



## **A New Deal for rural communities, wildlife and natural resources in Africa**

Associate Professor, Brian Child, at the Department of Geography, Centre for Africa Studies, University of Florida attended Africa's Wildlife Economy Summit at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe on 24-25 June 2019 and commented to LTRS as follows:

I recently attended the African Wildlife Economy Summit. I have to say that I was filled with hope. Africans, many of which come out of the SUSUSG and CBNRM movement of which I have been a part for many years, took complete control of a narrative in a way in which this list serve would be proud, and see hope for the future. So did their Presidents! There is a passion for wildlife, not to be pretty but as part of the economic future.

There was a powerful demand for much stronger wildlife ownership, especially in communities. And, as one of the Presidents claimed, we are about the only place on the planet that has "done God's will" as noted in the Garden of Eden, and actually looked after our wildlife, and those who have not had better stop telling us what to do! This is backed up by data showing the recovery of wildlife in the region where the principles of local ownership and free markets have been applied. However, as I said in my plenary presentation, another benefit of entrusting landholders and communities with the rights over wildlife was the capacity and commitment of Africans so evident in the room. In just two months, I noted that some of the people at the summit would be in another meeting that was trying to take away these very same rights - CITES

While we welcome the help of outsiders, my impression was that they were not nearly as schooled in the issues of wildlife economy as Africans, and especially local communities. We certainly do not need to be taught to 'fish' by people from countries who have lost most of their wildlife. Indeed, as the President's said, we are sometimes in the unhealthy position of being indebted to them to finance wildlife conservation, and even forced to follow wrong solutions, while we have hundreds of millions of dollars of wildlife products locked away in safes and vaults and on the hoof.

For a day before the meeting, communities from across Africa met, and I attach the communities' statement that emerged from this meeting. My overall impression from this meeting was that, across southern Africa, we now have a non-racial group of highly committed individuals.

My plea to this group is - please get involved with the Africans. You will be joining a powerful, unified, non-racial group of men and women who are passionate about the same things you are. They were, frankly, amazing. Personally, I feel I can now step back from the fight for wildlife and feel it is in good hands; this group is far better at the fight that we ever can be. However, when I wrote to one of my Zambian friends to say this he said, great, but we still need you guys for your guidance, support, experience and technical skills! Professor Frank Vorhies (AWEI. ALU) and Liz Reilly (iSwatini) were also there. I am sure they agree.

So my advice is, align your group with this movement, because a movement is what it is, and make sure you participate and attend in 2020. We need South Africa in general, including the private game ranching sector, to step up and, with far greater regional solidarity and less isolationism than in the past, become a genuine part of this regional partnership.

Best regards

Brian.

## **Community statement**

### **DECLARATION**

At Africa's Wildlife Economy Summit: Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe 24-25 June 2019

### **Voices of the Communities: A New Deal for rural communities and wildlife and natural resources:**

We, the over 40 community representatives of 12 countries across Africa have met prior to *Africa's Wildlife Economy Summit*, to tell the stories of our experiences of living with and among Africa's wonderful wildlife that our forebears watched over and cared for from time immemorial as an integral part of their societies' culture, traditions and economies. We have discussed the role of communities in managing wildlife resources on their land – bearing the costs of living among them sustainably over centuries, despite the continuing legacy of disempowering colonial laws and policies. We are the front line of defence in protecting natural resources and combatting illegal wildlife trade.

A key component of Africa's economic potential lies in its biodiversity and wildlife economy, as a unique competitive advantage, for fighting poverty and building resilient communities. Given rapid changes facing Africa in terms of growing poverty and inequality,

impacts of climate change, and increasing land transformation that have the potential to destabilize economies of the continent, urgent attention needs to be paid to these threats.

We are not helpless communities. We have strong capacity to take this New Deal forward ourselves, if our rights of ownership, governance and use of our natural resources are recognized and respected, as share-holders and not mere stakeholders.

We therefore implore you the Heads of State and governments in Africa together with the private sector and international organizations to recognize the role of communities in the ownership, management and conservation of natural resources that drives the wildlife economy across Africa and to address our concerns, in the spirit of environmental and economic justice. Let us move from a raw-deal to a New Deal.

## **Goals**

Noting increasing rural poverty across the continent, loss of wildlife and habitat, lack of inclusion of communities in decision making and lack of rights, our goal is to reset the agenda for community based natural resources management to:

- Reduce poverty at household level;
- Turn wildlife into a rural economic engine;
- Achieve self-determination and security of rights and tenure; and
- Develop strong community institutions to govern wildlife sustainably.

## **Solutions and way forward**

With consideration of the above arguments, we the communities of Africa propose the following as the way forward to achieve a New Deal:

- Recognize community rights over the ownership, management and use of resources
- Strengthen community governance and institutions
- Build and enhance local capacity of communities to govern and manage natural resources
- Recapitalize the communities and their natural resources including across boundaries
- Ensure that community voices are heard in shaping policy and decision making – from the local to the global level
- Strengthen evidence-based adaptive management, incorporating indigenous knowledge
- Promote investment partnerships in a community-owned wildlife economy.
- Ensure that a full and fair share of benefits from the wildlife economy flow directly to the communities.
- Change the development model from doing things for communities to financing well-governed communities to do things for themselves

This is an invitation to Heads of State and governments of Africa, the private sector and international organizations to work with us to allow our continent's communities to achieve a New Deal that will become a stronger foundation of Africa's Wildlife Economy. We trust that this is the first step in a meaningful process bringing us together as communities, government, private sector and international organizations as equal partners to conserve our

biodiversity into the future. We call on the global community to support this initiative as our biodiversity is a global asset.

It is our request that this Declaration be part of the formal record of this Summit.

## **Statement from Max Gomera, UN Environment**

Thank you Malan, thank you colleagues. I've just got home and am trying to put it all into some perspective. I think we can all be proud of what we achieved. We pulled off an incredibly impressive job. Africa rediscovered the power of togetherness! Whichever way you look at it, there is something for all of us to be proud of.

### **The numbers:**

We were expecting 350 people. By the end of the conference, 1,326 people had been accredited at Elephant Hills Resort. In fact, we move venue 48 hours before meeting and got Rooney's to build one of the best venues just outside hotel.

Having four Presidents (plus two more Presidents - Angola and Egypt - sending special envoys to represent them) was beyond what we expected. Having two Presidents - Masisi and Munangagwa - stay for the two days of the meeting was beyond our wildest dreams. And they were genuinely interested in the conversation. They demanded to listen to communities ahead of ministers. They spoke off the cuff. It was surprisingly not difficult to persuade them to dump speeches and speak from the heart. All four regions of Africa were represented.

### **The conversation:**

The quality, depth and breadth of the conversation was exceptional. Many thanks to the preparations by the panelists and their moderators. Overall, conversations were constructive, civil and engaging. Africa has matured more than it's given credit. Views on both sides of the ideological divide were raised and discussed. President Munangagwa was especially impressive in the way he framed the debate and set the tone.

The community group asserted themselves in a clear and firm way. The idea of having a preparatory meeting for communities was inspired.

### **Participants:**

We drew from all relevant sectors and players. Some were represented more than others but we achieved some balance. The youths story tellers just brought the house down. I've heard nothing but praise for them. And many called it unprecedented and touching.

### **Teamwork:**

Brian, Masego, Jose and the lot raised the bar further - kicking the ball way way out of the park it will be difficult for anyone to match them in future. It was a truly constructive meeting and set a new tone and bar. But none of it would have been possible without your support, encouragement and engagement. Many thanks for the constructive ideas. You all played a role in shaping this conversation. And I'm glad I've got you folks in my corner!

**Next steps:**

You will be pleased to know that The South Africans and the Botswana have expressed interest in hosting the second summit next year. We need to plan ahead...

**FOR MEDIA COVERAGE**

**SEE:** <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jun/26/lift-ban-ivory-trade-southern-african-leaders-summit>