

## **The legacy of Cecil the Lion: opinion piece.**

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- If the allegations surrounding the reprehensible demise of Cecil are true then they undoubtedly speak to a broader malaise in the safari hunting industry in Zimbabwe, which absolutely needs effective systemic change and reform.
- The death of Cecil has focused a much needed spotlight on deficiencies in regulation and ethical practices in the safari hunting industry and it is important that this be translated into meaningful and sustainable change for the betterment of conservation.
- However, it has been frustrating that the media and public outrage has been so polarised and simplistic on both ends of the spectrum, which has not been helpful in unbundling a very complex problem that is vital to conservation in Zimbabwe.
- It is essential that the legacy of Cecil be one of an improved outlook for conservation of his species, other wildlife and the wild-lands they inhabit.

## **Reform of the Hunting Industry in Zimbabwe**

- The fact is that Zimbabwe Safari Hunting Industry, while admittedly not without problems, currently underpins wildlife-based land use in Zimbabwe – which, as a country, and not for want of spectacular wildlife and wild-lands, simply does not have the ecotourism infrastructure, access or demand to compare with the likes of Kenya and South Africa.
- In recognition of the problems relating to compliance, ethics and regulation within the Hunting Industry the Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and Industry Stakeholders held an Industry Reform workshop in June 2015 some time prior to the demise of Cecil the Lion.
- A number of important problems were admitted and identified as well as approaches and mechanisms to remedy such failings in the future.
- Such issues included each and every one of the allegations and transgressions involved in the Cecil case – and many more besides.
- One of the key resolutions was the establishment of an enforceable Code of Conduct and Best Practice as well as a more robust, transparent and inclusive mechanism for enforcement.
- The output document of that workshop is currently been finalised – a process which has to a certain extent been delayed by the furore surrounding the Cecil case.

## **Safari hunting as a conservation tool**

- There is little doubt that well managed sport hunting is an important and highly effective conservation tool – as it is in Europe and especially North America where the industry is worth billions on an annual basis.
- Closer to home, over 90% of Zimbabwe's remaining rhino – including 3 of the top 8 free-ranging, so called "IUCN Key 1" populations of black rhino in Africa (defining these populations as being critical for survival of the species not only in Zimbabwe but worldwide) - are hosted on large well-protected and managed private Conservancies which are almost entirely dependent on well-managed safari hunting for their financial sustainability.
- Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that on these well-managed, hunted Conservancies populations of all other wildlife species are rising steadily and in the case of elephant and lion even exponentially so that there is in fact an increased risk of impact and even overpopulation of these species.

- The point is also made that, by comparison to the non-consumptive ecotourism sector, safari hunting has proved itself to be resilient and relatively refractory to social, economic and political turmoil as well as to external threats such as misperceptions surrounding threats of ebola in southern Africa for example.
- Hunting and ecotourism is not an either or choice and it is important to appreciate that safari hunting can augment ecotourism and other forms of wildlife-based land use in achieving a sustainable conservation objective.

### **Safari hunting in the context of Community-led conservation in Zimbabwe**

- At its inception in the 1980s, the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) was based on what was then a truly radical notion that the most effective custodians of wildlife and natural resources were the very people who lived amongst and alongside wild-lands
- The sole proviso of CAMPFIRE was that these Communities were entitled to benefit directly from sustainable and responsible management and utilisation of their natural resources so incentivising an inclination to long term conservation.
- Back then, the ability of Communities to market and sell strictly monitored and well-managed trophy hunts and to benefit from the proceeds thereof, had an almost miraculous effect in converting even the most seasoned poachers and sceptical communities into ardent conservationists.
- Unfortunately there has been a lack of evolution and diversification within CAMPFIRE which is currently entirely dependent on safari hunting to generate revenues that justify preservation of some 50,000 km<sup>2</sup> (or some 5 million hectares) of wilderness in communal areas throughout Zimbabwe (slightly less than the extent of the entire National Parks and Wildlife Estate).
- Without income from sustainable utilisation of natural resources these areas would suffer rapid human encroachment and impact through slash-&-burn subsistence agriculture and communal livestock production.
- These impacts would devastate these wild-lands - many of which are important buffers to the Parks Estate - as well as the wildlife populations they support and the vital eco-services they provide.
- Notwithstanding the foregoing, and as for the wider hunting industry, it is widely acknowledged that there are serious challenges facing CAMPFIRE and which undermine its conservation and community development objectives.
- Three key shortcomings affecting the success of CAMPFIRE:
  - Incomplete devolution of user rights translating into lack of transparent and equitable distribution of benefits to Community Level.
  - A lack of diversification and a total dependence on safari hunting to generate revenue.
  - A lack of competent technical, administrative and financial capacity at Community level to effectively manage and protect wild-lands and the wildlife under their custodianship.

### **Lack of equitable benefit distribution to Communities**

- A common criticism of safari hunting and CAMPFIRE is the lack of equitable benefit distribution to Communities.
- This is also true of mineral, oil and timber extraction and exploitation around the world where many Communities fail to receive their rightful share of benefits.
- The point is that benefit distribution is a function of transparency, accountability and administration rather than being peculiar to any given industry or activity and it is this aspect that needs to be redressed.

### **Effect of an immediate hunting ban in Zimbabwe**

- Given the lack of diversification of revenue streams derived from sustainable natural resource utilisation an immediate hunting ban is likely to have devastating impacts on the environment and wildlife populations in Zimbabwe.
- A similar picture was seen in Kenya in the late 1970s and early 1980s when they lost almost 50% of their wildlife following a withdrawal of user rights over wildlife from landowners. It has taken a generation for Kenya to develop a system of non-consumptive community-based tourism to turn this around and this on the back of a comparatively enormous eco-tourism market and huge donor subsidies – neither of which are available in Zimbabwe. Given the current state of wildlife in Africa, Zimbabwe does not have the luxury of time.
- Given the extreme poverty and unemployment in most Communal Areas around Zimbabwe, Communities are obliged to subsist off their allotted land.
- In CAMPFIRE Areas these Communities survive through a blend of slash-and-burn rain fed cropping, livestock husbandry, migrant labour and revenues from safari hunting.
- Poor agricultural and livestock husbandry practices and inputs make these land uses very inefficient and environmentally damaging – particularly in the form as they are currently practiced.
- If safari hunting were to be suddenly banned, the loss in revenue to Communities (and – perversely but very importantly - decreased enforcement by officials interested in safeguarding their cut) would result in dramatic encroachment and impact on CAMPFIRE wild-land areas with devastating impact on the wildlife populations and eco-services they support.
- Finally, as the CAMPFIRE buffers to State Protected Areas are eroded this will translate into much higher pressure on National Parks not only in the form of bush-meat poaching and commercial wildlife trafficking but also in the form of demand for resources such as grazing for livestock and wood harvesting and ultimately in the form of political pressure to de-proclaim state-protected wildlife areas – which has already occurred in recent years in Zimbabwe.

### **Need for Diversification – a key focus of WILD**

- The preceding section underlines the vital importance of immediate and comprehensive diversification of revenue streams and land use activities that are either derived from or are compatible with sustainable Natural Resource management so as to reduce reliance on consumptive safari hunting as the sole revenue stream.
- In this regard targets should be set at National and Community level which aim at increasing non-hunting based revenues to, for example, 50% within 4 years and to 80% of overall natural-resource-based-revenues within 7 years.

- The Wildlife in livelihood development (WILD) Programme ([www.wild-africa.org](http://www.wild-africa.org)) works with the CAMPFIRE Association and supports improved and diversified community-led conservation models in Zimbabwe.
- We focus on rehabilitation of Community-Owned conservation areas in establishment of Community Conservancies – providing the infrastructure, equipment, financial support, training and ongoing mentorship for them to provide competent and effective management and active protection of wildlife and wilderness areas under their custodianship.
- WILD sees it as vital to develop a broad array of diversified revenue streams based on sustainable management and utilisation of natural resources and so reduce the current total reliance on safari hunting.
- In this we include revenue generation from carbon credits under REDD+ models as well as development of diversified revenue streams from non-consumptive ecotourism and value addition to an array of non-timber-non-wildlife forest produce.
- WILD also focuses on Community Education, Community Development, good governance and improved efficiency of natural resource utilisation under traditional land uses – through training, extension and services aimed at improved livestock husbandry and cropping practices and production.

### **Paying for Conservation in the context of a poverty-stricken nation**

- It is unfortunate that mass media and 1<sup>st</sup> world city populations who have become abstractly alienated from the natural world and the realities of ecosystem protection and conservation are able to exert such enormous influence to the detriment of the communities and wildlife populations they hope to preserve.
- In the context of extreme poverty there are very real direct and indirect costs for communities to coexist with wildlife in Africa.
- Some of the direct costs include acceptance and mitigation of crop raiding or livestock losses as well as direct threat to human life through human-wildlife conflict.
- Indirect opportunity costs are also considerable as communities forgo the choice of encroaching on wildlife areas to practice traditional agriculture – which although inefficient is still life-saving in the context of having nothing.
- If a man has nothing – who gives outsiders the right to prohibit him from cutting down a tree to sell for money to feed his family?
- We have to offer alternatives and in the context of conservation those alternatives include establishment and support of an array of well-regulated sustainable revenue streams which are compatible with nature conservation.
- Some of these revenues will be derived from sustainable utilisation, some from non-consumptive tourism, some from payments for eco-services such as accreditation for carbon sequestration and some in the form of direct payments and donations from rich countries to enable impoverished communities and nations to take the environmentally sustainable approach to poverty alleviation, job creation and economy building.