Scoping Report for a National Ecosystem Assessment for Zimbabwe

1. Rationale

National ecosystem assessments (NEA) are important in biodiversity conservation and safeguarding nature's contributions to people at country levels. Whilst, the importance of natural resources and ecosystems productivity, particularly biodiversity, land and water is acknowledged in Zimbabwe, however, the same ecosystems are facing various threats and shocks which affect their integrity, sometimes leading to irreversible changes, undermining national development and resilience to climatic shocks and economic stresses. Increasing anthropogenic factors associated with human population growth continues to put pressure on ecosystems thus increasing the rate of biodiversity loss, posing serious threat to endangered species and fragile ecosystems such as wetlands. These include land clearance for farming, manufacturing, mining, and settlements among others. There are also natural factors which contribute towards biodiversity loss such as stochastic events like droughts, floods and climate change which increases the vulnerability of community livelihoods. The Government of Zimbabwe has lined up various climate change adaptation and resilience strategies to weensure sustainable livelihoods especially among the most vulnerable groups. A climate change policy has been adopted which directs climate change related issues in order to promote coordinated efforts in addressing the potential challenges from the changing climate. Other drivers of biodiversity loss include recurrent droughts, increasing poverty, food insecurity, and unsustainable land and resource use.

As part of monitoring and evaluation of ecosystem performance, an NEA is needed in Zimbabwe in order to identify areas for interventions to maintain ecosystem integrity. An NEA provides an opportunity to value ecosystems and encourage the prioritization of ecosystem health and wellness. The NEA findings will also play an important role in Zimbabwe as they will inform development and implementation of national development and sector policies. Zimbabwe's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) outlines the importance of nature (MEWC, 2014). Zimbabwe is committed to the conservation and protection of nature as an important resource for sustainable development. In addition, the National Development Strategy (NDS) 1 (2021–2025) emphasizes on the need for nature-based solutions to promote economic growth based on the sustainable use principles (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). Zimbabwe`s tourism development strategies are also underpinned on the abundance of wildlife resources and both the tourism policy and wildlife policy stresses the need to harness the economic value of the country`s biodiversity resources through both domestic, regional and international tourism growth for national economic development. Consequently, decision making at all levels strives to take full account of the value of nature. Nature provides raw materials, food, medicine, learning inspirations and contributes towards the country`s gross domestic product (GDP). The successful conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are therefore central to the achievement of the goals and objectives of these national strategies hence the need for NEA.

Although the value of nature is appreciated at all levels of development, there are limitations related to the effectiveness of conservation efforts in Zimbabwe. Various challenges and barriers are experienced at different scales of implementation of the NBSAP. The inadequacy of tools to measure and quantify the value and benefits of nature causes biased decisions in the face of competing claims on natural resources. As a result, there is lack of knowledge on the value of nature and its contributions in the national economy. In some instances, nature is sacrificed for short-gain economic interests. There is increasing pressure from other land use

options such as mining, agriculture, and infrastructure development. The fragmented biodiversity and conservation legislative institutions in the country also present a barrier in effectively including the value of nature in decision making. This is especially due to funding limitations to support the harmonization of all legislative instruments related to biodiversity conservation and tourism. As a result, there is poor enforcement of legislation and monitoring mechanisms by various institutions as well as variations in the valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services among key institutions, e.g., the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA), National Museums and Monuments, Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA). Differing values and recognition of biodiversity assets may in turn lead to conflicts and lack of cooperation among institutions.

There is a need for informed decision making in order to protect ecosystems and landscapes. Building a knowledge base on biodiversity and ecosystem services is needed in Zimbabwe in order to increase awareness about nature's benefits and promote policies which supports the sustainable utilization of biodiversity and ecosystem components. Both scientific and other forms of knowledge, e.g., local traditional knowledge, are important in the understanding of the interactions between human and nature, including uses, population dynamics and trends. Hence, an NEA is important in the provision of crucial biodiversity baseline data to inform conservation planning and resource utilization strategies. Zimbabwe's biodiversity use strategies have over the years suffered criticisms owing to the inadequacy of biodiversity data, including some threatened and endangered species such as black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*), elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), and African painted dog (*Lycaon pictus*) whose utilization through options such as trophy hunting or live animal sales or by products have become a contested issue globally.

Zimbabwe has about 28% of its land surface under some form of wildlife conservation and is endowed with diverse ecosystems, i.e., terrestrial land including (state and private) protected areas, forest land and communal areas management programme for indigenous resources (CAMPFIRE) areas, and aquatic areas (Machena et al., 2017). Associated with the rich natural heritage, is tourism of which 70% is nature-based (Mudimba, 2020). Tourism makes a significant contribution towards national capital, accounting for about 3% of GDP (Mukondo & Jian, 2020). The human population is growing with recent estimates at 14,863,000 people in 2020 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020) compared to 2012 population of 13,061,239 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012). Hence, this likely puts pressure on the natural ecosystems, especially those communities whose livelihoods heavily depend on it.

The integrity of ecosystems plays an important role in producing a habitable environment with the ability to sustain livelihoods. People depend on ecosystem-based resources and services for their everyday life and a healthy and well-functioning ecosystem are crucial for all sectors of the economy. The agriculture sector thrives on the ability of people to minimize all forms of pollution on land, air and water. Agriculture benefits much from biodiversity components such as insect pollinators and soil organisms whose abundance is determined by the healthy and integrity of ecosystems.

The NEA findings will be valuable and provide useful information for all the environment dependent sectors in the country such as tourism, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, wildlife conservation, energy, mining, industry and commerce. The findings will be instrumental in directing the country`s natural resource management and use strategies in a manner that allow the country to achieve national targets such as Vision 2030 of Zimbabwe becoming an upper

middle income economy (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018). The information will inform decision making and promote awareness among stakeholders about biodiversity status in the country.

Zimbabwe has 14 key national priorities under the National Development Strategy 1 (2021-2025) and these include, (i) economic growth and stability, (ii) food and nutrition security, (iii) governance, (iv) value chains and structural transformation, (v) health and well-being, (vi) housing delivery, (vii) human capital development, (viii) image building and international (re)engagement, (ix) digital economy, (x) infrastructure and utilities, (xi) youth, sport and culture, (xii) environment protection, climate resilience, and natural resource management, (xiii) social protection, and (ivx) devolution and decentralization. Industries contributing most to the economy and employment are agriculture, mining, manufacturing and tourism (wildlife, forestry and hospitality industry) (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020).

Finally, Zimbabwe`s NBSAP does not explicitly outline the need for an NEA but outlines the need for valuation of ecosystem services for integration into national and sectoral planning, budgeting and decision making. It sets a target of conducting economic valuation of priority ecosystems. The NBSAP, however, shows commitment to the use of available tools to promote sustainable utilization of natural resources. The fragility of ecosystems is quite acknowledged hence the need for assessments in order to identify most affected components of the ecosystems and provide suitable corrective or restoration strategies.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

Nature, i.e., biodiversity and ecosystems, supports the lives of people in Zimbabwe through provision of both direct and indirect benefits at different scales which results in good quality of life for the people. Biodiversity provides a pool of natural resources supporting wide ranging developmental activities. Nature also provides critical services such as traditional medicines, wild food and non-timber forest products which supports sustainable livelihoods in the country. In addition, nature plays an important role in flood regulation and minimizes impacts of some disasters such as cyclones.

Biodiversity and ecosystem services are under threat from anthropogenic drivers such as population growth, incompatible/unsustainable land use practices and unplanned settlement expansion (e.g., Tendaupenyu et al., 2017). The growing human population and economic development activities are causing increased land use changes, deforestation, pollution and overexploitation of natural resources. Natural drivers of biodiversity change in the country include climate change and natural disasters (Fig. 1). Impacts of disturbances on ecosystems are much more pronounced in wetlands and other sensitive habitats, which are rapidly being degraded, resulting in the call for their protection by various actors.

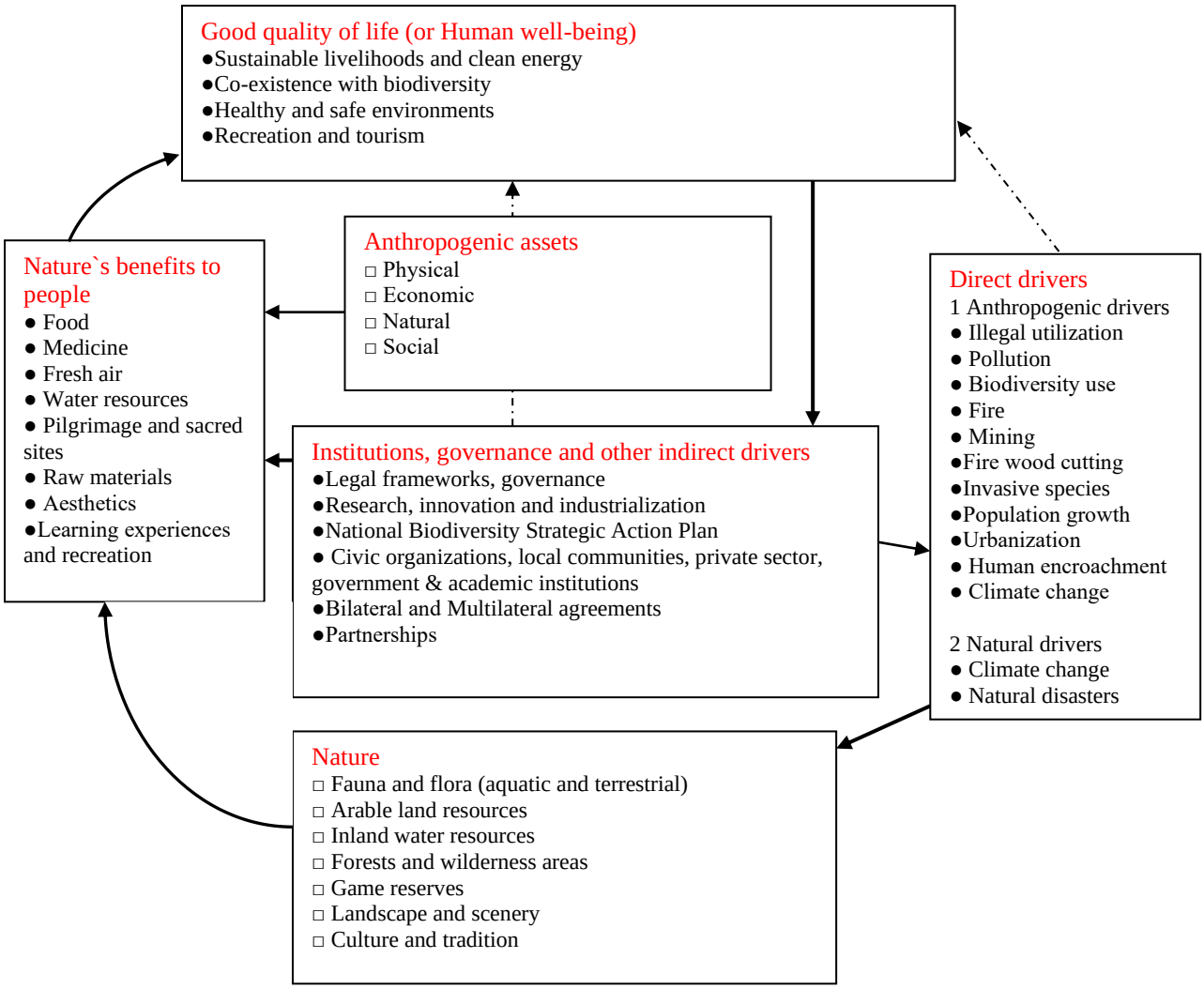

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for Zimbabwe on nature's contributions to people (NCP). *Adapted from IPBES Conceptual Framework.*

2. Key policy questions

The following are the key policy questions to be addressed:

1. What are the status and trends of Zimbabwe's biodiversity and ecosystems (i.e., terrestrial land including (state and private) protected areas, forest land and CAMPFIRE areas, and aquatic areas)?
2. What are the main drivers and their influence on biodiversity and ecosystems in Zimbabwe?
3. What is the contribution of indigenous knowledge systems in the conservation of Zimbabwe's biodiversity and ecosystems?
4. What are the socio-economic contributions of Zimbabwe`s biodiversity and ecosystems to human well-being (i.e., poverty eradication, climate resilience, and wildlife economy)?
5. What strategies can be adopted to ensure the mainstreaming of biodiversity related issues into national policies, laws and decision-making processes?

Annex 1 outlines the main policy issues, sectoral linkages and impacts of changes in biodiversity and ecosystems.

3. Scope

3.1 Priority ecosystems and services

The NEA will assess the state of knowledge of the past, present and future trends relating to the interaction between people and nature in priority ecosystems herein mentioned. The following information is needed to answer key policy questions, species inventory, genetic resources inventories, traditional medicines use, economic valuation of ecosystems services and the spatial distribution of species. Zimbabwe, 390,580 km^2 in extent, is divided into five (5) agroecological regions and is dominated by the savanna ecosystem with a small portion of the Eastern Highlands having the afromontane ecosystem. Hence, Zimbabwe's terrestrial land including (state and private) protected areas, forest land and CAMPFIRE areas, and aquatic areas will form the main focus ecosystems in addressing the key policy questions.

3.2 Temporal scale

The assessment will cover the period between 1989 and 2030. The year 1989 provides an important baseline due to the following, (i) the year in which the ban on ivory trade was put in place under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), (ii) the year Zimbabwe's flagship community-based natural resource management programmes, i.e., the communal areas management programme for indigenous resources (CAMPFIRE) was implemented, and (iii) a first wide nation-wide elephant survey was conducted. The Government of Zimbabwe is working towards Vision 2030, i.e., for the country to become an upper middle income society. Hence, it will be important to align the future scenarios within the NEA to the country's Vision 2030 timeline.

3.3. Geographic boundaries

At present, there is no readily available data that covers the entire country to answer all the key policy questions. However, there are some specific knowledge sources that are particularly important for specific geographical contexts, e.g., large carnivore and herbivore abundance and distribution data is available for the major four 'elephant' ranges; local ecological knowledge is available in most CAMPFIRE areas and other local communities, plant inventory data and genetic resources for some regions is available from the relevant government departments. Terrestrial land including (state and private) protected areas, forest land and CAMPFIRE areas, and aquatic areas will be of major focus or priority. Not all key policy questions are relevant at the national level as some ecosystems, e.g., major ranges for large carnivores and herbivores, are in specific regions of the Zimbabwe.

4. Potential use of the assessment

NEA forms an essential knowledge base to inform decision making in policy and practice and helps in safeguarding biodiversity and ecosystems services that are of benefit to both urban and rural communities in Zimbabwe. The main findings of the NEA will be published in the form of: i) assessment report, and ii) summary for policy makers which will be made accessible to all stakeholders in various sectors. The results will be distributed to stakeholders in various formats such as digital and hard copy in order to raise awareness about biodiversity and

ecosystems status in the country. NEA provides the opportunity for stakeholder engagement and participation which are essential in ensuring buy in and shared vision for natural resource management. The synthesis of data and knowledge on the state of biodiversity and ecosystems will give a guide to the extent and state of ecosystems, status of biodiversity in the ecosystems, their trends and drivers, as well as the associated ecosystem services which is very crucial for policy review purposes. In this regard, NEA will contribute to the knowledge base necessary for supporting cross-sectoral decision making at the national level, reporting to biodiversity-related conventions, or for national planning. Furthermore, NEA will help to identify gaps in knowledge and capacity, along with options for addressing such gaps, hence all this will be useful to the diverse stakeholders.

The following are key policies and plans that requires targeted information from the NEA:

a) National Forest Policy,
b) Wildlife Policy,
c) Agriculture Policy,
d) Climate Change Policy,
e) National Environmental Policy,
f) National Water Policy,
g) National Tourism Policy,
h) NBSAP,
i) National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025),
j) United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Zimbabwe (2022–2026),
k) Vision 2030,
l) Wildlife-based Land Reform Policy, and
m) Agriculture Land Reform Policy.

NEA will assist in enhancing Zimbabwe's compliance to regional and/or global initiatives especially those linked to biodiversity and ecosystem services, e.g.,

a) Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) protocols on (i) shared watercourses, (ii) wildlife conservation and law enforcement, (iii) development of tourism, (iv) mining, (v) forestry and (vi) fisheries,
b) African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA),
c) African Union's Agenda 2063,
d) Strategic Plan for Biodiversity of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD 2010) and some of the Aichi biodiversity targets, and the post 2020 global biodiversity framework and its goals and targets,
e) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES),
f) The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),
g) United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD),
h) World Heritage Convention (WHC),
i) Convention on Wetlands of International Importance,
j) Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and
k) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) environmental safeguards.

5. Relevant stakeholders and initiatives

Zimbabwe has various stakeholders involved in biodiversity issues across the country. These vary from government departments such as ministries, agencies and authorities to academic and research institutions. The key role of government departments is to set the policy direction, legislation and implement agreements at regional and international levels such as regional policies and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Agencies, e.g., the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) implement and enforce what is directed by policies by coming up with various legislation and monitoring changes in the environment caused by threats such as invasive alien species, veld fires and disasters such as floods and cyclones, the case of Cyclone Idai.

International development partners, e.g., World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), provide the necessary funding for government programmes and policy development. These institutions also provide a platform for government arms to review best practises from other countries and share lessons learnt at a global scale. Policy dialogue windows are facilitated through this process and creates engagement windows for the civic society organisations. The Academia and the civil society play a key role in collecting baseline data to identify trends and inform government arms where there is need for policy shifts. The civic organisations are also involved in awareness raising and policy advocacy.

Zimbabwe is signatory and member of various regional and multilateral agreements which are meant to strengthen ties for collaboration and partnership in order to increase capacity for biodiversity conservation. Zimbabwe has entered into transboundary natural resource management agreements with neighbouring countries which has led to the establishment of six (6) Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs), i.e., Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA), Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) TFCA, Lower Zambezi-Mana Pools TFCA, Zimbabwe-Mozambique-Zambia (ZIMOZA) TFCA, Chimanimani TFCA and the Greater Mapungubwe TFCA. The TFCAs provides opportunities for shared conservation values and practices, law enforcement and tourism development responsibilities while expanding wildlife habitats. Through the various SADC protocols as highlighted earlier, Zimbabwe plays an important part in natural resource conservation and hence the NEA findings will be valuable in enhancing collaboration and reporting systems. The NEA will be instrumental in the interrogating of the effectiveness of the various partnership arrangements in biodiversity conservation and assess their milestones in order to identify gaps and opportunities for improvements.

Zimbabwe has various indigenous people and groups that play a key role in biodiversity conservation. These indigenous people and groups are spread across the country such as the Doma community in the lower Zambezi and the Chibemene community in Chiredzi. The role of indigenous knowledge systems in biodiversity conservation is acknowledged and forms an important feature of conservation strategy through supporting community engagement and promoting access and benefit sharing in line with the CBD and the Nagoya Protocol principles.

Annex 2 outlines the main categories of stakeholders, their interest areas and scope of coverage that will be assessed in the NEA.

6. National biodiversity platform (NBP)

An entity similar to a National Biodiversity Platform (NBP) exists in Zimbabwe known as the National Biodiversity Forum (NBF) established the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry, however its science-policy function has been limited. The main objective of the NBF is to facilitate and support multi-sectoral efforts that promote biodiversity mainstreaming in sectors. Its specific objectives are to advocate for the placement of biodiversity at the centre of the developmental agenda at both national and sub-national levels, provide technical and advisory support to the Government of Zimbabwe in implementing biodiversity programmes; facilitate national dialogue for addressing biodiversity issues; and, monitor, evaluate and report on progress in the implementation biodiversity programmes in Zimbabwe.

The NBF comprises of members from government ministries, departments and agencies involved in biodiversity management, universities, research institutions, and civil society organizations. The NBF is a dynamic entity and its members can request other institutions to join and/or support it on a temporary or permanent basis. The NBF therefore can easily be turned into a NBP that will drive the NEA exercise by co-opting requisite members into the NBF. The mandate of the NBF is derived from environmental legislation and policies such as the Environmental Management Act, Parks and Wildlife Act, Forest Act and the National Environmental Policy among others which are administered by the ministry. The effectiveness of the NBF is limited by financial resources. Hence, a sustainable financial mechanism needs to be established. The NBF can be enhanced and play the role of the NBP to facilitate the NEA, however, some improvements in its setup and terms of reference is necessary. In particular, a project secretariat (or steering committee), a project team comprising of expert authors will need to be set-up to lead the NEA process and these will be liaising with the NBF.

7. Next steps

These will involve setting up a project secretariat (or steering committee), a project team comprising of expert authors (including co-chairs, chapter coordinating lead authors, lead authors and fellow) to lead the NEA process, develop a well-outlined NEA chapters, clear time-table of the entire process, and budget. The NBF will need to be strengthened to ensure it functions efficiently and effectively during the NEA process.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Policy related issues, sectoral linkages and impacts of changes in biodiversity and ecosystems

Issues	**Knowledge needed / linkages / impacts**	**Policies**
a) Biodiversity value and ecosystem services. • Contribution of traditional medicines towards healthy lives • Natures contribution towards poverty eradication	• Genetic resources inventory • Traditional medicines use and species inventory • Economic valuation of ecosystem services	• Agriculture Policy • Food Policy • Wildlife Policy • Health Policy
b) Existing and future/planned policies and programmes that may affect the economic, political, social and environmental situation in your country.	• Forest inventories • Species distribution models	Forest Policy Wildlife Policy Tourism Policy *Planned* • Wetlands Policy • Fisheries Policy • Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) Policy • Human-wildlife Conflict Policy
c) Sectors linked to biodiversity and ecosystems in Zimbabwe	• Forestry • Agriculture • Mining • Tourism • Health	Agriculture Policy Mining Policy Tourism Policy
d) Economic and societal implications of changes in biodiversity and ecosystems	• Income loss (both at household & national levels) • Loss of lives and livelihoods • Poverty • Increased vulnerability to climate shocks and threats	Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) Policy

Annex 2: Key stakeholder and their interests in natural resource management in Zimbabwe

Category	Areas of Interest	Coverage
Government entities / parastatals		
Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry	Wetlands, invasive alien species, land degradation, mining, animals, forests and non-timber forest products, genetic resources, national parks, safari areas	Countrywide
Min of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Resettlement	Crops, pests, veldt fire, crop diseases	Countrywide
Ministry of Local Government (including Rural District Councils)	Rural areas management, Communal Areas Management Program For Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) and natural resource management	Countrywide
Ministry of Mines and Mining Development	Mining and resource utilisation	Countrywide
Ministry of Health and Child Care	Health, livelihoods, disease surveillance	Countrywide
Environmental Management Agency	Wetlands, invasive alien species, land degradation, mining, genetic resources	Country wide
Parks and Wildlife Management Authority	Wildlife conservation and protected area management, veldt fires, animals, diseases	Protected areas, countrywide
Forest Commission	Trees, invasive alien species, veldt fires, plant pests and diseases	Gazetted forests nation wide
Allied Timbers Zimbabwe	Plantations, plant pests and diseases	Gazetted Forests
National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens	Trees, invasive alien species, veldt fires	Countrywide
National Biotechnology Authority	Genetic resources	Countrywide
International/regional Institutions		
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	Wetlands, invasive alien species, land degradation, mining, animals, forests, water	Countrywide
Birdlife	Birds	Countrywide
World Wildlife Fund (WWF)	Wetlands, invasive alien species, land degradation, mining, animals, forests	Countrywide
Southern Alliance For Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE)	Wetlands, invasive alien species, land degradation, animals, forests	Countrywide
African Parks	Biodiversity conservation and protected area management	Selected areas

Peace Parks	Transboundary natural resource conservation	Transfrontier Conservation Areas(TFCAs)
International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	Conservation and development	Countrywide
Africa Wildlife Foundation	Biodiversity data, wildlife, forests	Countrywide
Private sector actors		
Nyaradzo Funeral Services	Afforestation	Countrywide
Safari Operators Association of Zimbabwe	Wildlife conservation and sustainable use	Countrywide
Environment Africa	Environmental conservation	Countrywide
Academic Institutions		
University of Zimbabwe	Biodiversity, genetic resources	Countrywide
Bindura University of Science Education	Biodiversity, trees, genetic resources	Countrywide
National University of Science and Technology	Forests and wildlife conservation	Countrywide
Chinhoyi University of Technology	Biodiversity, wildlife conservation, social ecology, climate change	Countrywide
Civic society		
COSMO	Wetlands, biodiversity	Harare
Green Shango Trust	Biodiversity data and information, biodiversity education and awareness, biodiversity policy	Hwange
Grow A Tree	Trees, biodiversity	Harare, Mashonaland Central
Zimbabwe Youth Biodiversity Network	Biodiversity data and information, biodiversity education and awareness, biodiversity policy	Harare
Lupane Youth for development Trust	Biodiversity, land degradation, awareness	Lupane
Advocates4Earth	Biodiversity data and information, biodiversity education and awareness, biodiversity policy	Bulawayo
Community Climate Action Trust	Biodiversity data and information, biodiversity education and awareness, biodiversity policy	Bulawayo
African Youth Initiative On Climate Change Zimbabwe	Awareness, rehabilitation, restoration, wetlands, policy advocacy	Countrywide
Young Volunteers for the Environment	Awareness, biodiversity, conservation	Harare
Bio Innovation Zimbabwe	Genetic resources	Countrywide
Community organisations		
Chibemene	Genetic resources, traditional knowledge	Chiredzi
Tibokane Trust	Wildlife	Dete

CAMPFIRE Association	Wildlife conservation and rural development	Countrywide

Annex 3 – List of stakeholders consulted during the scoping report development

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