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**Community Based Wildlife Conservation
Principles and Experiences From Tanzania.**

by

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I

In the years 1878 to 1880 Joseph Thomson on his Royal Geographical Society expedition traversed what is now the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania. He reached Lake Nyasa and Lake Tanganyika and returned triumphantly to the coast.

Guess where he saw his first elephant? At the zoo of Edinburgh! This was the result of the ivory trade – a very unsustainable kind of wildlife use, we would say today.

The German colonial Government introduced modern wildlife legislation starting in 1896. The first protected areas were created at the same time like the Sabi Reserve, later Kruger National Park, and the Hluhluwe Reserve in South Africa. There were 15 protected areas, 5% of the Tanganyika colony, before the first world war.

Commercial elephant hunting was stopped in 1911. Soon, in the area which Thomson passed without seeing a single elephant, villages had to be moved because of permanent crop raiding by these pachyderms.

At independence there were three national parks, six game reserves and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania. Nowadays, the number has multiplied by the factor four respectively five. Over 20 percent of the total land surface of Tanzania is now under protection. With the

exception of Ngorongoro people are prohibited from settling or farming there.

Conservation problems remain, but studies show that most of these areas enjoy high biological biodiversity and wildlife numbers - in many cases more than a hundred years ago. Parks work!

Recent studies have also proven this fact for other parks in Africa. They work - not everywhere, but at many places.

However, protected areas work at high costs.

- High costs to defend them. They are difficult to finance, as many of these countries belong to the poorest of the world with the majority of their people surviving in poverty.
- High opportunity costs: Many parks are agriculturally marginal, but others are on highly productive land.
- And finally high social costs, because nearly everywhere people used to live and were driven out of these areas at some stage, typically without compensation.

This was “**conservation against the people**”.

Social conflicts between people and wildlife, people and parks are the other side of conservation, not only in Tanzania. I do not say that you can have conservation as a free lunch, but, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is easy for me to say, because I do not belong to those who pay the bill.

Tanzania is privileged in that it still has wildlife in high numbers outside the protected areas on village land, for example 20,000 elephants just in the vicinity of the Selous Game Reserve. I can take you to Ngarambe village where elephants are inside the settlement, nearly every night, not only when the maize is high. I can take you near Lindi airstrip where lions killed 23 people in five months. And I can take you to Bonye-Duthumi, where crocodiles killed 11 people in the last two years. Actually, while I was there a fortnight ago a woman and a child were taken by crocs in the neighbourhood.

The magnificent wildlife which the visitors from European cities admire, is - for us here nothing new - a burden for the small farmer. “Wadudu” he calls it in Tanzania, the same term being used for biting bugs and bloodsucking mosquitoes.

The only privilege he or she enjoys is the consumption of “bush meat”, completely illegal in Tanzania, but in many places the only meat available. Colonial and post colonial legislation has alienated villagers

from this resource, which was once freely available. Take-off levels were sustainable in the old days, but less so due to existing traditional rules, but more so due to low numbers of people and the existing inefficient hunting techniques. This all changed with the coming of steel wires, muzzle loaders and modern firearms.

A recent two year study done by TRAFFIC in seven Eastern and Southern African countries gives empirical evidence that the hunting and consumption of illegal game meat in these two regions is comparable to the flourishing, well researched bush meat trade in Western and Central Africa, in particular in the rainforest. It is only a romantic myth that bush meat originates from small-scale consumptive poaching which is less destructive than commercial trophy poaching. No, meat poaching is widespread, uncontrolled and mostly at unsustainable levels.

TRAFFIC shows that a country like Kenya which has made all hunting, except for birds, illegal, as it is claimed that legal trade encourages the illegal one, is in no way better off. Much concern centres at the flagship species like elephant and rhino, but in most countries it is actually the massive use of wildlife for bush meat which – besides population growth and loss of natural habitat – is the real threat for wildlife.

Government conservation agencies, in most cases little represented outside the protected areas anyway, have not been able to control this type of poaching. In fact, it is sometimes the official game scout in the village who runs the trade.

II

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the year 1987 the Tanzanian Government requested Germany to assist in saving biodiversity in the Selous ecosystem in the southern part of the country. The most obvious downward trend at that time was the disappearance of the rhino and the crash of the elephant population from an estimated 100.000 plus in the 1970's to less than 30.000 in 1989 at a speed of perhaps 3.000 to 5.000 or more a year. While reorganizing and rehabilitating the reserve the success of anti-poaching was obvious. But at the same time we realized that when poaching originated from villages outside the reserve, it was not sufficient to chase poor villagers inside. We had to develop better methods. And it became also clear that wildlife education, revenue sharing and donating water pumps and school buildings, were equally not purposeful. Yes, people thought better about wildlife and the park afterwards, but poaching levels remained the same. Poaching had an economic basis and without changing the economic incentive system for

the villagers, all efforts would bear no fruits. This was our lesson learnt in the Selous.

But involving people in order to reduce poaching and to improve conservation is only one side of the coin. The other side is more familiar to development workers: Involving people in the utilization of wildlife, because game is an important, nevertheless frequently overlooked resource in rural areas. A resource which can satisfy basic needs, if used wisely.

Therefore, Tanzania developed around the Selous and in other areas, the Serengeti, Ruaha, Wami-Mbiki, Saadani, an approach which aims at putting wildlife on village land under the management of the communities. Conserving wildlife in order to use it: **“Conservation with the people, or better, by the people”**.

Nowadays 50 out of 70 villages around the Selous have created their own Wildlife Management Areas. The new official Wildlife Policy of the country has declared this “Community Based Conservation” (CBC) a country-wide approach. Regulations are being finalized and the revision of the Wildlife Act of 1974 to accommodate this new policy is well underway.

Under this CBC-programme villages carry out wildlife inventories, prepare management plans and finally declare part of their land as a Wildlife Management Area where sustainable wildlife use will be the predominant mode of production. The areas will be surveyed and demarcated and if they are not large enough villages can join together with neighbouring ones.

Whether the wildlife use is “non-consumptive” - photographic tourism - or “consumptive” like cropping, resident or tourist hunting will depend on the prevailing conditions and the decisions of the landholders, i.e. the villagers. I say “will”, because presently villages are not allowed yet to sell their quotas to safari hunting companies, as the new Wildlife Act is not in place. They are, however, under certain conditions already allowed to crop game, charge licence fees to resident hunters and enter into contracts with lodge operators

Wildlife ownership will be retained by the state in order to exercise control and avoid misuse. “Consumptive use” is therefore based on quotas granted and controlled by the Wildlife Division. Protection and anti-poaching is being done by village game scouts themselves who act

as authorised officers and who are democratically elected by self-administration organs, called Natural Resources Committees. Ten years ago they were called Wildlife Committees, but meanwhile a similar concept has been developed for the management of forests and has been incorporated into the new Forestry Act.

Many crucial details have not been decided yet, and their development will depend on trial and error. But the guiding principle is the same everywhere: Wildlife management is devolved from Government to the grassroots, the major part of income stays where it is created, and the whole process is democratically controlled.

III

Community Based Natural Resources Management in these days is mainstream, fashionable, politically correct and for some even a myth. Expectations are sometimes unrealistic, and some agencies which have propagated “fences and fines” for decades are jumping to the other extreme: Forget the stick, offer carrots on a silver plate and people will protect their wildlife. Unfortunately it is not that easy!

At the same time a good number of academic papers have already summed up “why CBC cannot work”.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in Tanzania we are in the phase of moving from pilot projects to a national programme, from less than a hundred villages to hopefully soon a thousand. We are experiencing the practical obstacles in this challenging venture. But we are also observing the potential and the possible success.

As far as our critics are concerned we have a number of empirical answers. Let me mention a few.

1. CBC is no substitute for a protected areas approach. It is complementary. The Serengeti National Park will not be turned into a Wildlife Management Area of the surrounding communities. However, many unprotected areas which would otherwise be turned into maize fields and wheat farms, will receive a higher degree of protection of natural resources.
2. The policy may be Government driven, but the response is spectacular. In many cases villages have taken the initiative into their own hands, not waiting for the green light from Dar Es Salaam.

3. Anti-poaching by committed and trained village game scouts works, sometimes better than the official law-enforcement. But CBC is not there to replace it. Again, it does complement. Anti-poaching by the Government is there to stay.

4. CBC in many cases will not be a tremendous addition to household income. But in practical life also the small things count, meat is a precious luxury, and people are proud to look after wildlife, an important cultural asset, themselves. Improvements in crop protection are also a strong argument. Where safari hunting is possible, the income potential is indeed significant and can even compete with agriculture.

5. Rural people still have traditional knowledge to manage wildlife. They are keen and able to learn additional modern techniques. Advice is, however, necessary. We shall see a private wildlife consultancy sector flourish.

6. Sustainability is a challenge, but this does not only relate to villages as decision makers. There is a lot of use anyway, and to turn it legal makes it more controllable and contributes to keeping take-off levels sustainable.

7. At some stage the Government might get scared of its own courage to have initiated such a major process of deregulation. But the Tanzanian Government is committed to see the process through. There will be losses of power and finance for the central Government, but in the long run all sides will benefit.

8. Wildlife conservation and rural development are not conflicting targets. Game is an important economic resource in many rural areas. And its use is a nature-friendly option.

IV

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the early nineties I had employed an instructor in bush-craft, Mzee Madogo. He had already served in the fifties under the “father” of the Selous, Ionides, an eccentric whom the villagers by the way called “mpalangozi”, the “one who skins snakes and flays people”. Mzee Madogo told me before he died of old age while on patrol in the Selous: We used to fight the poachers at Madaba, which is right in the middle of the Selous. We still have to do this police-style work at Madaba. But more important is now the work we do in the villages.

Predictions are difficult, in particular if they deal with the future. But let me try one: In fifty years from now Tanzania will still have a broad biodiversity within national parks and game reserves – even if they will be islands. How much wildlife there will be in the unprotected areas where it has to live side by side with a population which may have trebled by then - present growth rates prevailing - I cannot say. Whether CBC in the long run will be a sufficient incentive to retain this wildlife I equally do not dare to predict. But what I can say with absolute surety: Without Community Based Wildlife Conservation there will be no wildlife to speak of outside the protected areas in Tanzania in fifty years from now.

Thank you for your attention