

Addressing Challenges of Limited Employment Opportunities in Environmental Policy: The Case of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Today's environmental managers and policy makers are focused on pollution prevention, natural resource development or protection, and integration of environmental considerations into economic and social decision-making. In Zimbabwe, population and economic growth pressures are creating complex environmental problems that directly impact all aspects of human society. A lack of labor force in environmental policy has hindered efforts to protect and conserve the environment. Limited job opportunities and few job openings in environmental policy has discourage people from pursuing careers in this field. In Zimbabwe there is limited awareness about environmental issues and career opportunities which led to a shortage of skilled workers. Insufficient training and education and limited access to environmental management training and education programs has resulted in a shortage of qualified professionals. Sustainable Development Goals, are the cutting edge of environmental issues but have not been attained. It is recommended for Zimbabwe environmental policy to be incorporated and monitored in education, governance and democracy, poverty reduction, public health, security, and economic strategy along with traditional environmental fields of agriculture, natural resource management, pollution abatement and conservation.

Key words: Environmental policy, Employment Environmental management, Conservation,

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 100 years, environmental policy careers have tracked the environmental movement generally. Early efforts were targeted at conservation and preservation, which then grew into the pollution regulation and mitigation focus of the 1970's through mid-1990's. In Zimbabwe graduates are using their degree to find employment that is not necessarily related to their degree specialization. This is because the employers are looking for the skills they have developed naturally, rather than their academic qualifications. Given the increased competition for graduate positions, it is important to consider a range of occupational areas considering that careers that require further study, training and/or work experience beyond academic qualifications. Many graduates undertake further study on completion of their first degree and/or after gaining relevant work experience. Reasons for doing so include wanting to explore an aspect of their studies in more depth, to further or change their career, because a specific postgraduate qualification is either an entry requirement for their chosen career or would be an advantage if entry is competitive.

BACKGROUND

In developed countries such as the U.S. federal government, it is the largest single employer in the environmental career world. While the Environmental Protection Agency is the agency traditionally associated with environmental policy development in the U.S., including international environmental policy, many federal agencies pursue international environmental activities, including agencies like the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Food and Drug Administration. Entry level positions in international environmental policy can be found in government, private industry, international organizations, and research, non-profit and non-governmental organizations. Career-related activities within this field of environmental policy include scientific research, environmental education and advocacy, regulatory and legislative design, technical assistance to government agencies for planning and management, regulatory compliance and enforcement, and entrepreneurial development in environmental products and services.

Generally, postgraduate study in Environmental Management can provide opportunities to work in higher education and for graduates in Environment, Policy, Development and International Studies in particular it can lead to opportunities in areas such as environmental management or consultancy, environmental engineering or auditing, nature conservation, environmental education, journalism and international aid/development work. For example, waste management cannot be addressed with simply landfill policies, but must incorporate smart growth, recycling, emission capture, and creation of markets to turn waste into a useful commodity. Job roles related to this environmental management area include nature conservation officer, countryside manager, environmental manager, environmental education officer, waste management officer, Foreign and Commonwealth officer, civil servant, diplomatic service officer, journalist, European Union official, immigration officer, international aid/development worker, volunteer coordinator, community development worker.

Challenges for today's international environmental policy analysts include: controlling global climate change, considering environmental regulations in treaties and trade agreements, creating environmentally and economically sustainable development, and helping the private sector find ways to incorporate environmental concerns into business planning. In much of the world, basic environmental management such as water resources, wetlands protection and restoration, and environmental health are also very important developments as economic progress puts stress on existing systems. New career areas such as environmental auditing and assessment; environmental management; and environmental engineering are emerging. It is predicted that environmental management and resource efficiency is to become fully integrated into many jobs, in much the same way as health and safety and equal opportunities have already been. However, the lack of employment opportunities in environmental policy can have several challenges, including:

Limited Career Prospects

Fewer job openings, limited opportunities for graduates and professionals in environmental management.

High competition, many qualified candidates competing for a limited number of positions.

Brain Drain and Loss of Expertise

Talented individuals seeking opportunities elsewhere, skilled environmental professionals may leave their home countries or fields in search of better opportunities.

Loss of specialized knowledge and skills, when experts leave the field, their expertise and experience are lost.

Negative Impact on Environmental Conservation

Insufficient workforce, without enough environmental professionals, conservation efforts may be hindered.

Lack of implementation of environmental policies, insufficient staffing can limit the effective implementation of environmental policies and regulations.

Economic and Social Consequences

Economic stagnation, limited job opportunities can lead to economic stagnation and reduced economic growth.

Social impacts, unemployment and underemployment can have negative social impacts, such as poverty and decreased well-being.

Solutions to curb under employment in environmental policy

There are several solutions and opportunities in the emerging fields of environmental policy. New areas like sustainability, climate change mitigation, and environmental consulting offer potential opportunities. Environmental professionals can create their own job opportunities through entrepreneurship and innovation. Policy and advocacy should work with governments, NGOs, and communities to advocate for environmental

policies and create job opportunities. Addressing the challenges of limited employment opportunities in environmental policy requires creative solutions, collaboration, and a commitment to developing the field. Environmental policy entrepreneurs play a crucial role in driving innovation and sustainability, and their work can have a positive impact on the environment and society. Education and training in environmental management can increase access to environmental policy education and training programs. Creating more job opportunities in environmental management to attract and retain skilled workers.

Environmental Management agency (EMA) should provide technical assistance to both private and government agencies as they work on environmental problems and solutions. They need both administrative managers who write and manage the contract proposals and technical experts who provide the monitoring and evaluation for various tasks. Raising awareness about environmental issues and promote the importance of environmental management. Foster collaboration between governments, NGOs, and private sector organizations to address environmental challenges. A sufficient workforce can lead to more effective environmental protection and conservation and environmental management professionals can contribute to sustainable development and economic growth. Environmental protection can have positive impacts on public health and well-being. Addressing the lack of labor force in environmental management requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education, job creation, awareness, and collaboration.

Demand and Future Challenges of Profession

While the need for understanding of global environmental issues is great, jobs in the field of environmental policy are very low in Zimbabwe except for graduates who are interested to further studies and work abroad. Prior work experience, an internship or volunteer initiative is essential. For students interested in working overseas, work in the Peace Corps or USAID, or prior experience in a domestic setting that is transferable to an international issue, like rural water distribution, is critical to a successful career search. Language skills, particularly for technical positions, are also important. Many international organizations like World Bank require a second language skill. Positions in several governments are being privatized to increase flexibility, so networking to determine the appropriate contractors for specific policy areas is important. International organizations also hire contractors through personal and professional connections. Even non-profit and non-governmental organizations are flooded with applications for program positions.

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