

# Momentum for Community-Based Conservation in Southern Africa Continues with Namibia's Conservancy Forum



*Community-based natural resource management must make a positive impact on livelihoods and good governance is essential for the future of successful community development and wildlife conservation in Namibia*

Following a series of collaborative events in Southern Africa, Namibia held its Conservancy Chairperson's Forum in July in Otijwarongo. As a leading country in community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organizations (NACSO) convened the chairs and managers of all 86 conservancies across Namibia. Safari Club International Foundation (SCIF) was recognized as a special guest in the meeting's opening ceremony.

Minister of Environment and Tourism, the Honorable Pohamba Shifeta, gave a strong message to the conservancy leadership on the critical aspect of transparent financial management. "We need to do everything... to ensure that benefits to our communities... make a positive impact on livelihoods," stated Shifeta. The Minister outlined a new directive that "*at least 50% of the total annual income from tourism concessions and hunting activities... must be allocated towards the implementation of*

by By Joseph Goergen, Maxi Louis, Hilma Angula & Rosalia Iileka

community development projects.” These projects, prioritized at the local level, may include drought relief, boreholes, electrification, classrooms, school materials, scholarships and health clinics. Invested directly into communities, in addition to employment opportunities and cash income from tourism concessions, these benefits provide the incentives for sustainable use of wildlife and to conserve large areas of communal land. Shifeta’s opening address made it clear that mismanagement of funds and individual gain over the rights of communities will not be tolerated.

Minister Shifeta also had an important message to the hunting industry, calling for the highest standards of ethics and responsibility. “Conservation hunting is at the heart of the success of the communal conservancies in Namibia,” stated Shifeta. However, bad practice can damage the country’s reputation and negatively impact the industry. The Ministry has been developing a set of social media guidelines along with the Namibian Professional Hunting Association (NAPHA). “Let us work together to ensure hunting plays the part it can in eradicating poverty and furthering conservation in this country,” concluded the Minister.

This announcement comes shortly after the controversial hunt of a problem elephant at the request of a community conservancy in the Northwest region made international media headlines. Stakeholders met separately to discuss issues of permitting conservation hunting tags to address human-wildlife conflict.

Every conservancy and region of Namibia was represented at the chairperson’s forum, engaging in high level discussions across the group’s diverse cultures and language barriers. The goal of the meeting was to promote financial sustainability and good governance of the community conservancies. Priorities for the program moving forward include hosting mandatory annual general meetings and elections for governing Committees, monitoring and reporting on financial management, updating benefit distribution plans and creating game utilization plans.

Namibia’s first conservancies were formed in 1998. Over the last 21 years, the CBNRM program has contributed significantly to community development targets in Namibia and globally. Namibia is a major success story in wildlife conservation thanks to this model, now home to the world’s largest free roaming population of black rhino and cheetah with growing numbers of elephant, lion and other species. SCIF supports NACSO’s community game guard training program. While wildlife crime remains a serious issue, rhino poaching has been drastically reduced to almost zero.

This national community forum, the first in several years, comes after many other developments in Southern Africa to collaborate on community-based sustainable use issues. Earlier this year, President Masisi announced significant reform to Botswana’s wildlife sector, including reversing the previous administration’s suspension on tourist hunting and reopening hunting on state lands following an inclusive consultation process with rural communities impacted by elephant overpopulation and human-wildlife conflict. Several Heads of States later met in Kasane agreeing to a transboundary elephant management plan across the Kavango-Zambezi (KAZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area, the largest combination of protected areas in the world home to more than half of Africa’s elephant population. Finally, just last month, community voices from across Southern Africa made a “new deal” declaration at the UN Environment African Wildlife Economy Summit.

by By Joseph Goergen, Maxi Louis, Hilma Angula & Rosalia Iileka

Momentum in Southern Africa is extending to East Africa too, where Uganda recently gazetted a new community benefit program and sustainable use ideas are spreading even in Kenya. All of these announcements and events are leading up to cooperation among SADC countries on sustainable use positions at the upcoming CITES 18th Conference of the Parties, rescheduled in Geneva in late August, and a productive African Wildlife Consultative Forum (AWCF) co-hosted by the Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and SCIF in Victoria Falls in November.

After a resolution was adopted by the Community Chairperson's Forum, NACSO gave SCIF staff a brief tour of the Kunene South region to learn first-hand how local conservancies are managed. The drought in Namibia remains severe and a massive challenge to livelihoods, livestock and wildlife, but tourism is still active. While photographic tourists and overlanding campers constitute a large number of visitors to this region, hunting provides a low environmental impact yet high value contribution where alternatives simply don't exist. Leaders in Namibia's conservation field also met to train the next generation on current CITES issues and young Namibian citizen conservationists were able to participate in hunting for the first time, giving them a powerful real-world experience in sustainable use.

As Namibia sets the example, Southern Africa is continuing to positively work together for the rights of their communities and to support sustainable use principles. Empowering local communities to benefit from tourism opportunities and have meaningful access to natural resources is the most critical aspect for the future of wildlife in Africa and hunting's role in conservation.

*About the authors: Joseph Goergen is the Conservation Manager at Safari Club International Foundation, hosting the annual African Wildlife Consultative Forum and developing international policy positions on CITES species proposals. Maxi Louis is the Director of the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organizations (NACSO). Hilma Angula is the Coordinator of NACSO's institutional governance support to communal conservancies in Namibia and Rosalia Iileka works for the Namibia Nature Foundation.*

*Banner Photo: Meeting participants, Joe Goergen photo*