

THE ENVIRONMENT

Living sustainably within the limits of the natural world

Zimbabwe is classified as one of the countries that will suffer significantly from global warming. The main areas of the country that are most likely to be affected are those that are already arid to semi-arid, and this, together with predictions of more extreme weather, must be taken into account by any incoming government that is serious about planning for the future. The MDC government will therefore accede to best-practice environmental protection agreements.

In addition to this global concern, over which Zimbabwe has, at best, a very marginal influence, there has been a serious deterioration in the country's environment in recent years. Water systems are severely polluted, air pollution from uncontrolled emissions and poorly maintained vehicles is an issue in the urban areas and bush fires in the rural areas are completely out of control. In this respect it must be noted that wild fires in Africa, many of which burn for days, are significant contributors to global warming. It is therefore not true to say that Africa makes an insignificant contribution to atmospheric pollution.

Land degradation as a contributor to rural poverty and environmental degradation is widespread. The search for income as a result of the economic decline has led to an enormous increase in gold-panning and the felling of trees for sale as fuel wood, both of which have had significant impacts on the environment. Some areas of the country are in fact in danger of becoming desert, and the growth of the Kalahari Desert in Botswana is a very real threat to the south-western districts of the country. Flash floods and dry riverbeds are a common feature, and the nature of such floodwater is testimony to the land erosion now taking place in all areas. This threatens urban water storage and irrigation systems and is depleting Zimbabwe's ability to sustain agriculture as a productive, profitable part of the national economy.

Halting and then reversing this situation will require a holistic approach to the environment that embraces all aspects of national life. Environmental policy will have to be brought to bear on land-use planning, land-use practices, tenure systems, the protection of the natural environment, flora and fauna in special areas, preservation and management of our natural forest areas as well the establishment of new forest industries in suitable agro-ecological regions. It is recognized that much work in this area has already been done by Agritex, which will in future be closely involved with national environmental activities.

All new developments will be required by law to submit Environmental Impact Assessments, and all businesses must meet minimum environmental standards for emissions and water and land management. All vehicles will be required, over time, to meet new standards for emissions. Maximum use will be made of renewable energy sources such as hydroelectricity, solar power, etc., and, where fossil fuels are used, strict standards for carbon emissions laid down.

Because the protection of the environment will impinge on all aspects of national life, it is the view of the MDC that responsibility for this function should be centred in one ministry. All agencies working in this field will be consolidated into a single integrated agency responsible for the environment, and appropriate ministries, under the guidance of this agency, will then implement the policies emanating from it.

POLICY OBJECTIVES

In implementing its environment policy, the MDC government will:

-  Seek to ensure sound environmental standards that contribute positively to economic and social development and a better quality of life for every individual.
-  Strive to upgrade the environment on the national scale of priorities and to assimilate this into the decision-making processes of central and local government.
-  Encourage the wise and prudent use of environmental resources, while encouraging conservation and preventing irreversible damage to resources through planning, technological and economic measures.
-  Establish a two-way communication system that recognizes the views of the public, a full partner in environmental activities, and take steps to deepen public participation through integrated activity in three spheres:
 -  Cultivating environmental values and behavioural norms based on protecting the environment and working on its behalf.
 -  Recruiting corporations and organizations as active partners in dealing with all environmental issues.
 -  Harnessing local authorities to cultivate environmental quality for the benefit of their residents.

The intention of the above is thus to foster environmental awareness and stewardship through education, outreach and assistance. Environmental education will be taught on a multi-disciplinary basis and integrated into ongoing curriculum review at the pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

POLICY PROGRAMMES

The MDC government will:

-  Strive for regional and international environmental co-operation, since environmental resources in Zimbabwe impact on and are impacted by neighbouring states. The purpose of this would be to foster regional and international co-operation through agreements, conventions and treaties on the sustainable utilization of natural resources and environmental management.
-  Develop an integrated database that will provide an updated picture of the state of the environment and of environmental risks in Zimbabwe, and of future trends and processes underlying environmental changes. This will serve as a basis for decision-making and policy-making, will provide feedback on all activities, and will serve as a tool for assessing achievements.
-  Integrate responsible environmental practices into business operations by establishing goals, measuring progress, and reporting performance through a comprehensive environmental management system. The aim is to encourage the efficient use of resources, reducing emissions into air, water and soil, and managing the hazards of waste.
-  Encourage research and development and require EIAs for all new developments and expansion, leading to the development of technologies and expertise to serve the public good by finding new and better solutions for environmental protection.
-  Encourage the development of eco-friendly products and provide incentives for the production of the same. This is intended to eliminate the production of environmentally hazardous products and substances.
-  Integrate the Environmental Management Agency into a new Environmental Agency and ensure that the new agency has the capacity to become an autonomous environmental affairs institution that is legally constituted and derives its authority under provisions of a broad legal framework for environmental management. The new agency will have a legal mandate to enforce compliance with national standards and have legal authority to seek legal redress whenever there is non-compliance. It will adopt a 'polluter pays' policy and businesses will be required to measure their own emissions to ensure they are within the laid-down standards.

The MDC will support research into the protection of natural woodlands, renewable sources of energy, water harvesting – in fact, all activities that will help Zimbabweans to conserve our country's natural resources.

The MDC recognizes that the provision of water will be one of this century's biggest challenges, and wise development and conservation of the country's water resources will be a priority. Existing riparian rights will be reviewed with a view to ensuring that they are just and viable.

The country will be divided into catchment areas according to river systems, and these will receive specific attention to ensure proper land conservation, land-use planning, the protection of wetlands and river banks, and the integrated management of water systems.

The Natural Resources Board

The NRB has played an important role in the management and conservation of natural resources in rural areas in the past. The MDC government will relocate the NRB into the ministry responsible for the environment, and consider its inclusion in the new national Environmental Agency.

The NRB will be given increased resources and responsibilities and be required to operate throughout the country as a custodian of natural resources and as a conservation agency. As at present, it will be able to grant orders to land-owners, mining companies and local authorities that will require remedial action to be taken where the Board deems that damage to natural resources is taking place.