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Viewpoint Environmental Education Policy Development in Zimbabwe: An educational experience

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Abstract

National environmental education policy is essential for guiding and coordinating environmental education activities within a country. The Zimbabwean Environmental Education Policy development process took place between 2000 and 2001. This paper looks at stages in the policy development process, the factors that influenced it and the lessons learnt from the process.

Introduction

As an environmentally concerned global and Southern African Development Community (SADC) partner, Zimbabwe has endorsed concepts of environmental management and sustainable development. This is evidenced by the international conventions and protocols endorsed by Zimbabwe, and the national policies and strategies developed internally, such as the National Biodiversity Strategy, the Environmental Impact Assessment Policy and the recent Environmental Management Act (MoET, 2002).

Environmental education and communication are important tools to support sustainable living and environmental management. They can be seen as more than just tools, as they involve processes of learning which are key to sustainable development and living.

The Zimbabwe Environmental Management Act of 2002 has as one of its environmental management principles the following statement:

Section 4(2)(d)

Environmental education, environmental awareness and the sharing of knowledge and experience must be promoted in order to increase the capacity of communities to address environmental issues and engender values, attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with natural resource management for sustainable development. (MoET, 2002:12)

The setting up of the Zimbabwe Environmental Education Consultative Forum (ZWEECF) in 2000 provided a degree of national recognition and legitimisation of the existing environmental education activities that existed in both the formal and non-formal sectors here and in the broader SADC and global contexts. One of the terms of reference for the Forum was to develop detailed recommendations for policies on environmental education and communication. This activity required the full support of government as well as

NGOs, educational and other institutions, the industrial sector, and all other sectors of civil society.

The development of an Environmental Education Policy Document was delegated by ZWEECF to the Environmental Education Policy Development Working Group. This followed discussions with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MoET) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) around their evolving process to develop an all-encompassing environmental policy framework.

The Environmental Education Policy was developed to extend the expected results of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Networking and Capacity Building (NETCAB) programme in Zimbabwe. Though the policy development process does not relate to one specific thematic area of the NETCAB programme, it is believed that education and communication are key to the management of natural resources (including trans-boundary agreements), natural resources tenure, environment and security, and areas of environmental economics such as eco-tourism and maintenance of water quality and demand management.

The policy development processes were based on existing practice and conceptual frameworks, as shown through national consultation using a multi-sector approach and baseline research from designated sectors. National policy is important in that it establishes a reference point for action within the various sectors of society. As can be noted from the series of case studies reported in 'Environmental Education in Action in Zimbabwe' (Herberden et al., 2000), there has been, and there continues to be, excellent examples of environmental education within various sectors of Zimbabwean society. The general consensus of stakeholders was that policy was needed at national level. For the formulation of such a policy, information on the needs and aspirations of the various stakeholders had to be gathered and a national consensus on proposed strategies for environmental education reached.

The Environmental Education Policy Development Process

Zimbabwe was a participant at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and is a signatory to the Rio Declaration. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992) focuses on the need to ensure education for sustainability in all nations. However, while there are environmental education initiatives on the ground in Zimbabwe, these have been uncoordinated due to lack of an overall national environmental education policy.

SADC, through the Environment and Land Management Sector (ELMS), introduced a programme to support environmental education in the region. In 1996 SADC-ELMS developed the SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme (SADC REEP), and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) were appointed to host the Regional Environmental Education Centre (REEC). A main focus of the REEP was to provide support for environmental education policy making. IUCN committed itself to sourcing funding for the process in five countries through the IUCN NETCAB programme. Zimbabwean members of Commission of Education and Communication (CEC), which is a network of experts under IUCN, took on this Environmental Education Policy Project as their focal activity for the years 2000 and 2001. Key partners in the environmental education policy formulation process were

the CEC members, ZWEECF, the Environmental Liaison Forum (ELF), the Department of Natural Resources under the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology and the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture.

The first stage of the policy development process involved the commissioning of a working group by ZWEECF to produce an 'Environmental Education Policy Discussion Document' in December 2000 (Shava *et al.*, 2000). The mandate of the ZWEECF to develop a national environmental education policy inclusive of strategies and a sector action plan was supported by the IUCN NETCAB Policy Project. This also followed discussions with the MoET and the department of Natural Resources (DNR) around their evolving process to develop a framework environmental policy.

The draft discussion document consists of two parts. The first part gives background information to the development of environmental education from a global, regional and national perspective. The last section of the first part highlights the state of environmental education in Zimbabwe. Part two is a synopsis of the SADC environmental education policy document *Enabling EE, Guidelines for Environmental Education Policy and Strategy Processes in the SADC States* (SADC, 1999), which provided an initial guide for development of our National environmental education policy. This document was followed up with a ZWEECF stakeholder workshop which led to the formulation of the draft 'Environmental Education Policy, Strategies and Action Plan' (ZWEECF, 2001).

Environmental Education Policy, Strategies and Action Plan Framework

In March 2001 a two-day workshop was organised by ZWEECF to consider the Draft Environmental Education Policy Discussion Document and plot the way forward in the policy development process. The outcome of the workshop was a framework document that was used in the development of the Environmental Education Policy for Zimbabwe. The document categorised stakeholders into two main education sectors: the formal, and the non-formal and informal.

The formal education sector comprised the formal school system (i.e. pre-school, primary and secondary school education), and the tertiary education institutions (colleges, polytechnics and universities). These broad groupings were considered as sub-sectors. The non-formal and informal education sector covered all education and training activities undertaken outside the formal education system (i.e. by government institutions, NGOs, industry, media, arts, research resource and documentation centres, environmental education centres and youth). These were then represented as sub-sectors.

Environmental Education Policy and Strategy Recommendations for Zimbabwe

With the backing of the IUCN NETCAB Environmental Education Policy Project, the gathering of policy recommendations was initiated in May 2001. The process involved stakeholder participation through a series of workshops held throughout the country. The workshops were of two types:

- *Regional multi-sector workshops* to which representatives of all sectors in a location were invited. These were held in the key regions of Zimbabwe, namely Mashonaland (Harare), Matebeleland (Bulawayo), Midlands (Gweru and Chegutu), Masvingo (Masvingo Town), and Manicaland (Mutare). This was in order to get a broad representation of all areas of the country.
- *Sector-specific workshops* to which only representatives of a particular sector/sub-sector were invited.

Participants to these workshops deliberated on the appropriate strategies and actions within their sector or area against each of the outlined key objectives. The two-tier exercise was preferred in that the multi-sector workshops enabled cross-pollination of ideas on the key objectives while the sector-specific workshops allowed an in-depth analysis in each specific sector. Outcomes of these workshops were compiled into sector recommendations. These were then edited to produce the draft 'Environmental Education Policy, Strategies and Action Plan Framework' for Zimbabwe (ZWEEF, 2001).

Lessons Learnt from the Policy Development Process

The environmental education policy development process, besides producing the National Environmental Education Policy for Zimbabwe, provided learning opportunities which might enrich similar policy development initiatives. These lessons include the following:

- Environmental education is valued by all sectors of the society in Zimbabwe as was evidenced by their contributions to the policy formulation process. It is, therefore, worth considering the involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders in policy formulation processes.
- A participatory approach to policy formulation brings with it a strong sense of ownership of the resultant end product. To date we are still getting enquiries from participants as to when 'their' final policy document will be out.
- Despite the diversity of stakeholders there were many convergent views with regards to some of the key objectives. An example was the general consensus on the need to focus on indigenous knowledge and its potential in environmental education processes.
- Stakeholder participation is very important to policy development in that it takes on board diverse views and concerns of the society. However, it is a costly process in terms of time and money. It is also not feasible to reach all potential participants in the process. It is therefore recommended that representative groups from all key stakeholders are engaged.
- The two-pronged approach to stakeholder participation worked very well for us. Multi-sectoral workshops, enabling cross-fertilisation of ideas, dispelled some of the contempt that some people had for certain sectors of the society. For example, the industry sector is strongly regarded as a key polluter, and yet is making real efforts towards environmental sustainability by implementing environmental policies at work and environmental management standards such as the ISO 14000 system standard. Sector-specific workshops enabled consolidation and expansion of ideas collected from the generalised multi-sectoral workshop.

- The multi-stakeholder approach enabled identification of gaps and strategies to address them. The formal sector in Zimbabwe, for example, is very subject-discipline oriented and most environmental education is done in carrier subjects such as the natural sciences. Even in such subjects only the biophysical aspects of the environment are emphasised. The need to take on board all subject disciplines including non-scientific domains was noted, as was the impossibility to have environmental education as a separate subject in already over-burdened systems. For the latter, 'curriculum greening' was suggested.
- An example in the informal sector was the limited role of the media in supporting environmental education. More environmental reporting was recommended and, at the same time, the need for environmentalists to adequately inform media personnel on environmental issues was highlighted.

Conclusion

The National Environmental Education Policy development process in Zimbabwe involved a multi-stakeholder participatory approach to embrace all sectors of the society. Its main outcome was the policy document. However, the process also provided important lessons which can inform similar policy development initiatives.

Notes on the Contributor

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