

# Rights Groups fail to Hijack Africa Wildlife Summit

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**CONSUMPTIVE TOURISM** which includes wildlife trophy hunting and hunting for the pot contributes 90% of tourism revenue southern Africa generates annually, said an Oxford University associate professor of ecology and economics, Brian Child, at the Africa Wildlife Economy summit.

Child said non-consumptive tourism that includes travel tourism only contributes 10% to southern Africa's annual tourism revenue.

"If Africa is serious about growing wildlife economy, it needs to grow both its non-consumptive and consumptive use tourism enterprises, particularly consumptive tourism that Brian Child said contributes 90% of southern Africa's annual tourism earnings," said Morrison Mtsambiwa, former CEO of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (shared by Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

Beyond tourism enterprises, the growth of Africa's wildlife economy can be boosted by trade in Africa's abundant wildlife products such as ivory and rhino horn.

Sadly, the text of the United Nations Environment Programme (Unep) convened and Space for Giants (a Western animal rights groups that is against hunting and ivory trade) sponsored the Africa Wildlife Economy Summit held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, from 24-25 June 2019, was silent on consumptive use of activities such as hunting.

The agenda that was set by Kenya-based Unep and Space for Giants (SfG) to grow the African wildlife economy exclusively using non-consumptive tourism raised a lot more questions than answers.

As the reality sank in that non-consumptive use was excluded from the summit agenda, the next and inevitable question was who would put consumptive use on the agenda?

To the relief of the pro-consumptive tourism delegates at the summit, president Emerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe authoritatively and refreshingly brought the consumptive use of wildlife issues on the agenda while delivering his keynote address to the summit.

To the shock and disappointment of animal rights groups, Mnangagwa touched on hunting, a topic that was suspiciously excluded from the agenda.

"Safari hunting is a vital cog in wildlife economy," said Mnangagwa. "Profits from hunting are used to provide water and fencing to reduce human-wildlife conflict and law enforcement against poachers. We continue to call for free trade in hunting products as these have positive impacts on the economies of our countries."

This pro-hunting remark spelt doom and failure to Western animal rights groups' attempt to exclude wildlife use from the agenda. Of course they shared that shock with local anti-wildlife use tourism business leaders who had a hand in crafting the wrong and suspicious non-consumptive use 'recipe' for growing Africa's wildlife economy.

Mnangagwa said animal rights groups were wrong in thinking that animals should not be used to sustain people's livelihoods.

Mnangagwa argued that Zimbabwe be allowed to sell its ivory and rhino horn stockpiles: "Zimbabwe has about US\$600 million worth of ivory and rhino horn stocks, most of which came from natural attrition of those animals.

"If we are allowed to dispose the same under agreed parameters, the revenue derived therefrom would suffice to finance our operational conservation efforts for the next two decades. We encourage a process where accruing benefits from natural resources are fairly and equitably shared among communities living within wildlife areas.

"This way the wildlife resources add value and improve the quality of life of local communities and the quality of life of animals themselves," he said.

If this was a boxing match, then Mnangagwa must have landed the knockout punch against animal rights groups when he said the rights groups were a threat to wildlife conservation because they put wildlife above the people and yet God made human beings the custodians of wildlife and should benefit from it.

He said it was time the UN Convention on International Trade In Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (Cites) was made aware that the one-size-fits-all approach towards a ban on ivory trade was an unfair and unacceptable method of determining who should trade in wildlife products.

This was a timely message to Cites member countries worldwide, whose votes determine whether proponent countries can be allowed to trade in ivory and rhino horn.

Cites secretary general Yvonne Higuero got the message as she sat in the front row when Mnangagwa delivered his address.

Soon after Mnangagwa delivered his speech, all the other southern African presidents also spoke in support of ivory trade and consumptive use and the need for rural communities living side by side with wildlife to also benefit from it.

It was impressive that the southern African presidents were not divided by Western animal rights groups as happened during president Ian Khama's animal rights influenced wildlife management era, when Botswana opposed ivory trade and hunting.

The united southern African presidents included Edgar Lungu of Zambia, Hage Geingob of Namibia and Mokweetsi Masisi of Botswana as well as Angolan president Joao Lourenco, who was represented by his minister of environment.

Fourteen African ministers of environment attended the summit.

The summit was held under the auspices of the African Union, under the chairmanship of Paul Kagame of Rwanda. Over 40 community representatives from 12 African countries attended the summit and called for the reduction of poverty at household level through turning wildlife into a rural economic engine.

"The declaration is about sustainable use which includes hunting and need for the communities living next to protected areas to benefit from wildlife and natural resources," Lamson Maluleke a representative of South Africa's Limpopo Province-based Makuleke Community.

Charles Jonga, the executive director for the Zimbabwe Communal Areas Management Programme For Indigenous Resources (Campfire) Association said he was concerned over attempts to have the summit exclusively focus on non-consumptive tourism.

One of southern Africa's successful non-consumptive tourism business people, Derek Joubert, made his anti-hunting stance known during a panel discussion. "I am not a hunter," he said.

"And so I was a bit worried coming up here (on the stage) and be sustainably harvested myself. Wildlife is what we have to protect."

Joubert said they are working to raise US\$200 million to acquire tourism properties and operate them with communities for three years before handing them over to the communities.

"I know that the Space for Giants is an animal rights group and that they are coming in the name of ecotourism which is an easy product to sell to communities and internationally," said a representative for the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO), Max Louis. "Therefore, they are using ecotourism to derail the sustainable use in southern Africa. We will not allow animal rights groups to come and change our sustainable use agenda in southern Africa. We will continue to defend sustainable use. We were aware that the animal rights agenda was being forced on us."

However, while southern Africans might not fully welcome the Space for Giants and Derek Joubert-sponsored non-consumptive tourism drive, well-placed sources said they have already started meeting southern African governments, to introduce this initiative.

They have also started promoting non-consumptive tourism projects in Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda where progress is at an advanced stage.

"At the moment consumptive tourism such as hunting is bringing much more money to Africans," said Jerry Gotor, the chairperson of Painted Dog project and founding director of Gonarezhou Conservation Trust.

The summit came at a time Botswana president Mogkweetsi Masisi is facing fierce opposition from animal rights groups for allowing the resumption of hunting.

Sources said Masisi had to be persuaded to attend the summit sponsored by an animal rights group that worked with bitter opponent former president Khama.

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