

COPAC Revises Constitutional Talking Points: Environment and Natural Resources Questions Incorporated

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The Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC) has revised the talking points and questions that will be used during the country-wide outreach programme to gather people's views on constitutional reforms. COPAC had initially developed talking points without consulting various stakeholders. The revision follows concerns raised by civil society organizations that some of the questions were leading and more importantly, that critical questions were left out. In particular, the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) had raised concern on behalf of the Land, Environment and Natural Resources Civil Society Cluster on Constitutional Reform on the absence of any specific talking points on environment and natural resources. Further, in its submission to COPAC, ZELA had stated that the lumping together of talking points on Land, Natural resources and Empowerment in the same thematic area without any distinction therein tended to cloud the whole thematic area. ZELA had suggested that although these issues are related, they needed separate and specific questions and should be treated as separate but related issues.

In response COPAC has revised the talking points and questions. On a positive note, questions on environment and natural resources were incorporated and are now part of the talking points. The revised questions are more open-ended although they are not framed in rights language. The following are the four questions on environment, natural resources, land and empowerment; how should the constitution deal with the issue of natural resources?, how should the constitution deal with the issue of the environment?, how should the Constitution address the issue of land? and how should the constitution deal with the empowerment of previously disadvantaged groups?

Further, as suggested by the environment and natural resources cluster, the thematic area on Land, Natural Resources and Empowerment has been split into four areas for purposes of consulting the people namely; land, environment, natural resources and empowerment with each having one open-ended question.

Based on the above position it is incumbent upon the Land, Environment and Natural Resources Cluster members to reach out to their constituencies to inform communities and raise awareness on the land, environment and natural resources issues they would want the people to demand for inclusion in the new constitution. Further, it is also important to note that ZELA will draft the position paper on land, environment and natural resources that will be submitted to COPAC. The position paper will be a synthesis of the key messages, principles and rights that civil society organizations have adopted and agreed to flag as key for inclusion in the new constitution of Zimbabwe. Having won the

battle to have the environment and natural resources talking points included, the battle to influence the content (the rights and principles to be included) has begun.