

The Role of Environment Conservation in National Development.

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ENVIRONMENTAL conserving is such an important aspect of development that in its absence, it becomes meaningless for any country to discuss matters of national development.

But alas and unfortunate! In the last ten years, Government and the civil society have not seriously considered its role in national development.

As a result, the so called "development for economic growth and job creation by investors" have been allowed to "develop" any area of their choice at the expense of conserving the environment.

Talk about Livingstone. It is still amazing that while government is striving to turn Livingstone into a prime eco-tourism destination, environmental conservation is one issue that has been terribly disregarded.

And examples abound. But the nearest would be the swelling of lodges on the Zambezi river water frontage which leads to pollution of waters and thereby, threatening the life and growth of the river and the eco-system as a whole.

This pollution which is mostly caused by boats on the river, reduces the number of fish species since fish only breeds in natural water.

Pollution alone, has become a scourge of modern times and has seriously depleted, degraded and poisoned the environment in various ways.

If not curbed or controlled, it is feared that the eco-system would soon be affected and as such, the future of bacteria, fungi, insect, large plants, fish, reptiles, birds and mammals would be doomed.

The world recently celebrated the World Environmental Day whose theme was "Water- two billion people are dying for it."

Tourism Minister Patrick Kalifungwa in addressing the nation on ZNBC- TV on the eve of the day said concerted efforts were needed to tackle the issue of water shortages, but he did not highlight the important role of the environment in the water system.

The other problem in Livingstone has been the building of

structures right on the banks of the river Zambezi. This distracts the formation of islands and growing of the river as it flows along its course. Thus, the river is unable to collect sand or soil from its banks.

According to South-West Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources regional co-ordinator, Harold Mweene, building of structures on the river frontage is supposed to be 50 metres away from the river. But it has not been so on the banks of the Zambezi river.

Mr Mweene recently disclosed that the purpose of leaving a distance of 50 metres was to allow the river to follow its natural course, form islands and give the local people and their animals access to the river.

But in Livingstone and some surrounding areas, it is a different situation. Lodges like the Maramba river lodge, the Zambezi water front, Taonga Safaris, Natural Mystic, Susi and Chuma and Nyala are situated right on the banks of the river.

"The whole purpose of leaving 50 metres is to allow the people and animals living near these lodges to access the river. Moreover, the flood plains create a clean environment for animals to free them from diseases," Mr Mweene said.

He said the increased number of flights taking place at very low heights over the parks made a lot of noise on the other hand and could ultimately lead to reduced tourism and wildlife appreciation.

Mr Mweene said there was therefore, urgent need to develop and implement guidelines that must be adhered to if the natural character of the park was to be sustained. Otherwise, animals and birds that could have taken sanctuary in the area would soon become extinct.

A typical example, according to one Vincent Katanekwa, is the sudden migration of the biggest bird species at the place where the Maramba river lodge has been built.

Mr Katanekwa who is Livingstone museum director, cited water fowls as another example of birds which were under threat of extinction. These particular birds do not build nests in the trees but lay eggs in the sand on the banks of the river.

But since the banks are disturbed, their lives are affected and their numbers reduced, if not completely lost.

It is amazing that nowadays even fuel depots and filling stations are being constructed in such places as the last animal corridor of the Mosi-o-Tunya National Park in

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Livingstone.

Today, any visitor to the area will testify that the elephants and hippos that used to move from the western Zambezi River side in the dry season to the eastern part in search of food, have now been confined to the western side. The end result would most likely, be complete extinction of these animals.

The Livingstone City Council said nothing could be done to change the situation as the plot in question belonged to an individual believed to be a renowned South African investor.

The other factor disturbing the conservation of the environment in Livingstone is the indiscriminate cutting of trees by charcoal burners in places like the Dambwa forests.

National Heritage Conservation Commission (NHCC) information and public relations division manager, Isaac Kanguya said if unchecked, the exercise would put the future generations in an awkward position.

Already, the exercise is being cited as a major contribution to the persistent droughts Southern Province has been experiencing in the recent past. Experts say uncontrolled felling of trees affects the rain cycle.

"Trees play a major role in the rain cycle and in improving the water levels in the ground. The uncontrolled cutting of trees has affected the whole system.

Furthermore, it has proved difficult to sink bore- holes in some parts of the province because the water table cannot be reached," Mr Kanguya lamented.

Livingstone district forest officer, Maureen Mwale when contacted on why the forestry department had not acted on the matter, said:

"We do not have enough resources to monitor whatever is happening in the forest so are just depending on the community to help us sensitise the charcoal burners realise the danger of disturbing the environment."

But at such a time as this when Government is working towards improving the tourism industry in Livingstone especially, one would only pray that Government could start monitoring all human activities regarding the conservation of the environment.

For indeed, it still remains a fact that environmental conservation is such an important aspect of development that in its absence, it becomes meaningless for any

country to discuss matters of national development.

by Stanslous Ngosa

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