

## GBIF MALAWI ADVOCACY ACTION END OF PROGRAMME REPORT

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### Executive summary

Malawi through the [National Commission for Science and Technology](#) (NCST) became an Associate Participant from 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015 in the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). By joining the GBIF and especially participating in the GBIF Malawi Advocacy Action project, the country expects to build her capacity at national level to effectively manage biological diversity data. That way Malawi will ensure that biodiversity information is available and well organized to meet the needs of researchers and of policymakers for policy makers to use when making decisions and also to lobby for biodiversity mainstreaming in the National Development Plans.

The project has assisted Malawi in determining co-coordination Mechanism and Organizing Process, which aimed at putting in place an effective planning and management structure for managing activities of the GBIF at the national level.

The activities planned under the last half of the Malawi GBIF Advocacy Action project included: Development of a list of priority activities and actions to be undertaken by GBIF Malawi node and its stakeholders; Web based needs assessment; Development of the MoU for data and information sharing with stakeholders; and stakeholder consultations on the operationalization of the MoU. The needs assessment exercise revealed a number of issues that need to be clarified, improved and resolved for the smooth operationalization of the initiative. However, it was appreciated that the stakeholders have a

positive perspective on the initiative in general and are looking forward to benefiting from the global initiative.

The stakeholder consultations held were aimed at getting their views on modalities for sharing biodiversity data and information, in a manner that aligns with institutional objectives and with the agreed purposes; and also assess the capacity needs of different stakeholders for them to be able to carry out their respective responsibilities under the MOU. The assessments revealed that both human and infrastructure capacities, as well as lack of linkages and collaborations both within and across institutions are among the challenges that have to be addressed for successful implementation of the initiative.

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### Introduction

Malawi has unique and diverse ecosystems, flora and fauna that support the country's economic growth. The major ecosystems include terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The greatest diversity of plants and animals are in the 97 protected areas, comprising 87 Forest Reserves, five National Parks and Four Wildlife Reserves. Aquatic ecosystems cover about 20% of the total surface area of Malawi and are habitats to a diversity of species such as fish, amphibians, reptiles, water lilies. Overdependence on the

different biological resources for income, food and other needs is putting the resources under great threat. There is need therefore for immediate action to enhance management, conservation and utilization of the country's biological diversity to avoid their extinction. Recognizing the importance of data management for informed policy decisions and biodiversity management, Malawi through the [National Commission for Science and Technology](#) (NCST) became an Associate Participant from 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015 in the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). In joining GBIF, Malawi plans to develop capacity at national level to manage biodiversity data to effectively enhance management, conservation and utilization of the country's biological resources.

By joining the GBIF and especially participating in the GBIF Malawi Advocacy Action project, the country expects to build her capacity at national level to effectively manage biological diversity data. That way Malawi will ensure that biodiversity information is available and well organized to meet the needs of researchers and of policymakers for policy makers to use when making decisions and also to lobby for biodiversity mainstreaming in the National Development Plans. In addition, mobilizing biodiversity data will help Malawi fulfil her commitments to intergovernmental processes like the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and other biodiversity related Multilateral Environmental Agreements to which Malawi is a party.

The project has assisted Malawi in determining co-ordination Mechanism and Organizing Process, which aim at putting in place an effective planning and management structure for managing activities of the GBIF at the national level. To that effect, the first half of the project among other things looked at the Malawi GBIF Advocacy Actions like; sensitizing the stakeholder institutions in Malawi on the GBIF; Informing the stakeholders of the need for the Malawi GBIF Node and its functions; Raising awareness on the benefits of joining GBIF; and soliciting stakeholder commitment for successful implementation of GBIF activities at national level. The second half of the project looked at Needs Assessment and operationalization of the activities. Which included development of the MoU and consulting stakeholders on how best to implement the provisions of the MoU, and developing a list of activities to be implemented by the GBIF node and its stakeholders at national level.

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### **The project and its objectives**

The main objectives of the project are as follows;

- a) Develop the structure, framework and procedures for implementation of GBIF activities;

- b) Establish a mechanism for planning, managing and supervising the development and implementation of activities of the GBIF at national level consisting of an effective executing group and a mechanism to involve all relevant stakeholders;  
Commence the process of raising awareness of GBIF issues with different stakeholders outside Government;
- c) Achieve sufficient commitment from different stakeholders to allow the successful implementation of GBIF activities at national levels; and
- d) Raise awareness within Government departments, ministries and agencies of GBIF and CBD.

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### **Project activities completed in the second half of the project**

Activities carried out in the second half of the Malawi GBIF Advocacy Action project included: Development of a list of priority activities and actions to be undertaken by GBIF stakeholders; Web based needs assessment; Development of the MoU for data and information sharing with stakeholders, and stakeholder consultations on the operationalization of the MoU.

NCST as Malawi's GBIF Participant wishes to establish an ongoing relationship for sharing Biodiversity data and information with data holding institutions through an MOU between them. This MOU between the parties (NCST and Data owners) wishes to facilitate the secure and timely flow of Biodiversity data and information between them; and enable free and open access to biodiversity data from all sources in order to support biodiversity science, environmental research, and evidence-based decision-making.

To kick start the process, the Agriculture and Natural Sciences section together with the Department of Documentation and Information Services of NCST, conducted a series of consultative meetings with various stakeholders from 12 to 17 June, 2016 to consult them on the modalities of the MoU for information and data sharing under the GBIF Malawi Advocacy project. The meetings were held with stakeholder institutions, which included Forestry Research Institute of Malawi, Biology Department of the University of Malawi at Chancellor College, National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens of Malawi in Zomba, Fisheries Research Unit in Monkey Bay; the National Plant Genetic Resource Centre; African Parks Headquarters and Museums of Malawi in Blantyre, Mzuzu Coffee Cooperative in Mzuzu, Mzuzu University and Mzuzu fisheries office in Mzuzu.

Currently, Malawi has several biodiversity data holders. Genetic resources of different plant species are conserved at different institutions which include the National Plant Genetic Resource Centre, Agricultural Research Stations, Botanical Gardens, Academic institutions and Forestry Research Institute of Malawi. These institutions in most cases do not have a platform to share information among themselves and with

the general public making it very difficult for researchers, policy makers and the general public to access such information for different uses. The project requires to develop the capacity of different stakeholder institutions to prepare and store data in a form that it can be shared with different stakeholders. The stakeholder consultative meetings were an eye opener as the Node, was enlightened on a number of issues that need to be clarified, improved and resolved for the smooth operationalization of the initiative. Stakeholders shared different challenges that may affect their participation into the global initiative. Among these challenges were:

- a) Lack of human capacity in ICT and Library services;
- b) Lack of ICT equipment for managing data and information;
- c) Lack of proper infrastructure for housing data and information; and
- d) Lack of proper coordination and networking within and across institutions.

However, despite these challenges, the stakeholders accepted the initiative and are looking forward to benefiting from data and information access from the initiative. The country currently does not have any policy on data sharing. To that effect, the stakeholder meetings also discussed the modalities on data and information sharing with the stakeholders in form of an MoU.

Further to that, the Node developed a list of activities to clearly map out an implementation plan that is easy to follow. Among these proposed activities were to:

- a) Conduct an online survey to identify training and infrastructure needs at organizational and individual level on data management for biodiversity management;
- b) develop a Memoranda of Understanding to be signed by stakeholder institutions to facilitate transfer of data/information to the Malawi GBIF repository;
- c) organize more sensitization and advocacy meetings for stakeholder institutions on the GBIF Malawi project so that they are aware and are ready to support the initiative;
- d) host the Malawi GBIF web portal and update it regularly so that it stays current;
- e) establish a group of experts in various fields charged with the responsibility of reviewing unpublished articles before they are deposited in the GBIF Malawi repository;
- f) promote the development of national digital repositories and GBIF activities;
- g) develop and promote national policy and institutional policies to govern the flow of information to the Malawi GBIF repository;

- h) Establish a Malawi GBIF oversight committee; and
  - i) Organize meetings of the Malawi GBIF oversight committee.
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### **Project communications**

In order to inform the general public on the activities of GBIF, the Department of Documentation and Information Services at the NCST is already working on its website to include developments in the GBIF.

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### **Recommendations**

Having conducted the consultative meetings with the relevant stakeholders, the Node through the support from different development partners plans to:

- a) Operationalize the MoU, taking into consideration inputs from the consulted stakeholders;
- b) In the short term, NCST as Malawi node, needs to build capacity for the stakeholders on data and information management to facilitate data and information sharing;
- c) Strengthen networking and collaborations within and across institutions to enhance data and information sharing;
- d) Support ICT and Library personnel within institutions with proper skills in Data and information management; and
- e) Engage development partners to support the ICT infrastructure development and equipment for the stakeholders to participate fully in the global initiative.