

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

9/14/2026

Fiscal Year , PIR Number

FY 2026 , Final 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

1,404,511.00

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 9/14/2026

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

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

1.1 Finalisation and testing of the Risk Analysis Procedures for Invasive Alien Species The risk assessment was as part of testing Risk Analysis procedures, especially the risk assessment methodology adapted from Ireland. The work focused on identifying, assessing, and prioritising invasive species and their pathways of introduction and spread across pilot districts of Chikwawa and Nsanje, including the Shire River and Elephant Marsh.

In total, 64 species were assessed: 30 invasive species already occurring in the Lower Shire and 34 potential invasive species identified through horizon scanning of neighbouring countries and major trade partners.

The assessment followed a participatory risk analysis process combining desk reviews, expert workshops, field surveys (terrestrial and aquatic), rapid botanical surveys, and community social surveys. Species were scored and ranked based on invasion history, spread potential, impacts, pathways, and management feasibility, with uncertainty explicitly considered.

The work involved the Environmental Affairs Department, technical experts from relevant sectors, local communities, and partners supporting the Shire Valley Transformation Programme, the programme which cofinance the project. From the 30 existing species, 15 were prioritized as high risk. These comprised:

1. Plants (10 species): Argemone mexicana, Calotropis procera, Prosopis juliflora, Senna alata, Datura innoxia, Datura stramonium, Lantana camara, Opuntia stricta, Pistia stratiotes, Pontederia crassipes. Invertebrates (2 species): Deroceras laeve (slug) and Tithonia diversifolia (treated as a high-impact terrestrial invasive plant in management terms).
2. Vertebrates (2 bird species): Columba livia (pigeon) and Emberiza quelea (red-billed quelea).
3. Aquatic invertebrates (1 species): Cherax quadricarinatus (redclaw crayfish).

Key outputs included prioritised lists of high-risk invasive species, identified and ranked invasion pathways, spatial maps of infestation hotspots, and evidence-based recommendations for management, prevention, and early detection. These outputs are useful for guiding policy decisions, targeting control efforts, strengthening biosecurity, and supporting early warning and rapid response systems in the Lower Shire Landscape.

2.0 Two revised Protected Area Management Plans including strategies and budgets for IAS prevention and Control.

2.1 Development of an Invasive Alien Species Management Plan for Nyika National Park In December 2025, stakeholders reviewed and approved IAS Management Plans for Mulanje Forest Reserve and Nyika National Park.

The plans were developed with technical expertise of CABI and draw on over six years of project experience, including results from experimental invasive species control trials conducted in Mulanje and Nyika over the past five years. The plans compile species identified during the project, present information on a species-by-species basis, outline indicative management costs, and identify high-risk invasive species for prioritisation. Stakeholders feedback acknowledged the technical value of the drafts and approved them provisionally indicating need for additional implementation plan outlining specific actions, implementation approaches, responsible institutions, timelines, and monitoring indicators.

This process was agreed to be part of the work of the sites after the project phases out so that the implementation plan can clearly define what will be done, how it will be implemented, who is responsible, and how success will be measured. Development of Environmental and Social Safeguards as part of the IAS Management Plan for Nyika National Park. The Nyika IAS Management Plan was finalised in this reporting period. The implementation plan development was supported by a local consultant.

The implementation plan proposes a 10-year management programme targeting approximately 984 ha of invasive species, including eradication of about 450 ha of the Chelinda pine plantation, with an estimated implementation cost of MK 2.7 billion. It also includes environmental and social safeguard measures, post-clearing restoration actions, and institutional arrangements for implementation under the Nyika-Vwaza Trust.

The Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for the proposed pine harvesting at Chelinda Plantation was also conducted. The project team supported review of the project brief since the Malawi Environment Protection Authority requires a full ESIA under the Environment Management Act (2017).

A consultant was selected and a multidisciplinary ESIA team established to conduct baseline studies, impact assessment, stakeholder consultations, and preparation of an Environmental and Social Management and Monitoring framework. All the final steps related to this work will be supported by Department of National Parks and Wildlife who plan to initiate phased implementation of invasive species clearing and rehabilitation activities according to the IAS management and implementation plans.

3.0. Communication strategy and outreach campaigns including use of media, workshops and meetings targeting government officials, PA staff and affected communities Under this output, the following were achieved in this reporting period.

3.1. Printing, Shipping and Distribution of the Field Guide During the reporting period, significant progress was made on knowledge management and awareness raising through finalisation, printing, launch, and distribution of the Invasive Alien Species (IAS) Field Guide.

Following approval of the final manuscript, printing specifications were agreed and the guide was produced and shipped to Lilongwe. Despite minor adjustments to original specifications, the printing process was completed successfully. The IAS Field Guide was officially launched as part of efforts to strengthen national capacity for identification and management of invasive alien species. The guide provides practical, user-friendly reference material for field officers, researchers, and practitioners involved in IAS management across Malawi. An initial 30 copies were distributed to academia, researchers, and selected policy makers to support research, teaching, and evidence-based decision-making.

The remaining copies are being distributed through the Communication and Awareness Division of the Environmental Affairs Department (EAD) and the Malawi Environment Protection Authority, with priority given to field workers, researchers, academia, and institutions directly involved in invasive species management. Distribution is designed to maximise uptake among practitioners working on the ground, while also supporting awareness and policy engagement at national level. Beyond the current project phase, the field guide will continue to be reproduced and disseminated to ensure sustained access and long-term use in invasive alien species management, research, and capacity building initiatives.

2.2. Dissemination of IAS Awareness Materials IAS awareness materials including documentaries, radio jingles, songs, t-shirts, calendar were distributed and being used continuously during this reporting period. The documentaries were aired on MBC TV along with other coverage during the MBC TV news segments.

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

The project faced some challenges that affected the timely and efficient implementation of activities. Foreign exchange scarcity in Malawi made it difficult to pay international consultants, resulting in delays in some project operations. The project was also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, when most activities were put on hold. The subsequent two-year extension helped to complete activities that had been delayed. Political pressure regarding pine harvesting in Nyika National Park also created implementation challenges, as pine revenues were viewed as a potential source of government income, while the project was implementing IAS management protocols. Staff turnover at project sites also affected continuity, although replacement staff were subsequently assigned. In addition, the project faced mobility constraints because activities were implemented in remote areas with difficult terrain and the project lacked a reliable vehicle for supervision and field operations.

However, the project managed to apply adaptive management, institutional coordination and additional resources to maintain implementation progress which eventually led to all project targets being achieved.

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

Mount Mulanje Conservation Trust: Technical and financial support and information and platform to share project results and outputs 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 casual workers involved in IAS clearing were 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

The project has produced the following Knowledge products so far:

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
7. <https://www.capitalradiomalawi.com/2024/07/07/malawi-launches-guidelines-to-fight-invasive-alien-species>
8. <https://www.nyasatimes.com/ministry-of-natural-resources-launches-publications-to-sensitize-people-on-effects-of-alien-species/>
9. <https://www.zodiakmalawi.com/nw/national-news/66-news-in-southern-region/6464-lwt-tips-communities-on-invasive-alien-species>
10. <https://blog.invasive-species.org/2024/05/13/cabi-publishes-guide-to-the-naturalized-and-invasive-plants-of-malawi/>
11. <https://times.mw/malawis-wildlife-under-alien-threat/>
12. <https://mw.chm-cbd.net/projects/invasive-alien-species-management-project-malawi>
13. <https://www.nyasatimes.com/public-urged-to-support-fight-against-invasive-alien-species/>
14. <http://www.aejmalawi.org/news/?invasive-threaten-species-diversity-in-ecosystem-hotspots-482ff0cfe41a3ff2c2c95e2b2a5b6300>
15. <https://zodiakmalawi.com/nw/national-news/66-news-in-southern-region/3900-frim-to-eradicate-invasive-alien-species-on-mulanje-forest-reserve>
16. <https://africabrief.substack.com/p/controlling-invasive-alien-species>
17. <https://africabrief.substack.com/p/controlling-invasive-alien-species>
18. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0ACTn6jAnYu4MUK9PVA>

Main learning during the period

The main lessons from the reporting period are as follows:

1. Communications and awareness raising are key to ensure sustainability of project outcomes Regular outreach activities such as radio programmes, written materials (flyers, stickers), branded T-shirts and golf shirts, documentaries, and jingles carrying invasive alien species (IAS) messages are essential for reaching large audiences. These communication tools help reinforce public responsibility for environmental management, particularly IAS management, and ensure that messages reach as many people as possible, repeatedly and consistently.

Stakeholder engagement and mobilization of co-financing is important to ensure buy in and take up of project activities by other stakeholders

Integration of project activities, outputs into existing strategies and management plans is helpful to ensure on-going sustainability

Environmental and Social safeguard activities should always be budget for to ensure their implementation

Restoration and IAS projects may take years to realize the outcomes

Engaging and training the media will allow for ensuring good outcomes and proper reporting and awareness raising

Integration of IAS in the syllabus is the way to go

Monitoring and Reporting strengthens accountability

There is no one single optimal method for addressing IAS

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_2026
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