

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: population growth

Rapid population growth in Malawi poses a great challenge to government to provide basic services for its people.

According to population projections by the National Statistics Office (NSO) Malawi's population grows by more than 400,000 people each year. By 2050 the country's population is projected to reach about 40 million if current trends continue.

Families, on average, have six children.

This week, our bulletin looks at how population growth affects the nation's fisheries sector. It plays a key role in poverty reduction by creating jobs in rural areas, and just as importantly, contributes to household food security.

The fishing sector provides employment opportunities to more than 350,000 people. However, population growth is posing a great threat to this sector.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To increase knowledge of listeners on how population growth affects the fisheries sector
- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on population growth and the fisheries sector
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions to population growth and the effects it has on the fisheries sector

The Problem: Population Growth and Fewer Fish

In August of this year, the fisheries department acknowledged that the fish population, including the popular Chambo, in the country's lakes, is decreasing.

This has led to soaring fish prices and the fewer fish on restaurant menus.

The fisheries sector contributes to the country's economy – the sector is about four percent of Malawi's Gross Domestic Product. The GDP is the total market value of all goods and services produced in a country in a given year.

The fishing industry is a significant source of jobs, directly employing about 60,000 fishermen and indirectly about 350,000 people who are involved in fish processing, fish marketing, net making, boat building and engine repair.

Population growth is having a negative impact on this sector. A growing population requires more food – and fish. So, over the years, more and more people have gotten into the fishing business. One of the results has been a rapid decline in fish populations in Malawi's rivers, lakes and streams.

The result of this overfishing is that some fish populations become extinct or reduced in numbers to the point where it is no longer viable to harvest them.

Catching as many fish as possible may seem like a profitable practice to most fishermen, but overfishing has serious consequences. The results not only affect the balance of life in the lakes and rivers, but also the social and economic well-being of the communities around the lakes and rivers that depend on fish for their way of living.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how population growth affects the fisheries sector in the country.

Make the following points to your listeners:

A high population growth rate contributes to overfishing, species loss, and pollution of the lake.

The population is growing at an annual rate of more than three percent, making it difficult to meet demand for food. Fish from the lake provides about 70 percent of protein consumption in the country. As the population grows, so does the consumption of fish, thereby creating pressure on the lake's fish.

High population growth has increased land cultivation in the lake's catchment areas and has contributed to the pollution of the lake through the runoff of fertilizers and other chemicals and the disruption of natural ecosystems through the clearing of the catchment areas.

Increased population will also increase demand for water, resulting in the drying up rivers, lakes and streams. The flow of water will decrease as population needs increase. When the rivers, lakes and streams dry up, fish can't survive.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature estimated in 2004 that the population of the popular Chambo fish had declined by 70 percent over the previous ten years.

You can make the following suggestion to your listeners, to

ensure that the fisheries sector is no longer at risk because of overpopulation.

People should consider using modern family planning methods to make sure that they space the birth of their children, or if they already have many children they should consider using a birth control method so as not have any more children.

Since Malawi has high levels of illiteracy which limits work opportunities and hastens the childbearing age for women, it is important for chiefs and other traditional leaders to talk to their communities about the importance of family planning.

Tribal leaders also need to fishermen to abide by the rules of the fishery department, especially when the lakes and rivers are closed to fishing to give enough the fish enough time to replenish their stocks.

Interview several fishermen and ask them why they think the fish population is decreasing and what they think can be done to deal with this problem. What other job opportunities are available to fishermen during the times when fishing is banned?

Interview an official from the fisheries department and find out what is being done to replenish fish stocks. What are the penalties for illegal fishing? Are the laws enforced? What measures are being put in place to deal with depleted fish stocks?

Ask the official how population growth affects the fisheries sector.

Useful Contacts

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- H Banda ; The fisheries Department +265 1 580 066
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