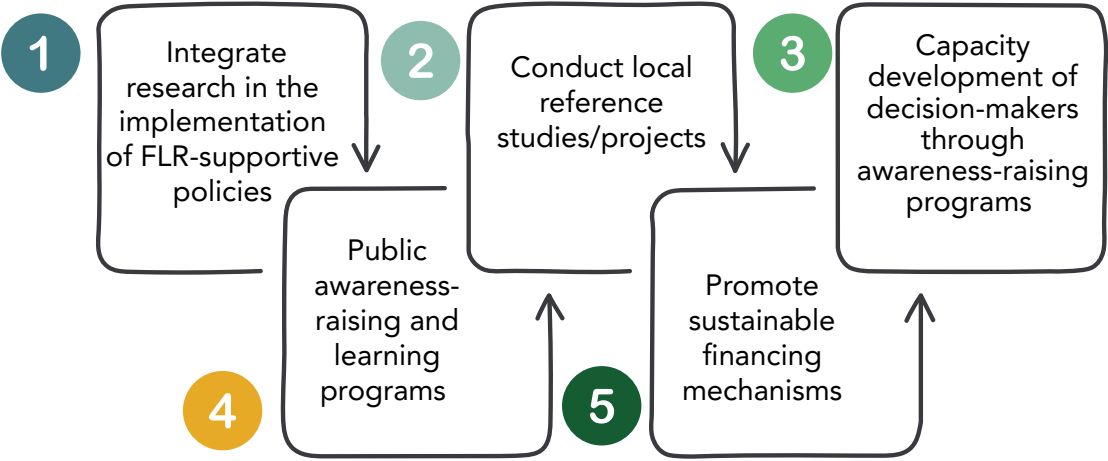
The Department of Forestry as a designated authority for FLR in the country should be tasked to review and harmonise FLR related policies to support FLR implementation. Specifically, the Forestry Act, 1997 to align it with the Decentralisation Policy, 1998 on licensing of extraction of forest produce from customary land, the Customary Land Act to recognize the role of Village Heads in allocation and administration of customary land.

2

There is a need to work towards better networks by connecting administrative boundaries and linking stakeholders across jurisdictions, sectors, and scales—while remaining grounded in specific landscapes. This involves establishing multi-actor networks within and between landscapes, which can bridge the gap between existing governance structures and the socio-ecological realities they aim to address. However, to truly achieve impact, these networks must also prioritize improved efficiency and effectiveness in coordination, resource use, and decision-making processes, ensuring that landscape-level restoration efforts are both inclusive and results-driven.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND LEGAL HARMONIZATION

Measures to Address Policy Gaps



- 1** Policies are shaped by current knowledge of an uncertain future and may fall short as conditions change. As restoration advances, insights from monitoring, research, and stakeholder input should inform management plans and strengthen FLR policies over time.
- 2** Building on lessons from piloting land laws, pilot studies should be carried out for key FLR-supportive policies and legal instruments. These pilots will test feasibility, inform process design, and guide effective policy and law implementation.
- 3** Organise engaging awareness events to inform policy and decision-makers about the right regulatory mix needed to support local actors in restoring land and adopting sustainable practices. These sessions should encourage dialogue through presentations, videos, and panel discussions.
- 4** Information should be shared with the public in local languages and accessible formats to encourage dialogue and informed decision-making at the community level. Media, local leaders, CSOs, and government officials can play key roles in raising awareness and promoting understanding of policy and legal provisions.
- 5** Enhance sustainable financing mechanisms to diversify FLR funding streams through public-private partnerships and climate finance.

REFERENCES

- The Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change - Malawi (2022). Report on Harmonisation of Laws and Policies Supportive to Forest Landscape Restoration in Malawi. Department of Forestry (Malawi) and International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Restoring Malawi's Forests, Restoring our Future!



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