

HOW KENYA 'PLOTTED' OWN WILDLIFE LOSS

By Emmanuel Koro

Johannesburg, 25 November 2021

If Kenya had known that its 1977 hunting ban would devalue and massively degrade its wildlife it might have avoided it.

Sadly, the damage has already been done.

A professor of the US-based University of Florida Centre For African Studies, Dr Brian Child said that since the hunting ban, Kenya's wildlife has declined by 60 % and "is being replaced by cattle." This means that the land that was previously set aside for wildlife conservation is being taken up for cattle production.

"In Southern, Africa wildlife has increased by 600%," said Dr Child, illustrating that where international wildlife hunting is taking place and rural communities are benefiting, it creates incentives for them to conserve wildlife.

Meanwhile, Kenya-based wildlife expert, Dr Daniel Stiles said that without hunting benefits, "there are no incentives" for Kenyan communities co-existing with wildlife not to poach it.

Dr Stiles said in an interview that in an attempt to rescue its declining wildlife population Kenya has unsuccessfully promoted ecotourism as the solution for unemployment and revenue generation from land leasing.

He said that Kenya's misdirected policies have certainly degraded the country's wildlife.

"I believe the 1978 ban on commercial wildlife use has had even more of a negative impact on wildlife than the 1977 hunting ban, although the two are linked," said Dr Stiles.

He said that although ecotourism has worked to some extent in Kenya there are some problems. The communities not included in ecotourism projects "feel excluded and cause a lot of problems" that are not conducive to wildlife conservation.

"Eco-tourism is not a substitute for sustainable consumptive use of wildlife," said Dr Stiles. "The first is an artificial construct from the North, sustainable use is the natural state of affairs in the South with millennia of practice, up to the 19th century."

Meanwhile, researchers who include Joseph O. Ogutu, Hans-Peter Piepho, Mohamed Y. Said, Gordon O. Ojwang, Lucy W. Njino, Shem C. Kifugo and Patrick W. Wargute recently established that the "real underlying cause of wildlife declines in Kenya is policy, institutional and market failures."

They published an investigative research paper entitled, [Extreme Wildlife Declines and Concurrent Increase in Livestock Numbers in Kenya: What Are the Causes?](#) The researchers established that in the same period that wildlife declined in Kenya, wildlife in several or most southern African countries have, in sharp contrast, increased. The increase happened where opportunities, rights and responsibilities for wildlife conservation have been fully devolved to private landholders and communities. The stark difference with Kenya is that southern African countries that are experiencing increased wildlife growth allow hunting outside parks, but Kenya banned it.

“If Kenya doesn’t change its policies and organise a managed, regulated bushmeat harvest to feed rural people, both from wild and ranched sources, which will provide incentives not to kill everything possible, Kenya’s wildlife is doomed,” said Dr Stiles.

Therefore, the Kenyan Government faces a policy reform challenge to stop the rapid decline of its wildlife population.

Joseph O. Ogutu and other researchers who recently investigated the causes of Kenya’s wildlife declines and the concurrent increase in livestock suggested the need for wildlife revenue to flow to communities as one of the ways to create incentives for community wildlife conservation. This has been done successfully in countries such as Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe by making communities benefit from international hunting revenue.

It remains to be seen when Kenya will correct its flawed wildlife management policies, including the 1977 hunting ban and the 1978 ban on commercial wildlife use.

“The ban on hunting and wildlife commercial use have contributed to Human-Wildlife Conflict, that is rampant in Kenya and it’s in contrast with Namibia and other southern African countries where rural communities tolerate wildlife because of the benefits that help compensate the socioeconomic costs of co-existing with it.”

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