

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SUCCESS IMPOSSIBLE IN AFRICA WITHOUT INTERNATIONAL HUNTING

*By Emmanuel Koro, Johannesburg, South Africa
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Why should African rural communities co-existing with wildlife and receiving zero benefits from it bother conserving wildlife that damages their crops, kills their livestock, loved ones and destroys their property?

This is the key wildlife conservation question that all African States had to address as they took over from the colonial rulers who forced rural communities co-existing with wildlife to conserve it, despite the fact that they did not benefit from it.

Under independent Africa, it was always going to be undemocratic, violation of human rights, political suicide and a wildlife conservation disaster for any government to force rural people sharing the land with wildlife to conserve wildlife without benefiting from it. The communities would predictably refuse to conserve wildlife that doesn't benefit them as happened during the colonial era.

“Decades of colonialism in Africa alienated its people from their traditional use of wildlife,” said the Chairman of the SADC Wildlife Technical Coordination Unit, Mr Matthew Matemba in his foreword for Proceedings of the Regional Natural Resources Management Conference, held in Botswana's tourist town of Kasane in 1995. “The majority of poachers ended up in the hands of ‘game guards’ and eventually went to the gallows. This situation sparked decades of antagonism and resentment between the so-called ‘game officers’ and local communities.”

Communities co-existing with wildlife protested the lack of benefits by poaching it.

This demonstrates that resistance of authorities is a key element sustaining the viability of poaching,” said Richard Fynn and Oluwatoyin Kolawole in their recent commentary entitled ‘Poaching and the problem with conservation in Africa.’

Richard Fynn and Oluwatoyin Kolawole said that poaching, as an act of resistance, is achieved through informal rural social networks. They hide and even encourage poachers and the middlemen to poach “game and buy meat, ivory, and rhino horn.”

Most independent African States were aware of the wildlife conservation resistance they would face if they did not make communities co-existing with wildlife receive direct benefits from international hunting. To avoid a wildlife conservation disaster, international hunting became a widely accepted solution to wildlife conservation in independent African countries, particularly in wildlife-rich southern African countries.

Therefore, in 1995 the SADC Natural Resources Management Programme was used to shape a future where international hunting should be included on the region's wildlife and habitat conservation agenda.

“It was quite clear during the Kasane SADC Natural Resources Management Programme Proceedings that local community participation in the management of wildlife resources [including direct benefits from international hunting] not only restored decades of lost confidence and trust in States, but also a highly charged sense of responsibility and ownership of wildlife by rural communities,” said the SADC Natural Resources Management Chairman, Mr Matemba.

Today, international hunting is being practised with great wildlife and habitat conservation support and success from rural communities co-existing with wildlife and benefiting from it, in African States involved in international hunting. Such community wildlife conservation cooperation has resulted in less poaching and an increase in wildlife populations. This was revealed in presentations by the government, safari hunting companies and rural communities representatives who attended the Victoria Falls November 2019 Safari Club International Foundation African Wildlife Consultative Forum.

“It must be understood that hunting is the economic engine for sustainable conservation of iconic wildlife,” said CEO of Safari Club International, Switzerland Office, Mr Antoine Spillmann in a September 2020 published paper entitled ‘Trophy Hunting.’ “In the United States, game wardens’ salaries come from state conservation services which are largely funded by hunting related income.”

The international wildlife hunting socioeconomic benefits that communities co-existing with wildlife are receiving in post-independent Africa include financing the construction of much-needed rural infrastructure ranging from roads, clinics, schools and boreholes.

Notably, the Western animal rights groups are the biggest threat to African wildlife conservation success in Africa. In order to raise millions of dollars that are hardly sent to Africa to support ‘wildlife conservation,’ they spread propaganda that international hunting threatens wildlife with extinction and then seek financial donations to support their high lifestyles and not to conserve wildlife in Africa. A ban on international hunting would block the flow of international hunting revenue into the African continent. This threatens to take away both the socioeconomic and wildlife and habitat conservation benefits that international hunting brings.

Despite the opposition from Western animal rights groups, international hunting is an internationally recognised wildlife management and conservation method. The UN Convention on International Trade In Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora Species (CITES) allows hunting of all wildlife, including endangered wildlife as long as it’s not harmful to the hunted population. Old wildlife bulls that are no longer of reproductive value are the ones that get hunted. When the old male predators are no longer able to actively hunt their own prey, they start moving into rural communities for easy prey that includes humans and livestock. This increases human-wildlife conflict. That’s the other reason why these old animals need to be cropped out.

Unfortunately, Kenya is working against international wildlife hunting. This is against the wishes of the Kenyan people co-existing with wildlife and would like to benefit from it.

Recently, the governor of Kajiado County in Kenya, Joseph ole Lenku, threatened to order his people to start killing wildlife unless they are given much better benefits from wildlife conservation,” said Fynn and Kolawole.

Kenya’s self-inflicted wildlife conservation crisis is best highlighted by a continued sharp decline in its elephant population. Wildlife conservation experts say the crisis will never end as long communities settled next to Kenya’s national parks and nature reserves don’t receive benefits from hunting.

According to South Africa-based leading African elephant management specialist Mr Ron Thomson, Kenya has been captured by Western animal rights groups. Mr Thomson said that Kenya signed an almost unbreakable anti-international hunting contract dating back to its independence from colonial rule in the 1960s under which the Western animal rights groups committed to continuously fund the entire Kenya Wildlife Services in exchange for a permanent international hunting ban.

“Kenya is in a bind and, even if they wanted to, they cannot get out from under the animal rights influence.”

The threat of animal rights’ anti-international hunting culture in Africa is real. They captured Botswana under President Ian Khama who then banned international hunting in 2014. It resulted in wildlife revenge killings, lion poisoning and increased poaching. The local communities protested the Khama international hunting ban. President Mokgweetsi Masisi lifted the hunting ban in 2019 and chased Western animal rights groups from Botswana.

However, the threat of Western animal rights groups’ money-powered anti-international hunting ban dictatorship in Africa remains. Resident Western animal rights groups NGOs are reportedly using Kenya as the ‘launch pad’ to spread anti-international hunting influence on the continent.

However, they have failed to ban hunting in other East African countries, including Tanzania, Ethiopia and Uganda. In West Africa, they failed to ban hunting in Cameroon. They have also failed to ban it in some North African countries, notably Morocco where 3 000 international hunters go hunting annually.

To persuade Kenya to lift the ban on international hunting, pro-international hunting African countries, communities and NGOs have continued to showcase to it the wildlife, habitat and socio-economic benefits that flow from international hunting.

At the start of the 21st Century the Southern African rural communities, working with Africa Coordinator for Safari Club International, Mr George Pangeti and the Africa Resources Trust now called ResourceAfrica, invited Kenya to come and witness the necessity of international hunting to wildlife conservation in Southern Africa.

The entire Kenyan delegation that included government officials, politicians and rural communities and Kenya Television Network was impressed with the hunting benefits that it

witnessed. They visited hunting communities of Zimbabwe's Hwange District, Maun and Chobe in Botswana and Namibia's Caprivi Strip hunting communities. Accompanied by their Deputy Minister of Environment, the Kenyans were expected to return home and recommend to Parliament the introduction of international hunting as a necessity to wildlife conservation.

Sadly, it never happened in a country that has been long captured by Western animal rights groups. It was ignored. It remains to be seen when Kenya will learn that wildlife conservation success is impossible in Africa without international hunting.

About the writer: Emmanuel Koro is a Johannesburg-based international award-winning independent environmental journalist who writes and has written extensively on environment and development issues in Africa.