

  

**Youth-Centric Approach to Environmental Sustainability in Zambia**

**POLICY BRIEF | NOVEMBER 2022**

**Executive Summary**

This brief focuses on the strategic development area 3 of the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) and highlights the recommendations that the government should take in order to advance a youth-centric approach to environmental sustainability. This meaningful youth participation will require the government to extensively collaborate with the private sector investment entities on youth-centric environmental sustainability and a considerable youth engagement by the government in policy issues, climate and environmental research.

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**Background**

With only eight (8) years left to 2030, the world is more likely not to meet the Sustainable Development Goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030.[[1]](#footnote-1) Factors such as COVID-19 pandemic have been a major setback to ending extreme poverty since 1990 and have contributed to low and negative growth rates in many countries globally. The war in Ukraine exacerbated these setbacks. 2020 witnessed about 70 million people, the largest number in a single year to be pushed into extreme poverty since the inception of global poverty monitoring in 1990. And by end of 2020, about 719 million people lived on less than $2.15 a day.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Responding to these global challenges that left Zambia economically devastated and the poor disproportionately affected, the country embarked on an ambitious plan for national development. This is detailed in the 2022 to 2026 Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP). The 8NDP which is themed, “Socio-economic Transformation for Improved Livelihoods” intends to go beyond economic growth and is premised on meaningfully engaging the Zambian people in transforming their livelihoods. Economic Transformation and Job Creation, Human and Social Development, Environmental Sustainability, and Good Governance Environment are the 4 strategic development areas identified in the plan.

As Zambia races against time in attaining its vision of becoming a prosperous middle-income country by 2030, environmental sustainability should be at the core of national development. Arguably, Zambia has unsustainably exploited natural resources which has led to deforestation and forest degradation, land degradation, encroachment of protected areas, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable fishing, production and consumption patterns, and informal human settlements.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Challenge**

The Eighth National Development Plan of 2022 to 2026 underwent broad consultation phases with stakeholders. It acknowledges that for Zambia to attain its vision of becoming a prosperous middle-income nation by 2030, there is need to embark on development anchored by ecosystems, sustainable environment and natural resource management principles. This means adhering to development that meets the current needs without compromising the future generation to meet their own needs.

Despite the acknowledgement of the current climate catastrophe, the youth that are at the helm of Zambia’s future and make up more than 50% of the total population are not meaningfully engaged enough on environmental sustainability. The 90 paged Eighth National Development Plan only makes reference to the “youth” 30 times in the entire document and no mention on strategic development area 3, which is environmental sustainability. These factors justify government intervention and redefining meaningful youth participation in Zambia’s green growth strategy.

**Proposal**

* *Extensive Collaboration with Private Sector Investment Entities on Environmental Sustainability*

Sustainable Development Goals cannot be attained by 2030 in the absence of the private sector, especially those available to focus on the medium to long term. Financing and implementing youth-led green initiatives through private investment and capacity building is key to achieving environmental sustainability in the 8NDP.

The private sector investment entities in Zambia are well equipped with technical knowhow and expertise on supporting and building viable and scalable business solutions. In their endeavor to minimize barriers to entrepreneurship, some of the entities largely focus on ideas likely to succeed.

The government should extensively engage and collaborate with these entities and support them in mainstreaming youth-centric and youth-led environmentally sustainable ideas and initiatives. Collaborative and inclusive approaches to decision making and implementation relating to climatic and environmental risks can serve as opportunities for economic growth and can trigger innovations for sustainability.[[4]](#footnote-4) This approach to startup and entrepreneurship will make climate and environment related initiatives attractive for the youth to engage with.

* *Government Should Considerably Engage Young People in Policy Issues, Climate and Environmental Research*

As Zambia steadily moves towards the ‘Edge of Evidence’, participatory research, policy- and decision-making are gaining significant relevance and acceptance, especially where issues of validity and legitimacy of research findings are concerned. While the government formulates and implements climate and environmental evidence-based policies, they should carry along the young people in all processes and engage them as equal partners of development. Further, it is vital that the people who are to be largely affected by Zambia’s environmental sustainable policies, should have a say in how these policies are formulated and implemented. Young people that are at the helm of Zambia’s future and make up more than 50% of the total population are disproportionately affected by the impacts of ecological disasters. The reason for meaningful participation of the young people is premised on the understanding that people at the highest risk of climatic disaster often have the best adaptation ideas.[[5]](#footnote-5) The participation of this young demographic has benefits of bringing to light their views and ideas to light and propose solutions that contribute to environmental sustainability.

**Key Recommendations**

This brief highlights that the strategic development area 3 of the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) has inefficiently addressed youth-centric environmental sustainability and therefore, recommends the following for a meaningful involvement;

* Government should extensively collaborate with the private sector investment entities on youth-centric environmental sustainability.
* Government should considerably engage young people in policy issues, climate and environmental research.

**References**

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Renn, Ortwin. 2014. Stakeholder Involvement in Risk Governance. London: Ark Group.

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1. 2022 World Bank study [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. World Bank study approximated that 719 million people lived on less than $2.15 a day at the end of 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Current situation of Zambia indicated in the 8th National Development Plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Renn 2014; Hill et al. 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dagher et al. 2020. G20 policy brief. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)