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“INTERIM” REPORT ON ZIMBABWE’S BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN (BSAP) PROJECT: MAY – DECEMBER, 1997

BACKGROUND

The convention on Biological Diversity of which Zimbabwe is among the over 172 signatories, places the primary decision for the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources at the national level. Thus, in response to the Government of Zimbabwe’s request for support to prepare a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) approved a project document (ZIM/96/G31/A/1G/99 to provide funding of about US\$ 300 000.00 through the local office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The BSAP project is intended to build upon and reinforce other existing national strategies and plans such as the Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) programme which has been quite successful. The BSAP project, which runs from May, 1997 to April, 1998 will enable Zimbabwe to meet its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity by facilitating the preparation of a country study on the status of biodiversity as well as in the development of a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

In order to operationalise the project, a Secretariat, Steering Committee and Consulting Group were established within the Ministry of Mines, Environment & Tourism. The former is responsible for the day to day running of the project while the Steering Committee provides overall guidance and direction to the project. A multidisciplinary Consulting Group is responsible for preparing the country study and for developing a national strategy and action plan through national and provincial level consultations with the key stakeholders. International consultants with global expertise in biodiversity planning, GEF linkages and the preparation of biodiversity strategies and action plans are brought in to provide technical backstopping to the Secretariat at specific stages of project implementation.

PROGRESS MADE

Country study format

The country study is the first and perhaps one of the most important components of the BSAP process which provides baseline information for developing effective strategies and actions. To help plan the country study, the Secretariat organised a two day workshop at Lake Chivero Safari Lodge in April, 1997. Participants included members of the Secretariat, the consulting Group and Steering committee; and representatives from the local UNDP office and IUCN (both from the regional office in Harare and head office in Switzerland).

The Lake Chivero workshop debated and agreed upon the format and content of the country study Report. For purposes of breaking the report into manageable units, the sector

and ecosystem options were considered. Notwithstanding its inability to capture synergies and contradictions that occur across sectors, the sector approach was adopted because of the following reasons:

The government is structured along sectoral lines and the formulation and implementation of the policies that affect biodiversity is done within a sector context; and,

International conventions are generally formulated along sectoral lines.

The four sectors adopted were forestry; terrestrial wildlife; aquatic flora and fauna; and agriculture. Elements considered under each sector included the following; the status and trends of biodiversity at genetic, species and ecosystem levels; the causes of biodiversity changes; biodiversity conservation and sustainable use measures; pertinent legislative, policy and institutional issues; the economics of biodiversity conservation, incentives and disincentives; and unmet needs in terms of gaps and opportunities that form the basis for Zimbabwe's biodiversity strategic plan framework.

Key country study output/findings

A draft Country Study Report has been produced and a copy is attached. The report is now being finalised following the very positive and constructive inputs received during the First National Workshop.

The Country Study clearly indicates that biodiversity is of critical importance to the social and economic development of Zimbabwe at both the local and national levels. The majority of the country's population directly depends on a range of biological resources for subsistence and income generation. On a commercial scale, forestry, agriculture, fishing and tourism rely on a healthy diversity of genes, species and ecosystems. However, the report highlights that biodiversity in Zimbabwe is under threat from a number of biotic, abiotic and economic factors. These include conflicting economic policies, rapid population growth rates, restrictive land tenure systems, recurrent droughts, the erosion of cultural values, the sectoral approach to biodiversity issues and inadequate incentives for the rural folk who "live with" the biodiversity. Furthermore, government expenditures on biodiversity conservation have been declining over time in real terms. Significant gaps were also identified in the technical capacity and fiscal ability of some of the public sector institutions to monitor and enforce existing legislation. With respect to the latter, the study highlights the need for the Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism to incorporate biodiversity conservation into its on-going law reform process.

There are however, a number of positive steps being taken to conserve biodiversity and to use it sustainably in Zimbabwe. For example, about 13% of the country has been set aside as the national parks and wildlife estate under the Parks and Wildlife Act and another 2% as gazetted forests under the Forest Act. These areas are used for the conservation and

preservation of the country's wildlife, aquatic life and forests. With respect to ex-situ conservation, an elaborate network of forestry and agricultural gene banks has been established throughout the country. Furthermore, the CAMPFIRE programme, a success story that demonstrates the benefits of establishing conservation programmes that involve local communities and institutions is in place. However the report notes that such efforts continue to be threatened by factors elaborated earlier hence the need for an implementable Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan in the country.

The First National Workshop

In line with the need for feedback and consensus building among the various stakeholders on the biodiversity strategy and action plan formulation process, the project organised a two day First National Workshop on 3 and 4 December, 1997 at Club Mazvikadei. The objectives of the workshop were to:

Analyse the draft Country Report and prioritise its unmet needs;

Develop strategies that address the priority unmet needs;

Consider actions that should be taken to operationalise the identified strategies.

The workshop was attended by 41 environmentalist, ecologists, scientists, extensionists, agriculturists, foresters, wildlife experts and journalists and was officially opened by Mr. C. Chipato, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism. Mr. T.P.Z. Mpofu, UNDP Field Officer for Zimbabwe gave a keynote address. A report on the outcome of the workshop is being put together and will form the basis for the eight provincial workshops scheduled for January and February, 1998.

Communication strategy

The project believes that the successful development and implementation of Zimbabwe's BSAP will largely depend on building strong awareness and support at various levels in order to achieve informed and meaningful stakeholder participation. To this end, the Secretariat prepared a communication strategy and action plan at the inception of the project in May, 1997. The strategy started by identifying the following key stakeholder groups:

Print and electronic media

Parliamentarians

Government ministries and departments

Rural District Councils

Traditional leaders and rural communities

Environmental NGOs

The general public

The offices of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and UNDP.

Given the diversity of the stakeholdership, the project adopted a multi-pronged approach in biodiversity awareness raising as follows:

Production of a quarterly newsletter. Two issues of the newsletter have been produced so far and have been widely circulated within and outside the country.

Media workshop. In September 1997, the Secretariat organised a one day workshop for media personnel on biodiversity conservation and the BSAP project. Some 20 media personnel representing all major media organisations in Harare participated. The first part of the workshop was devoted to presentations by the Secretariat followed by a question and answer session. The afternoon was devoted to a field trip in the Bindura/Shamva area to view the adverse effects of deforestation on biodiversity at one site and the benefits of conserving forest biodiversity at another site. This workshop was quite successful judging from the balanced biodiversity news items appearing in both the electronic and print media at the moment.

OUTSTANDING ACTIVITIES

Provincial and Second National Workshops

Eight provincial workshops will be held in January and February, 1998. The workshops will aim at developing local level biodiversity strategies and action plans. The country study and the First National Workshop will provide valuable inputs into these meetings.

The Second National Workshop will be held in late March or early April, 1998. This workshop will review the draft strategy and action plan based on inputs from the First National workshop and the eight Provincial Workshops.

Workshop for Parliamentarians

The Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism will hold a one day workshop for Parliamentarians in early February, 1998. The workshop is aimed at raising awareness of the importance of biodiversity conservation in Zimbabwe, its threats and the possible strategic options for its conservation and sustainable use. The meeting will also provide a good opportunity to seek input from Parliamentarians on the legal and institutional requirements to improve biodiversity conservation as well as how this influential group might assist in implementing the strategy in their respective constituencies.

Completion of report

The final report on Zimbabwe's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan will be ready by 30 April, 1998.

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