



We posted an article entitled “The Future of Hunting” because we believe that the author is absolutely correct in stressing the three key principles that should be followed by the hunting fraternity, and which should be enforced, namely (i) transparent implementation of and compliance with scientifically grounded sustainability rules, (ii) full recognition of the role of local rural people in wildlife management and their rights and responsibilities regarding natural resource management, and (iii) the behaviour of hunters in the field and how they conduct themselves and present themselves to the public.

We clearly need to correct the conspiracy theories being peddled regarding the institutional arrangements concerning the organisations that support communal conservancies in Namibia. First, WWF in Namibia is a programme office of WWF-USA. It is not a country office. No environmental NGO in Namibia works under WWF. Namibian NGOs supporting conservancies are all independent organisations with their own, independent boards. Second, NCE is an independent, umbrella membership-based organisation for mainly Namibian environmental NGOs. WWF is not a member of NCE and has no position or involvement in any NCE governance structure or decision-making.

We need to explain the arrangements between the Namibian NGOs that support communal conservancies. These NGOs have created an umbrella CBNRM support organisation called NACSO (Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations). Only Namibian organisations supporting communal conservancies are eligible for full membership of NACSO. NCE is not a member of NACSO because it does not work at the conservancy level. Non-Namibian organisations working on CBNRM, such as WWF, although a highly valued partner, do not qualify for full membership – they are Associate Members with no voting rights. This has been the situation for almost two decades.

The decisions made by NACSO are made by their Namibian NGO members which have Namibian boards of trustees / directors. They work to help facilitate and develop conservancies and support their natural resources management and development. NACSO has three working groups through which much of the coordination, information sharing, and support is channelled by the member support NGOs. These are (i) the Natural Resources Working Group, which assists with wildlife monitoring and wildlife management, (ii) the Institutional and Governance Working Group, which supports issues around the management of conservancy committees, AGMs, financial management, etc, and (iii) the Business, Enterprise and Livelihoods Working Group, which helps conservancies set up joint venture initiatives with the private sector (e.g. to establish lodges), as well their own managed businesses (e.g. camp sites, craft centres, local guiding). All these processes contribute to an evolving self-sufficiency, democratisation and sustainable resource-based economy in communal areas, based on people’s rights and responsibilities over natural resources.

Is everything perfect? Certainly not, there are many challenges – but it is vastly better than the situation at the time of Namibia’s independence when rural communities had no

rights, were totally disempowered, wildlife numbers were very low and people got no benefits from their natural resources. There is certainly plenty of scope for improvement, and all partners are working with conservancies on a daily basis to continuously help get things better and better. It is a process which is generally moving in the right direction. And like democracy, imperfect as it is, there is currently no better model around.

We also need to explain that the support organisations are only one part of the process in establishing wildlife numbers, trends and quotas. The conservancy members themselves, their community game guards and committees are fully involved (they live with the wildlife on a daily basis), as is the Ministry of Environment & Tourism, and in some areas, also the private sector joint venture partners, e.g. in the tourism sector. Wildlife numbers and trends are determined using a number of methods – fixed route vehicle or foot transects using internationally accepted methods such as “Distance” (used in many parts of the world), observations from game guards, water hole counts, camera traps and periodic aerial surveys. Both the fixed route and aerial survey methodologies applied in Namibia have been reviewed by accredited international scientists and found to be of high standard. Different methods are used in different regions and for different species. There is no one system that gives perfect results for all wildlife in all areas. The most useful approach is to use a combination of standardised methods, and particularly to look at species population trends.

Finally, it is important to understand that wildlife populations are not, and should not be, static. They are increasing and decreasing each year and over longer cycles, while some species (e.g. elephant and buffalo) seasonally move across international borders, further contributing to annual fluctuations in census findings. Without this dynamic nature there is little resilience in ecosystems. And in arid zones, this dynamic aspect is particularly apparent and important. So, animals move over large areas and outside places where they might have been seen last year or the year before. And animals die because of drought. But they recover relatively quickly when conditions improve. This is the nature of arid and hyper-arid zones. The larger the open system, the more robust and resilient it is.

Management of wildlife in arid areas also requires a deeper level of ecological understanding and some aspects might seem counter-intuitive. For example, when entering a dry cycle, it might be appropriate to harvest animals while they are still in reasonable condition, put the income in the bank, so that fewer animals die in the drought, so that those which come through the drought are in reasonable condition and are well placed to breed successfully to start rebuilding the population. This is also better for veld management. The old agricultural subsidy system in Namibia, where the state providing fodder, resulted in too many animals staying on the land and, after the first rains, hammering the veld and not giving it time to sufficiently recover. This was one of the contributing factors that led to the bush encroachment we see today.

Short-term (over a number of years) population fluctuations should therefore not be cause for concern, provided that long-term monitoring and adaptive management mechanisms are in place, that governance systems are working fairly effectively and that the broader public understands that arid systems are very dynamic and that wildlife populations vary in response.

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