

Malawi: Environmental journos hail new government

By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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The Association of Environmental Journalists in Malawi (AEJ-Malawi) has hailed the country's new president Joyce Banda for creating a ministry responsible for environment and climate change management and subsequently appointing Catherine Gotani Hara as minister responsible.



"This is an encouraging development considering that for the first time in the history of Malawi we have a full ministry to oversee issues of environment and climate change management," said Emmanuel Muwamba, president of AEJ-Malawi.

Muwamba said it is a fact that environment and climate change affect people's lives in many parts of the world. In Malawi, Muwamba said environment and climate change has had an adverse impact on agriculture, infrastructure, energy, human health, fisheries, forestry, water, wildlife and gender.

AEJ-Malawi willing to help government

The president's association said these impacts are a threat to Malawi's socio-economic development and the attainment of the targets stipulated in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy and the Millennium Development Goals.



Emmanuel Muwamba

He said as a media body they are willing to help government fight the effects from these calamities which include poor crop yields or total crop failure, leading to serious food shortages, malnutrition and chronic ailments associated with malaria, cholera, diarrhoea and HIV/AIDS.

Muwamba said the journalists in the association are also aware of challenges resulting from the disruption of hydroelectric power generation in critical watersheds as a result of siltation due to soil erosion and environmental degradation.

He also talked on droughts and floods which are responsible for the declining or even drying up of water bodies, resulting in low fish production and loss of biodiversity.

"In Malawi, the fisheries industry contributes about 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and over 60% of animal protein intake. In addition, the diversity of fish species is of global significance because most of them are endemic to Malawi," said the head of AEJ-Malawi.

Malawi is vulnerable to climate change

The association also observed that Malawi, which is in sub-Saharan Africa, is most vulnerable and least prepared to address the adverse effects of climate change.

As an environmental media body, Muwamba said they are aware that this is the case because Malawi has a narrow economic base which is dominated by agriculture and that its population is largely rural and rain-dependent for food production and survival.

"In the last two decades, Malawi has experienced a variety of climatic hazards such as intense rainfall, floods, seasonal droughts, multi-year droughts, dry spells, cold spells, strong winds, thunderstorms, landslides, hailstorms, mudslides and heat waves, among many others," said Muwamba.

He said this situation has been compounded by the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS which has created a large number of dependent orphans and the elderly.

"It has also adversely impacted on rural household food production capacity as well as the quality of life and sustainable livelihoods," he said, "Hence, Malawi needs to prepare for the impacts of climate change now and for the future."

Government of Malawi hailed

The environmental media body also hailed government of Malawi for demonstrating its commitment to addressing climate change issues when it signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992 during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

It also observed that Malawi ratified this important convention in 1994. In addition, the country acceded to the Kyoto Protocol on 26 October, 2001.

Locally, Muwamba said Malawi has developed its own home-grown development blue print called the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) which is in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs).

MDGS focuses on nine priority areas within the many priorities. "Climate change, natural resources and environmental management is one of the nine priorities in the MGDS," he said. "We, therefore, hope that with the creation of the new ministry of environment and climate change management, issues of environment and climate change management will be efficiently and effectively dealt with."

AEJ-Malawi also congratulated president Joyce Banda on her ascendancy to the presidency, "[We] pledge to continue to work together with government in our endeavour to assist in the socio-economic development of our nation through raising awareness of the challenges in the sector," said Muwamba.

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