



MALAWI JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SPECIAL ISSUE: CALL FOR PAPERS

Behavioural Dimensions of Water Security and Climate Adaptation in Malawi



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RATIONALE AND FOCUS

Climate change is intensifying drought, floods, rainfall variability, heat and groundwater stress across Malawi (World Bank, 2022). Yet water insecurity is not produced by physical scarcity alone (Jepson et al., 2017). It arises where climatic shocks meet infrastructure deficits, unequal access, gendered labour, weak maintenance and fragmented institutions (Kalin et al., 2019). How these pressures play out depends on what people and organisations do. Households decide whether to store, treat, ration or switch water sources. Communities decide whether to maintain a borehole and enforce the rules for using it. District councils, utilities, NGOs and funders decide which problems receive attention and money. Adaptation therefore depends on behaviour at every level, from the individual to the institution (Conway, 2024). Why is uptake of climate information and advice often low, even where it is available (Vincent et al., 2017)? Why do some water problems attract policy attention while others, equally serious, are neglected? Why do some adaptation efforts last while others fade when a project ends?

The behavioural and psychological sciences offer theories and methods for answering these questions, but most underlying evidence comes from Western societies (Henrich et al., 2010), and its relevance to Malawi cannot be assumed. Research framed as water security has also made little use of behavioural and psychological concepts (Conway, 2024). This special issue of the Malawi Journal of Science and Technology invites research that applies, tests, adapts or challenges behavioural perspectives on water security under climate change in Malawi. It aims to move beyond describing climate exposure towards analysing who adapts, at what cost, with what effect on water security, and whether responses reduce or reproduce future vulnerability (Eriksen et al., 2021).

The issue is convened by the Behavioural Adaptation for Water Security and Inclusion (BASIN) project, funded under the UK-Canada CLARE programme, which has studied how households, communities and institutions in Chikwawa and Mulanje respond to climate-related water stress. Submissions do not need to be connected to BASIN. We welcome work from any discipline, institution or sector that addresses the themes below.

SCOPE

Papers should focus on Malawi. Comparative studies are welcome where Malawi is one of the cases. We welcome quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods and experimental work, and contributions from researchers, practitioners and policymakers. Every paper should make clear which behaviour it examines, whose behaviour it is, and what explains it.

THEMES AND DESCRIPTORS

1. Water Security, Climate Change and Human Behaviour

Papers may examine how individuals, households and communities perceive and respond to climate-related water risks, including droughts, floods, rainfall variability and groundwater stress. Contributions may explore risk perception, attitudes, beliefs, values, emotions and decision-making under uncertainty, as well as the behavioural differences between short-term coping and long-term climate adaptation.

2. Behaviour Change, Climate Information and Water Management

Papers may investigate the drivers of and barriers to behaviour change in water use, conservation, treatment, storage and climate adaptation. Topics may include the role of climate information, trust, communication, indigenous knowledge, social norms, incentives and behavioural frameworks in shaping decisions and translating information into anticipatory action.

3. Collective Action, Institutions and Governance of Water Security

Papers may examine how social norms, cooperation, leadership and organisational behaviour influence the management and sustainability of water resources and infrastructure. Contributions may explore the behaviour of water point committees, traditional authorities, district councils, utilities, NGOs and policymakers, including institutional coordination, accountability, resource allocation, policy implementation and the factors contributing to successful adaptation or maladaptation.

4. Equity, Vulnerability and Behaviourally Informed Climate Adaptation

Papers may examine how gender, age, disability, poverty and geographical location

shape people's choices, adaptive capacity and experiences of water insecurity. Contributions may assess who bears the social, economic, health, time and safety costs of water insecurity, alongside the design and evaluation of behaviourally informed interventions that promote equitable, inclusive and sustainable water security under climate change.

ARTICLE TYPES AND WORD LIMITS

- **Original research articles:** maximum 6,000 words, excluding references and appendices
- **Review articles:** maximum 4,000 words, excluding references and appendices
- **Short communications, including policy and practice notes:** 500–800 words

FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS

- Abstract: maximum 250 words
- Referencing style: APA 7th edition
- All submissions must be original, unpublished and not under consideration elsewhere.
- Research involving human participants must state the ethical approval obtained.
- There are no submission or publication charges, and all articles will be published open access.

TIMELINE

Milestone	Date
Call for abstracts issued	23 October 2026
Abstract submission deadline	29 November 2026
Notification of abstract outcome and invitation to submit full manuscript	11 December 2026
Full manuscript submission deadline	14 March 2027
Peer review and revision	March–June 2027

Milestone	Date
Final acceptance and production	July 2027
Publication of special issue	August 2027

Stage 2: full manuscripts. Authors of selected abstracts will be invited to submit a full manuscript by 28 February 2027. Submission instructions will be sent with the invitation. An invitation to submit does not guarantee publication.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

Stage 1: Abstracts. Send an abstract of up to 250 words to BASIN@unima.ac.mw by 15 November 2026, with the subject line “MJST Special Issue: Abstract”. Include the proposed title, author names and affiliations, the article type and the theme(s) addressed. The abstract should state the research question, the behavioural framing, the methods and data, and the main findings or expected contribution.

REVIEW AND EDITORIAL PROCESS

Abstracts will be assessed by the guest editors against the criteria below. Full manuscripts will undergo double-blind peer review, and decisions will rest on the reviewers’ reports and the editors’ judgement. Manuscripts authored by a guest editor or by members of the BASIN project team will be handled by an editor with no involvement in the work.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING ABSTRACTS

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Adequate (2)	Weak (1)	Score
Relevance to the special issue	Directly addresses one or more themes; behaviour in relation to water security in Malawi is the central subject	Strong thematic fit with minor gaps	Partial relevance; behaviour is peripheral	Outside scope	/4
Behavioural and conceptual grounding	Clear research question; explicit, well-justified use of behavioural, psychological, social or institutional theory	Sound framing with adequate theory	Basic framing; limited theoretical engagement	Vague or absent framework	/4
Methodological rigour / evidence base	Appropriate design, transparent methods, robust data or synthesis	Solid methods with minor limitations	Adequate but thin evidence	Weak or unclear methods	/4
Contribution to knowledge or practice	Novel insight with clear relevance for policy or practice in Malawi	Clear incremental contribution	Limited novelty	Minimal contribution	/4
Equity and inclusion	Explicit attention to gender, poverty, disability or power relations	Partial attention to equity	Equity mentioned but not analysed	Absent	/4
Clarity of writing and structure	Well organised, precise, within word limit	Generally clear with minor issues	Understandable but uneven	Poorly structured or unclear	/4
Total					/24

Abstracts scoring 16 or more out of 24 will normally be invited to proceed to a full manuscript.

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We look forward to receiving contributions that advance understanding of how people, communities and institutions in Malawi can secure water under intensifying climate stress.

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