

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Project ID:	9539
Project Name:	Enhancing Sustainability of Protected Area Systems and Stabilizing Agro-production in Adjoining Areas through Improved IAS Management
Countr(ies):	Malawi
Implementing Agency:	UNEP

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Enhancing Sustainability of Protected Area Systems and Stabilizing Agro-production in Adjoining Areas through Improved IAS Management

Country

Malawi

GEF ID

9539

Implementing Agency

UNEP

Executing Entity

Environmental Affairs Department, Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

MSP

PIR Submission

9/16/2025

Fiscal Year , PIR Number

FY 2025 , 6th PIR

Objective

To prevent new invasions and reduce the current impacts of invasive alien species (IAS) in protected areas and adjoining agro-ecosystems in Malawi

B. Ratings and Disbursements

Implementation Progress

Highly Satisfactory

Development Objective

Highly Satisfactory

Overall risk

Low Risk

Project Financing

1,645,250.00

Cumulative Disbursement

1,317,269.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval

3/15/2018

Agency Approval

4/11/2018

Implementation Start 7/10/2018	First Disbursement 7/10/2018
Expected MTR 1/30/2023	Actual MTR 1/31/2023
Expected Completion 5/31/2024	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities

The project continues to make significant progress toward its expected outcomes. Most of the Key outputs have been finalized and only a few are nearing completion, the IAS Management Plan development championed by CABI and the Final report of the cost benefit analysis by a Masters student are the only outstanding activities. The project has reported notable developments in planning, implementation, capacity building, and communication for IAS management. Progress during the June 2024 to June 2025 reporting period has further solidified earlier gains and extended the project's reach and impact.

Output 1: National framework for the cross-sectoral management of IAS operational and supporting long-term development planning By June 2024, the National IAS Coordination Mechanism and Coordination Unit had been established, and their functions integrated into the National Invasive Species Strategy and Action Plan (NISSAP) and the Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) procedures. MEPA has structured its Biodiversity Unit in line with the Environmental Management Act and NISSAP, and recruitment is underway for national IAS coordination positions. Most IAS management procedures have been finalized, including the EDRR procedures and the Pathway Risk Analysis studies. The IAS Risk Analysis Procedures were further reviewed during a working session with stakeholders from key institutions. An updated version of these procedures was developed to enhance preventive IAS management actions. With co-financing from the Shire Valley Transformation Project, in August 2025, the project supported risk assessment of 32 species to test the Risk Analysis procedures. This resulted in prioritisation of 10 IAS species as high-risk species.

Output 2: Evidence base established and communicated for IAS prevention and management in and around PAs A national inventory on the presence and distribution of priority invasive plants was completed in National Parks and four Wildlife Reserves. Cost-benefit analysis studies were also concluded, offering essential evidence for decision-making. To support the IAS Management Plan development for Nyika National Park, a mapping exercise was undertaken using GIS and Remote Sensing technologies. Fieldwork, conducted from 26th May to 1st July 2024, combined UAV imagery and geographic coordinates to track species such as pine, eucalyptus, and black wattle. This exercise provided robust data on distribution patterns to inform management planning.

Output 3: Two revised Protected Area Management Plans including strategies and budgets for IAS prevention and control IAS issues were integrated into the Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve's Integrated Management Plan. For Nyika National Park, significant progress was made: IAS Management Plan Development: CABI and a local consultant were engaged to develop the species-specific and plantation management plans respectively. The local consultant has supported Department of National Parks and Wildlife to produce a harvesting plan for IAS on Nyika National Park and currently the department is co-financing further work including development of a comprehensive Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP). Development of ESMP: A working session and field visit to Nyika from 26th to 29th July 2024 identified key environmental safeguards. These included managing plantation waste, allocating resources for park staff use, conducting cost-benefit analyses, and ensuring revenues from harvested IAS support park conservation. All these are important for further work on the Management plan

being developed including by CABI. The second draft of the IAS Management Plan, being developed by CABI is expected to be finalized by September 2025.

Output 4: Tested management plans for four IAS, including IAS control and habitat restoration in two PAs. Species targeted for management trials were identified by June 2020. Trials were completed for most species by December 2024, with bracken fern trials concluded in April 2024. Direct IAS control activities have been conducted across 1,641.21 ha of forest and 569.60 ha of grassland in Nyika and Mulanje. These interventions contributed to Mid-Term METT scores of 70 for Mulanje and 72 for Nyika. A final METT is expected to contribute to the End-Term review.

Output 5: Capacity of 80 PA staff improved and applied in the identification and management of IAS. Eighty PA staff were initially trained in 2023 at the Malawi College of Forestry. Training continued beyond the target due to growing demand. Since the IAS training manual was integrated into the College's syllabus, an additional 61 staff (49 male, 12 female) have been trained. Further training was conducted in 2024 which included: In Nkhosakota Wildlife Reserve, reaching over 50 staff. Through the Shire Valley Transformation Project, with 30+ staff continuously trained during fieldwork in active project sites.

Output 6: Biocontrol Working Group established and operational, leading to the introduction of three host-specific and damaging biocontrol agents. Target species and agents were identified for *Mimosa diplotricha*, *Opuntia stricta*, and *Pistia stratiotes*. Import permits and risk assessments were approved. Two agents were shipped to Malawi in April 2023 and released in all three regions. The third agent for *Mimosa* could not be shipped from Australia due to logistics. Monitoring was conducted in September 2024 to see progress, in Nkhosakota the area where the agents were released no longer had the IAS but in Chikwawa the IAS were still visible in the same numbers as the time the agents were released. Future work should focus on importing additional agents for *Opuntia* and *Mimosa* for mass rearing at the Department of Agricultural Research Services to support biological control after the project phases out.

Output 7: Invaded rangeland (100 ha total) in buffer zones/agro-ecosystems of two adjoining PAs cleared and restored through enhanced partnerships with local communities. Two NGOs—CARD and Total Land Care—coordinated restoration activities. Over 100 hectares of rangeland were cleared and restored. 100 farmers trained on IAS identification and management. 50 households in Rumphi (Nyika) and 72 in Mulanje were actively involved in IAS management and sustainable land use. These include 42 male- and 8 female-headed households in Rumphi, and 27 male- and 45 female-headed households in Mulanje.

Output 8: Sustainable farming practices adopted in farming communities around Mulanje and Nyika. By June 2020, over 115.7 hectares of farmland were under sustainable practices. Farmers trained in agroecological methods are contributing to IAS prevention by maintaining resilient and biodiverse farming systems adjacent to PAs.

Output 9: Communication strategy and outreach campaigns implemented. Two NGOs—Lilongwe Wildlife Trust and Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi—continue to champion IAS awareness. So far, the following awareness and communication activities have been conducted: 14 posters, 2 jingles, and 2 songs developed. 800 posters distributed. Jingles aired on 8 radio stations. 18 IAS messages developed. 7 campaigns held, reaching over 3,000 people. The Mulanje Mountain Porters Race reached an estimated 6,000 people. Journalists trained; a documentary on IAS aired on MBC TV. Media Training & Tour (May-July 2024): 10 journalists (8 male, 2 female) trained. At least 16 articles were published across media platforms. Journalists visited community sites to witness IAS management practices. Documentary Production (May-July 2024): A documentary covering IAS threats and interventions in Nyika was produced and aired on national television. Commemoration Event (July 2024): During the Biodiversity and Environment Day in Neno, the NISSAP, Communications Strategy, and Field Guide were launched by the Principal Secretary. A booth showcased awareness materials, jingles, and posters, and educated attendees on IAS. This progress report demonstrates that the project has delivered on its core outputs and extended its impact through institutional strengthening, planning, field implementation, and widespread stakeholder engagement. The integration of communications, policy, science, and field action has laid Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities. Since the project is in its final year, most of the work has focused on ensuring that gains realized in the early project years are sustained. The delay in finalizing the management plan has been a challenge mainly due to lack of forex to make timely payments for consultants. This has been resolved and there is hope that the remaining aspects of the project will be completed. The project continues to make significant progress toward its expected outcomes. Most of the Key outputs have been finalized and only a few are nearing completion, the IAS Management Plan development

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Information on challenges of project implementation activities Since the project is in its final year, most of the work has focused on ensuring that gains realized in the early project years are sustained. The delay in finalizing the management plan has been a challenge mainly due to lack of forex to make timely payments for consultants. This has been resolved and there is hope that the remaining aspects of the project will be completed.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

The project has been very successful in bringing on board several stakeholders including the Private Sector, NGO'S, Community organizations, academia, research institutions and government institutions to implement and co-finance several of the project outputs.

Since the project also have coordination structures at National and site level, it helps to bring several stakeholders to one place and make decisions in a coordinated way. The project has also conducted a number of workshops, meetings, trainings and awareness activities which have brought on board several stakeholders together. The major stakeholders including the following:

GOVERNMENT

- Malawi Environment Protection Authority: Co-financing implementation of NISSAP
- Department of Forestry: Responsible for Site Coordination of activities at Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve
- Department of National Parks and Wildlife: Responsible for Site Coordination activities at Nyika National Park
- Department of Agriculture Research Services: Responsible for biological control activities and RA processes

ACADEMIA AND RESEARCH

National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens: Supporting work on IAS inventories and IAS field Guide

Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife: Capacity building of PA staff and development of training module, support in monitoring and evaluation of the project

NGO's and Private sector

- Wells of Zoe: Supporting payment of wages and IAS clearing activities on Nyika National Park.
- CABI: Technical support and Capacity building
- Lilongwe Wildlife Trust: Coordinating awareness activities at National Level and in Rumphi
- WESM: Coordinating awareness activities in Mulanje and Phalombe
- CARD: Coordinating Community activities in Mulanje and Phalombe
- Total Land Care: Coordinating community activities in Rumphi
- Blantyre Water Board: Supporting restoration efforts of the project
- Peace Parks Foundation: Supporting clearing of IAS

Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust: Technical and financial support and information and platform to share project results and outputs for Surrounding communities.

D. Gender Equality

The project has made commendable efforts to incorporate gender perspectives and address gender concerns in its activities, despite not having formal gender action plan. These efforts include data collection practices, encouraging female participation in training, promoting women's involvement in the community activities, achieving gender balance in awareness-raising activities, and ensuring women's representation in leadership roles. Challenges related to the recruitment of the Protected Area staff are being addressed, and partner organizations are actively working to implement inclusivity policies. While there have been both positive and negative aspects, the project demonstrates a commitment to advancing gender equality and inclusiveness in its mission to enhance sustainability in agroecosystems adjoining protected areas through the following:

DATA COLLECTION AND DISAGGREGATED DATA

One positive aspect of the project is its commitment to collecting sex-disaggregated data. This practice ensures that information regarding the participation of men and women in project activities is recorded,

facilitating the tracking of gender-based disparities and the promotion of equal participation. This approach is commendable as it provides a basis for informed decision-making and targeted interventions.

LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE

The presence of women in leadership roles within the project is a noteworthy positive aspect. The Project Director, Project Coordinator, and the Chair of the Project Steering Committee are all women. Additionally, the project has enlisted the expertise of an Environmental, Social, and Gender mainstreaming expert within its technical team. These women provide crucial guidance and insight into integrating gender considerations effectively.

INCLUSIVENESS IN PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

While most staff in protected areas are men, several project executing partners are actively implementing their institutional policies to promote inclusiveness. For example, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife has actively recruited women for clearing Invasive Alien Species (IAS), with 37% of recruits being women in one location. In Mulanje, 10% of the women involved in IAS clearing were Page 14 of 41 women. This commitment from partner organizations helps to address gender disparities within their respective spheres.

AWARENESS RAISING ACTIVITIES

The project has demonstrated a commitment to gender inclusivity in awareness-raising activities, with a minimum of 40% women participating. This effort ensures that gender perspectives are integrated into community engagement efforts, leading to a more balanced and holistic approach.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

In community activities, the project has witnessed higher participation of women, surpassing that of men. In the agro-ecosystems adjoining protected areas in Rumphi, women's participation exceeded men's participation and the overall participation by gender was 23 men and 27 women, even though some women participants came from male-headed household. Similarly, in Mulanje, out of the 70 participants, 45 were women

E. Knowledge Management

Knowledge activities and	Yes. The project has produced the following Knowledge products so far:
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products	1. Invasive alien Species field guide: https://lnkd.in/dHtu8yAr 2. ii. National Invasive Alien Species Strategy and Action Plan 3. iii. IAS Early detection and Rapid Response Procedures 4. iv. Several IAS Posters, calendars, t-shirts, car stickers v. Several IAS documentaries 5. vi. Invasive alien Species communication strategy vi. Several IAS radio Programs 6. vii. IAS messages vii Several IAS News Paper articles https://www.capitalradiomalawi.com/2024/07/07/malawi-launches-guidelines-to-fight-invasive-alien-species 7. https://www.nyasatimes.com/ministry-of-natural-resources-launches-publications-to-sensitize-people-on-effects-of-alien-species/ 8. https://www.zodiakmalawi.com/nw/national-news/66-news-in-southern-region/6464-lwt-tips-communities-on-invasive-alien-species 9. https://blog.invasive-species.org/2024/05/13/cabi-publishes-guide-to-the-naturalized-and-invasive-plants-of-malawi/ 10. https://times.mw/malawis-wildlife-under-alien-threat/ 11. https://mw.chm-cbd.net/projects/invasive-alien-species-management-project-malawi 12. https://www.nyasatimes.com/public-urged-to-support-fight-against-invasive-alien-species/ 13. http://www.aejmalawi.org/news/?invasive-threaten-species-diversity-in-ecosystem-hotspots-482ff0cfe41a3ff2c2c95e2b2a5b6300 14. https://zodiakmalawi.com/nw/national-news/66-news-in-southern-region/3900-frim-to-eradicate-invasive-alien-species-on-mulanje-forest-reserve 15. https://africabrief.substack.com/p/controlling-invasive-alien-species 16. https://africabrief.substack.com/p/controlling-invasive-alien-species https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/OACTn6jAnYu4MUk9PVA
Main learning during the period	he main lessons from the reporting period are as follows: 1. Communications and awareness raising are key to ensure sustainability of project outcomes 2. Stakeholder engagement and mobilization of co-financing is important to ensure buy in and take up of project activities by other
	stakeholders 3. Integration of project activities, outputs into existing strategies and management plans is helpful to ensure on-going sustainability 4. Environmental and Social safeguard activities should always be budget for to ensure there implementation 5. Restoration and IAS projects may take years to realize the outcomes. 6. Engaging and training the media will allow for ensuring good outcomes and proper reporting and awareness raising . 7. Integration of IAS in the syllabus is the way to go.

III: Minor Amendments

CONTEXT	
Result Framework	
Components and Cost	
Institutional And Implementation Arrangements	

Financial Management	
Implementation Schedule	
Executing Entity	
Executing Entity Category	
Minor Project Objective Change	
Safeguards	
Risk Analysis	
Increase of GEF Financing up to 5%	
Co-Financing	
Location of Project Activity	
others	

IV: Geographic Coordinates of Project Activities

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Nyika National Park	-10.64417	33.69231	

Location Description:

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Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve	-15.9494	35.5923	

Location Description:

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Activity Description:

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category
M and E Document

Title
9539-PIR-UNEP-2025-Malawi Invasive Alien Species
Management Project