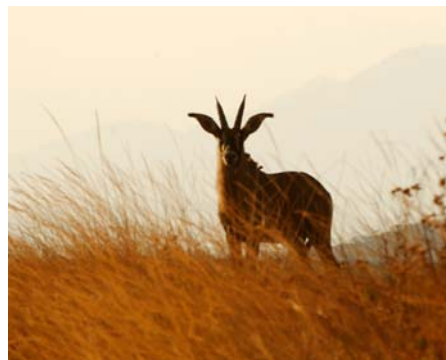


Apiaries and Memories: A Nyika Conservation Story

Nyika, meaning “where the water comes from” in the local language, is one of Malawi’s most important water catchment areas. It is also one of the most remarkable ecosystems in the country. Sitting at an elevation of about 2,500 meters above sea level, Nyika National Park is home to an amazing biodiversity of flora and fauna, including lions, leopards, elephants, buffaloes, zebras, large numbers of antelopes and over 435 species of birds and 200 types of orchids. The Park’s extensive savannah and marshes provide refuge to important migratory birds and endangered species, and protects such sacred places as *Mvanda hill* and *Kaulime Lake*, which have served as local spiritual sanctuaries for centuries. This unique, Afro- montane center of biodiversity, however, is under threat.



Widespread poverty combined with lack of access to productive alternatives have forced many of the area’s population to depend on direct use (usually uncontrolled and unsustainable) of its natural resources for their livelihoods. Poaching, deforestation, and uncontrolled forest and grassland fires exert pressure on the Park, increasing sharply when nearby communities experience a rise in economic hardship. About 40 percent of land surrounding Nyika is suitable for agriculture, leading many smallholder families, who struggle to make a living off of the land, to revert to the Park to make ends meet since many still feel the Park is theirs to begin with. The National park was gazetted in 1965 and expanded to a total area of 3,200Km² in 1978, at which time, centuries-old communities within park boundaries were resettled outside the protected area.

Although the National Park has been legally protected for a while now, lack of sufficient funds has prevented enforcement of the restrictions resulting in ineffective protection of biodiversity and habitat loss. The realization that social fences constructed in cooperation with surrounding communities are far more effective than the “fence and fine” approach, is quickly taking hold within the DNPW. COMPASS II/USAID support to combine conservation with small-scale commercialization of forest-based products has contributed to reinforcing this social fence, which is gaining in strength. In less than 2 years, 66.6 percent (213,044 Ha) of the Park has been demarcated as apiaries, areas within the National Park identified for productive economic activities and participatory management between DNPW and surrounding communities. Already, there are signs that this partnership is proving to be successful.

Central to the success of this partnership is the *Resource Use Agreement*, developed by COMPASS II/DAI. A Resource Use Agreement is a formal agreement, between the government and legally constituted community-group enterprises made up of producers of natural resources-based products. These agreements provide a legally binding mechanism for local people to enter the Park and harvest resources from within while sharing the responsibility for management and conservation of the area. The establishment of demarcated apiaries for community beekeeping enterprise now bolstered formally by resource use agreements has encouraged a behavioral shift. Communities have begun to view themselves as partners with the DNPW, and are enthusiastically sharing conservation and management responsibilities. A total of about 6,000 hives presently hang in the Park; vandalism has reduced; poachers are more frequently being arrested and snares are confiscated by community members while monitoring their hives; and habitat management such as early burning is being carried out in concert with volunteers from surrounding communities.

A total of 1,688 households from 221 villages through 142 clubs are active members of the communities that take pride in the stewardship of their apiaries, especially given that they carry the potential to increase household income from sale of carbon credits and from honey production over the 40 tons they sold locally this year. These clubs belong to 8 formally registered Beekeeping Enterprises, through which they have finally earned the privilege as partners in the protection of the Park. Equally importantly, it has earned them freedom to be in places where their ancestral villages once stood and to visit old burial grounds and sacred sanctuaries. A part of the present-day Nyika National Park once held bustling villages; today they are finally happy to have regained their rights to connect with their past and freely walk down memory lanes that now meander through the apiaries. ¹

¹ Author: Ms. Bagie Sherchand, Chief of Party, COMPASS II/USAID Project. COMPASS II is managed by Bethesda based Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI). Photo Credit: John Dickinson.