

Zimbabwe (Republic of)

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Location and area

Zimbabwe is a landlocked republic in southern Africa, bordered on the northwest by Zambia, on the northeast and east by Mozambique, on the south by South Africa, on the southwest by Botswana, and on the west by Botswana and the Caprivi Strip of Namibia. The total area of the country is 390,759 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

The country occupies part of the great plateau of southern Africa and can be divided into

1. the Highveld, a broad upland that runs southwest to northeast across the country, and is most extensive in the northeast. It has an average elevation of about 1,500 m.
2. the Middle Veld on either side of the Highveld where the land slopes downward, in the north towards the River Zambezi and in the south towards the River Limpopo. These areas have average elevations of about 1,000 m.
3. the Lowveld, consisting of the basins of the Zambezi, and the Limpopo, and, in the south-east, the Sabi-Lundi system.
4. the Eastern Highlands, a mountainous range along the eastern border, which rises to a maximum elevation of 2,592 m at Inyangani.

Apart from the Eastern Highlands, Zimbabwe's terrain is predominantly gently undulating, except for a narrow belt of rugged hills associated with fault lines along the Zambezi valley. There is also the Great Dyke, made up of hard, intrusive rocks, which runs some 480 km (298 mi) roughly north-south through the centre of Zimbabwe, and gives rise to prominent ranges of hills.

A number of short rivers rise in the Highveld. Of these rivers the Shangani and Sanyati flow north, and the Sabi and Lundi flow south. Just downstream from the Victoria Falls on the Zambezi is Lake Kariba, which was formed behind the Kariba Dam. It is one of the world's largest artificial lakes and lies on both sides of the border with Zambia. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

Although Zimbabwe lies in the Tropics, its climate is considerably moderated by both altitude and distance from the sea. The average temperature is 16° C in July (winter), and 21° C in January (summer). The average annual rainfall is about 890 mm in the Highveld and less than 600 mm in most parts of the Middle Veld. Most rainfall occurs between October and March. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

The land of Zimbabwe is primarily covered with savannah; forests are found along the eastern border and in the wettest areas of the Highveld. Woodland covers about 22.5 % (1995) of the country, although the rate of deforestation is serious. Explosive population growth in the 1980s put significant pressure on agriculture and land use in Zimbabwe. Water availability is

a major problem, and the nation is subject to periodic droughts. Overcropping and overgrazing have led to soil erosion.

Zimbabwe gets most of its electric power from the Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

According to Mharapara et al. (1998) Zimbabwe is endowed with 12,800 km² of wetland areas. The following types of wetlands are distinguished:

1. Flood plains are associated with the major drainage systems and tend to be well developed in low-lying flat areas. Zimbabwe is located on a plateau and hence there are few small flood plains. These are found in the Zambezi Valley and around the Save-Runde confluence in the southeastern part of the country.
2. Pans are depressions that collect and retain water from the surrounding uplands. They are generally saline due to the accumulation of salts brought by water that eventually evaporates.
3. Swamps **wat zijn dat???** There are few swamps in Zimbabwe, e.g. the Tsamtsa and Kwazulu Swamps in low rainfall areas in the southern and northeastern parts of the country. The Binga Swamp in the Goromonzi District is in danger of drying out due to excessive utilization pressure. (Matiza 1994).
4. Dambos are valley bottoms or depressions that form natural drainage systems with or without a developed and distinct stream. About 3.6% of Zimbabwe (14,000 km²) is covered by dambos and these are largely confined to the high and middle veld of Zimbabwe (Whitlow 1984). Some dambos have unstructured hydromorphic soils with a thick peaty or matt of organic matter at different stages of decomposition and growth (Mharapara et al. 1998).

Through the Department of Natural Resources, Zimbabwe is carrying out an inventory and mapping (1:50,000) of dambos and other wetlands (www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/X6611E/x6611e04c.htm).

Peatlands

According to Markov et al. (1988), "peatlands" are located mostly in western parts of Zimbabwe around larger lakes. The peat layer is about 1 m. Some wet forests have peat layers under 10 cm.

Kivinen & Pakarinen (1981) mention the presence of peatland in Zimbabwe but present no estimates for its area.

P.-L. Grundling (pers. comm. 2002) infer on the basis of the SA Peat Eco Regional Model the potential peatland area in Zimbabwe on 350 km².

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols exist in Zimbabwe and 2,606 km² of gley soils.

Mire and peatland losses

Currently wetlands and their related catchments continue to degrade at an alarming rate and the cultivation of wetlands is increasing (Mharapara et al. 1998).

The utilization of vleis or dambos in Zimbabwe for agricultural production has been limited. It is estimated that about 200 km² are used to grow mainly green maize, vegetables and to a lesser extent rice (Khaya Moyo 1998).

Still to be checked:

Ackerman, E. 1936. Dambos in northern Rhodesia. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen, Leipzig 4: 149-157.

Keilhack, K. & Milbread, J. 1930. Ein subtropisches Torfmoor in Südrhodesien. Z. d. D. Geol. Ges. 82.