

CITES COP18
**SPECIAL
REPORT**

By Emmanuel Koro

CITES: Curse or Blessing for

WILDLIFE-RICH BUT POVERTY STRICKEN

SADC Countries



THE TRUE GREEN ALLIANCE

They were fed-up and armed to the teeth with compelling scientific data in favour of their ivory and rhino horn trade proposals, including downlisting African elephants and trade in live white rhinos. They had also planned a wild card reaction, if their proposals for ivory and rhino trade were rejected.

It was now or never for ivory and rhino horn trade. This was the mood of SADC countries when they attended the UN *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora* (CITES) in Geneva, Switzerland (17-28 August 2019). It was now or never for ivory and rhino horn trade.



CITES Secretary General Yvonne Higuero (second from left) observes a minute's silence in memory of Sri Lankan citizens who perished during April 2019 terrorist attacks.

This means that SADC countries went to attend CITES CoP18 determined to abandon their nice guy approach of yesteryear. They were not going to tolerate diplomacy amid vote rigging and non-recognition of scientific data. They would no longer tolerate failed proposals. It was just time to claim their long-denied sovereign rights to trade in their ivory and rhino horn.

As CITES CoP18 kicked-off, CITES Secretary General, Yvonne Higuero issued an ambitious statement that the UN Convention was working towards supporting the achievement of sustainable development by 2030. How could this be achieved when ivory and rhino horn, along with hunting markets were being shutdown was the million dollar question on the minds of quick-thinking delegates. They dismissed this talk as political hot air within the UN system. Observers said that Western animal rights groups and governments would not achieve SDGs in Africa where decision-makers in East and West Africa in particular are being bought. They in turn vote

against the use of wildlife and trade in wildlife products at the command of their Western paymasters. The vote-rigging and the trashing of compelling scientific facts failed the elephant over-populated SADC countries' proposals to trade in their ivory and rhino horn, presented at the 18th meeting of the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) that was held in Geneva, Switzerland from 16-28 August 2019. If one thought there was no election rigging in UN CITES, think again. It happened at CITES CoP18 and angered affected SADC countries. They immediately started talking about pulling out of CITES or alternatively opt for reservation positions on all the species they believed their proposals were unfairly voted on.

Evidence of vote rigging

The almost unprecedented margin of the loss of the elephant overpopulated SADC countries' ivory trade proposals made it evident that the US\$600 million Western animal rights groups 'industry' was involved. These groups want to continue profiting from ivory trade bans because they don't save the African elephant, but ironically increase the poaching of the iconic species. They deliberately create the poaching crisis, in order to selfishly use it for raising money to pay their high salaries. On the other hand, they scandalously never give some of the money to African rural communities for elephant conservation. Therefore, the Western animal rights groups continue to use this ivory trade ban that triggered poaching to keep themselves in business. They are believed to be collectively raising a global annual average of US\$600 million from this scam that hurts both the African elephant and African people, particularly those from elephant-rich Southern Africa.



The elephant over-populated SADC countries, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe submitted a joint proposal to trade in their thousands of tons of stockpiled ivory but were incredibly defeated by 81% no-votes, with only 19% supporting their proposal. Not accepted 81% to 19% - that's the smoking gun. It shows that animal rights groups

had long rigged the votes through among other things paying inducement money to East and West African representatives of the African Elephant Coalition countries, formed and funded by Western animal rights groups. The East and West African countries were seen at CITES COP18, in numerous and suspicious compromising meetings with Western animal rights groups. From time to time they were frog-marched into televisions interviews, told in typical puppet fashion what to say in committees and how to vote; by young Western blondes - young enough to be their own grandchildren. Then after the SADC ivory trade proposal was scandalously and controversially defeated in the stolen vote, the very same people were seen celebrating with Western nationals.

How can three elephant overpopulated countries that contribute more than 70% of the world's total elephant population receive only 19% of the total vote in their bid to trade in ivory? This is the question that defeated SADC governments and communities were asking after the vote.

They then collectively dismissed CITES as an integrity damaged UN agency that they no longer trusted and called upon SADC presidents to pull out of CITES.

“Fraud, rigged elections, sold votes bought by the Europeans,” said Botswana Minister of Environment, Natural Resources, Conservation and Tourism, Onkokame Mokaila, describing the stolen election overseen by the UN CITES. He declined to disclose the collective action that SADC countries would take following this rigged CITES election result. He said the next 90 days would be an important consultative period for SADC “to do what is right.”



The lone East African (dressed in black, red and white coloured outfit) seen among Westerners, soon after the vote against ivory trade.

“The future threat to elephant populations in Africa isn’t necessarily (only) non-sustainable use but rather local communities retaliating if they don’t get benefits from the destructive elephants,” said Namibia’s Minister of Environment and Tourism, Shifeta Pohamba, in his warning statement to CITES member countries that are opposed to sustainable use.

Zimbabwe’s Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality industry, Munesu Munodawafa said that we know CITES is an organisation where decisions are based on science but the vote against elephant overpopulated SADC countries suggested that the CITES decisions “are no longer based on science.”

Speaking in support of SADC countries’ ivory trade proposals, representatives of the South African Government urged CITES to reward and not punish, them for their conservation success. The South African delegates expressed shock and disappointment at the vote against SADC countries’ bid to trade in ivory by East and West African countries that have been formed into anti-sustainable use African Elephant Coalition force; through the financial support of Western forces. Each time these countries declared their links with the African Elephant Coalition before the vote. In stating before vote that they would vote against sustainable use, they by implication openly confirmed that they had long been paid by Western animal rights groups and countries to vote against sustainable use. That’s clear vote-rigging.

Meanwhile, SADC rural communities were equally disappointed for not being rewarded for their excellent elephant and rhino conservation efforts. The rigged vote disgusted SADC community representatives who immediately called upon their presidents to pull out of CITES because it was *not serving their interests*.

They also appealed to Western citizens to stop donating to the Western animal rights groups as they were scandalously using the votes against ivory and rhino horn trade *not to stop but to increase elephant and rhino poaching*.

“CITES for me is a rotten organisation and the UN needs to look into this rigged voting process,” said a representative of the Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Support Organisations (NACSO), Maxi Louis. “They claim to be a scientific organization that bases its decisions on science but they are not even looking at science. I have lost faith in this institution and I would like our government to know that we are wasting our time and taxpayers money by remaining in CITES.”



A representative of the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO), Maxi Louis.

A representative and a member of the Ngamiland Council of NGOs of Botswana, Gakemotho Satau said that the stolen vote made him lose trust in CITES.

“My proposal is that SADC countries should just denounce or pullout of CITES because the voting is not based on science, said Satau. “I am not happy with the voting process and its outcome.”

A Masoka, Zimbabwe Communal Areas Management Programme For Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) Community representative, Ishmael Chaukura said the CITES-rigged vote was an unjust outcome. “The decision is affecting us who bear the costs of living with wildlife,” he said. “They (Western animal rights groups) are using money to spearhead their agenda while we (Africans) remain poor and suffering.”

SADC conservationists back home also *complained bitterly* against vote rigging in UN CITES. Ron Thomson, the CEO of one of Africa’s most outspoken environmental NGOs; South Africa-based True Green Alliance said, “Our immediate thrust, however, should be to extricate SADC from the quagmire and to get South Africa to abandon its association with CITES. That is a job I shall be engaged in during the weeks and months ahead.”

Trans-historical Western animal rights groups CITES capture



CITES longest serving employee, Swiss national Jacques Berney confirms Western animal rights groups influence in CITES decision making processes.

The very first and CITES longest serving employee, Swiss national Jacques Berney confirmed that CITES had lost its credibility as an objective UN agency because it was no longer making decisions informed by science but by animal rights emotions.

“Western animal rights groups started to influence CITES at the 1985 CoP5 Buenos Aires, Argentina,” he said. “The animal rights groups claim that legal trade is promoting illegal trade which is contested by almost all economists worldwide. Prohibition of ivory trade doesn’t stop elephant poaching. Without trade in ivory it will be very difficult to achieve sustainable development by 2030.”

Berney said that the Western animal rights groups are opposed to trade in any wildlife. The Western governments support these groups when votes are cast at CITES because they also want their votes in political elections in the West.”

Elsewhere, the Kenyan Wildlife Service defied President Uhuru Kenyatta’s decision to have Kenya support Botswana’s ivory trade proposal at CITES CoP18. This directive followed President Kenyatta’s recent meeting with Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi in Kenya in which he endorsed his country’s support for Botswana’s ivory trade bid.

“The Western animal rights groups have and continue to pay the Kenyan Wildlife Service millions of U.S dollars in exchange for votes against ivory and rhino horn trade as well as on other wildlife use and trade issues,” said a Botswana Government official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. “The Kenyan delegation from

the Kenya Wildlife Service let us down at the 11th hour because they cancelled their flight to Botswana a day before our meeting in Gaborone; to finalise the agreement to vote in support of Botswana's ivory trade bid at CITES CoP18 in Geneva."

The pro-sustainable use U.S. based Ivory Education Institute Managing Director Godfrey Harris said that this inter-governmental dispute playing out in public "is not only shocking, but embarrassing."

"The Kenya Wildlife Service was and continues to be paid a lot of money by animal rights groups that use money to entice them not to support ivory trade and wildlife hunting," said the Botswana Government official. "This is why they defied the vote for Botswana ivory trade proposal directive from President Kenyatta."

In what is clearly a disturbing trend of Western animal rights groups are continuing to use money to make some 'weak' African countries oppose any form of wildlife utilisation, including trade in ivory and rhino horn. It was learnt that part of the total of 30 Kenyan delegation's CITES CoP18 travel, food and accommodation costs were paid by a Western animal rights group, People for Ethical Treatment for Animals (PETA).

Meanwhile, a senior Malawian delegate confirmed that one of their delegates was funded by the *International Fund for Animal Welfare* (IFAW). The rest of them were funded by the German Technical Cooperation Agency. The Malawian delegation raised eyebrows when they did not join a SADC pro-wildlife products trade logistical meeting held at the start of the CITES CoP18.

Additionally, delegates from Chad shamelessly confirmed at Ibis Hotel in Geneva that another Western animal rights group, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) was funding them. This was after they were seen milling around a young U.S. blonde of the HSUS in what was clearly a money handout meeting. They later disappeared with her to an unknown venue. Country votes were on sale again as usual in exchange of voting against sustainable use at the command of their animal rights groups paymasters and ironically against the needs of African countries' needs.

Worse rigging happened as some delegates from West and East Africa, belonging to the African Elephant Coalition, were being told how to argue against ivory and rhino horn trade in plenary and also to vote against it. SADC Nationals circulated a WhatsApp message in which one of these the African Elephant Coalition members was being instructed by an animal rights group what to say in plenary. The African Elephant Coalition was formed and funded by the UK-based *Elephant Protection Initiative* (EPI) that is dead against any form of sustainable use, including trade in wildlife products such as ivory and rhino horn and hunting. Therefore, it was quite revealing that a vote against sustainable use would be cast, each time a country introduced itself as belonging to the Elephant Coalition in CITES plenary before the voting.



The Human Society officer in beige and brown outfit talks to an African delegate. She was also seen briefing other African delegates before interviews with Reuters.

Facts about who investigates vote-rigging countries

For a long time, the CITES member countries particularly the pro-sustainable countries had serious concerns over CITES Secretariat's non-investigation over the ongoing vote-buying and vote-selling scandals. They were worried that this has never been formerly discussed on any CITES meeting agenda, including at standing Committee meetings, since CITES was established 44 years ago.

The writer of this report seized the opportunity to ask Ms Higuero why the CITES Secretariat is not investigating the ongoing Western animal rights groups influencing activities, in order to restore the integrity of the CITES voting process and the image of the organisation.

“I have no evidence of vote-buying or anything like that happening,” said Higuero almost breaking the heart of this writer who knew that her predecessor John Scanlon had long admitted that vote rigging was taking place and needed investigation. “You (member countries that are complaining about vote-buying) have to present this evidence to the CITES Secretariat.”

She cited Resolution 17.3 (*mostly ineffective*) that calls for voluntary disclosure by whoever comes to attend CITES meetings and is not funded by his or her own government. However, even there at CoP18 there was evidence that delegates from

‘weak’ African governments were being sponsored in different ways by Western animal rights groups but did not declare this to the CITES Secretariat.

The statement by Higuero that countries which were impacted by vote rigging or buying had the burden to provide evidence to the CITES Secretariat dismayed the president of a South African environmental organisation, The True Green Alliance (TGA), John Rance when he read about it in the media.

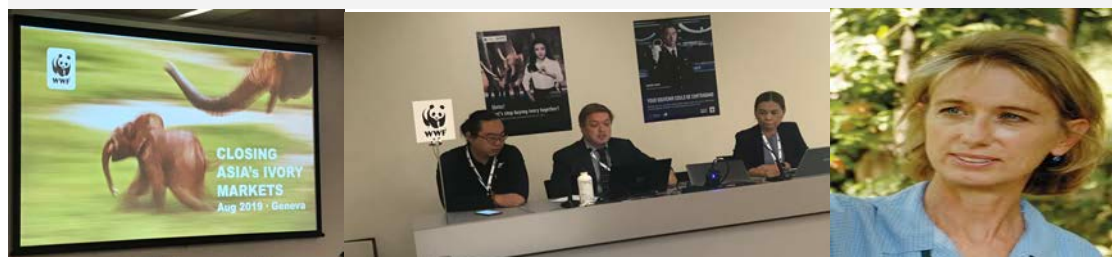
“Get someone to tell Higuero that it is not the function of whistle-blowers to give evidence,” said Mr Rance. “The matter [vote buying scandal] has been brought to the attention of the CITES Secretariat and it’s their job to institute an inquiry.”

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that the CITES Secretariat is *obviously aware and can’t deny* that Western animal rights groups don’t only pay for a trip, but **also** food and accommodation, in order to influence a CITES vote outcome.

Sources, that the writer spoke to at CITES CoP18, including Mr Godfrey Harris of the Los Angeles-based Ivory Education Institute confirmed that other corrupt CITES vote-influencing activities happen well before CITES meetings.

“They include outright bribery; honoraria payments for lectures, Board of Director’s fees, research grants and official visits are made to bribable countries,” said Mr Harris.

THE WORLD-WIDE FUND FOR NATURE – NOW A Hardcore ANIMAL RIGHTS GROUP – HELL-BENT ON GLOBAL SHUTDOWN OF IVORY MARKETS WITHOUT CONSULTING SADC COUNTRIES



Meet the harmful champions of promoting African poverty (The World Wide Fund) at a time when the CITES Secretariat is calling for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. How can that be achieved when the WWF has announced its global programme to shutdown the Asian countries lucrative ivory markets for SADC countries? Photo left (centre, James Compton, TRAFFIC Asia Pacific Senior Director. Photo right: Ginette Hemley, WWF-U.S.A.

One of the most dominant of the Western environmental groups— the WWF declared itself a hardcore *animal rights group* at a CITES CoP18 side event where its Senior Vice President and General Counsel, Ginette Hemley announced the WWF global campaign to close down domestic ivory markets, working together with TRAFFIC Asia Pacific and the Chinese Government.

The WWF plans to raise US\$20-\$25 million to close down the world's most lucrative domestic ivory trade markets that include China, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam. There is no doubt that the WWF's ill-informed plan to shutdown Asian ivory markets will irreparably damage African people and wildlife's wellbeing, particularly elephant conservation.

Therefore, in a rare protest that took the WWF, TRAFFIC Asia Pacific, its Chinese allies and anti-ivory trade Western forces off-guard, an African environmental journalist, stood up and spoke in hard-hitting and never heard before protest language against the shutting down of ivory markets:

“The fate of the African elephant lies in the hands of the African people and I am an African. If ivory was oil that Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the U.S. and other oil producing countries are selling you would not dare shut down their oil markets as you are shutting down ivory markets for SADC countries without consulting them. Why are you shutting down our ivory markets? We know the story of the Huawei cell phone (a Chinese product) when it was banned from selling in the U.S. There was a big uproar between America and China. Just a cell phone (causing such a big dispute)! Here we are talking about a resource (ivory), which was traded, in pre-colonial times by our forefathers. And now you have got the audacity to look down upon the African race without consulting them about what you are going to do with our ivory markets.

“You’re shutting down our markets! And yet you’re speaking on a platform where the CITES Secretary General is talking about the achievement of *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) by 2030. How can you achieve that when you are shutting down the markets?

Without benefits from ivory trade some of the African rural women are walking barefoot. They don’t have clean drinking water. Why does that happen? Because when we don’t have money from ivory sales, the West, including you WWF and China, you’re working together with animal rights groups – then you tell our governments to increase the budgets to protect the elephant but the elephant is not bringing any money.

“Then our governments are forced to take the money from treasury, which was meant for education, poverty alleviation, building schools, roads, and put it on the elephant. What is that doing to the African people? It’s degrading their lives. They are poor and yet they are resource-rich. How can you do that? It’s racist. It’s retrogressive. It’s just everything bad you can talk about. This is the saddest day for Africa (the WWF global ivory markets shutdown) and it’s not going to work.”

While delivering the speech, one could see blushing faces of Western people who were listening to him in dead silence. Even a pin drop could be heard. They were stunned! Immediately after that, high-ranking representatives of the Chinese Government and an officer from *Trade Records Analysis of Fauna and Flora In Commerce* (TRAFFIC) came to compliment the author of this report for what they described a rare argument for ivory trade. Dan Stiles, a Kenya-based wildlife specialist immediately started sending e-mails to delegates at CoP18, saying that a Johannesburg-based African environmental journalist had delivered a unique and high-impact argument for ivory trade. The President of the Professional Hunters Association of South Africa (PHASA), Dries Van Collier later informed the journalist that he heard the WWF delegation saying that everything was going well about the ivory markets shutdown until that African journalist spoke. Meanwhile, sources say that the Chinese people still want to buy and use ivory. The decision to shutdown Chinese ivory market was made at the highest political level in China, against the wishes of the Chinese people. China wants to be seen as a nice guy by the Western world super powers such as the U.S. Government that supports the shutting down of ivory markets, worldwide. Therefore, the decision to ban ivory trade in China has nothing to do with saving Africans elephants but everything to do with improving diplomatic relations with the U.S. while its citizens are sadly denied the use of ivory needs that is part of their culture.

The lesson learnt is that it's very important to attend side events at CITES, especially those that engage in activities that harm human and wildlife wellbeing in Africa.



Botswana's Minister of Environment, Natural Resources, Conservation and Tourism, Onkokame Mokaila (second from left) in a post-ivory trade vote chat with Zimbabwe delegation that includes Permanent Secretary for the Zimbabwe Ministry of Environment, Munesu Munodawafa (extreme right).

What CITES Secretariat Thinks About Shutting Down Wildlife Products Markets

Higuero was quizzed about what CITES was doing as a wildlife trade regulatory agency to address the ongoing and unfair shutting down of SADC countries' ivory, rhino horn and hunting trophies markets worldwide. She was asked how it would be possible for the CITES Secretariat to contribute towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 when hunting trophies, ivory and horn trade markets for Africa were being shutdown worldwide.

In response Higuero did not explain how this was going to interfere with the attainment of SDGs. Instead, she said that shutting down domestic markets was being done by sovereign nations and CITES had no control over that. No wonder why WWF has selfishly started shutting down the lucrative ivory markets in Asia. But this will never work, as it is almost similar to telling people to *stop drinking water*. They will never listen and would rather buy it (water) on the black market as is currently happening with the ivory and rhino horn trade black markets.

MEDIA PUBLICITY

A pro-sustainable use African journalist based in Johannesburg wrote news features that gave regular updates of the latest developments at CITES CoP18. The stories were published in newspapers and online media platforms in Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. He also wrote daily news updates that appeared in *The Source*, news feed that was distributed via e-mail worldwide. It became an instant hit with delegates attending CoP18 and wildlife management stakeholders asking for issues of the publication even days after the CITES CoP18 had ended. Please find attached Internet links of the published stories.

A lot of investigative journalism was exercised. This included the findings on vote-rigging and the publication of the story on President Uhuru Kenyatta having met with and promised Botswana President Masisi that Kenya would vote for Botswana's ivory trade bid – only to be defied by the *Kenya Wildlife Service* (KWS) management that cancelled a trip to Botswana to finalise this agreement at the 11th hour. Why defy your presidential directive? Simply because Western animal rights groups paid Kenya up to US\$0.5 billion in the 1970s and smaller amounts annually; in exchange with a permanent *no-vote* for any proposals related to use and trade in wildlife products, including ivory and rhino horn.

If this is not the case, then we should soon hear that President Kenyatta has fired his entire KWS management for defying his directive to vote for Botswana's ivory trade bid.

One of the biggest stories ever to be published at a CITES CoP18 was the announcement by Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa that Zimbabwe planned to pullout of CITES. To which Namibia's Minister of Environment and Tourism Shifeta Pohamba responded:

“That’s the way to go (reservations and pullout). I think many other SADC countries, especially those who have burdens of living with wildlife [should follow suit]. We are going to sit and take stock. We are not happy with CITES CoP18 and also not happy with CoP17. We can pullout. We have other partners who can help us to support our conservation by trading with us. We are being punished and not rewarded for good wildlife conservation work, at every CITES.”

According to CITES articles XV, XVI and XXIII, a reservation over a particular species means that Zimbabwe in this context or SADC countries would no longer be members of CITES with respect to a particular species (in this case the elephant); and would no longer be restricted from trading in ivory with other countries that might also pullout of CITES, or the ones that are not the members of the Convention.

On the other hand, a pullout (denunciation) option, according to article XXV is a total exit from the Convention but you can still trade with countries that are not members of CITES. It must be lodged within 90 days after CoP18 in this instance. Then it takes effect after 12 months after the concerned government has submitted the pullout notification to CITES.

However, the reservation and pullout processes have to be done over a 90-day period and the countries concerned should lodge their pullout notice to CITES. Therefore, the next three months shall be crucial for the future of Zimbabwe’s elephants and people who continue to be compromised with extinction and limited socioeconomic benefits, respectively as long as CITES ivory ban continues to be enforced. Zimbabwe has never gone on reservations. It tried it 1989, but didn’t because the ivory buying countries that had also planned to pullout so that they could buy from Zimbabwe; eventually didn’t pullout.

UNIQUE REVELATIONS ON THE IMPACT OF SADC PRO-SUSTAINABLE USE MEDIA PUBLICITY

One of the biggest lessons that was learnt from the CITES CoP18 fact-finding mission on how much impact Southern Africa is making in the media (both social and mainstream media); is that our messages are being well received and complimented.

However, the Western animal rights groups are angered by our messages. Not surprised at all. They are our obvious opponents because they believe in anti-use while we subscribe to sustainable use.

The writings of Ron Thomson are being read by animal rights groups. Some of them don’t take kindly to Thomson’s use of the *paedophile analogy* when referring to the harm that these groups are causing to wildlife. The anti-use votes create demand and increase poaching. The other negative impact is that anti-use votes deny people sharing land with wildlife; socioeconomic benefits. Also, the vote buying against sustainable use is tainting the CITES voting process and image.

Ref:

The animal rightists join CITES to sabotage the Convention's purpose.

Consider this situation: If a government department is organising a conference to discuss abuse against women and children, who are the people they will NOT invite to such a conference? They will not invite, of course, the country's known paedophiles and rapists. These unwanted guests will be excluded because their objectives are the exact opposite of the conference's purpose.

Source: Blog on www.mahohboh.org

Here comes the big one. The President of the Species Survival Network and Born Free Foundation, Mr Will Travers confronted an African environmental journalist in the foyer next to main CITES CoP18 hall where the voting on CITES proposal was taking place. Travers is an English director, writer, broadcaster and animal rights activist from Surrey (President of the Born Free Foundation and Born Free USA as well as Species Survival Network). He said:

“Hello. So who are you?” flipping the Johannesburg-based African environmental journalist's conference identity card to read his name as if he didn't know him. “Emmanuel Koro, why do you write stories like that. I have all your stories on my phone. I can show you. Why also do you also call animal rights groups paedophiles?”

What an excellent indicator of our global media reach and impact - hardcore animal rights groups, SSN and Born Free President Travers had just confirmed that he was reading stories written by Emmanuel Koro. Travers later confronted him and asked why he writes such controversial stories. Koro fired back and told Travers that he had to write disruptively in order to grab public attention. Besides, the issues are controversial and he represented rural communities in Southern African who suffer from animal rights' harmful influence within CITES and very misleading thinking that wildlife products trade bans save wildlife. But in reality the trade bans have not saved a single elephant and rhino. Then the journalist further explained that he writes to get public attention on the interests of the voiceless and the ivory and rhino horn trade ban impoverished rural communities. The journalist asked Travers if he could interview him to which Travers responded by asking the journalist to first inform him on the questions that he was going to ask him. The journalist told him that he would ask Travers to explain how on earth votes against sustainable use can ever save a single elephant or rhino. Then Travers immediately declined to give the interview, but not before asking the journalist if he had recorded the conversation. The journalist told Travers that he was not going to record him without his permission or consent.

Travers then walked a few metres away. After that he kept watching the journalist who was waiting to interview the Namibia Minister of Environment and Tourism, Shifeta Pohamba. The journalist could see that the Minister overheard Travers' confrontational language and equally the journalist's salvo of sustainable use defensive language, which put Travers off. Later Travers was seen accompanied by European women who kept on looking at the journalist curiously. The anti-use agenda

puts the SSN and Born Free Foundation in the same camp with poachers that harm both the African people and wildlife.

The CITES Secretary General Reads Our Stories:

In a post interview discussion with Emmanuel Koro, the CITES Secretary Ms Ivonne Higuero told Mr Koro that she reads his twitter page and the news features that he writes. Unlike Travers, the confrontational President of the most hardcore animal rights groups on planet earth (the SSN and Born Free Foundation) – Ms Higuero was very professional in her post-interview discussion with Mr Koro. In response Mr Koro thanked Ms Higuero for responding to his interview questions. He informed her that he writes in the public interest of vulnerable and poor African communities sharing the land with wildlife without any benefits from ivory trade and sometimes hunting. They are also voiceless in the media.

Before his meeting with the CITES Secretary General Mr Koro had been introduced to some of CITES Secretariat staff who said that they had not met him but they read his stories, so did delegates from different parts of the world, including China, Italy, the U.S and the United Kingdom. The Safari Club International also complimented Mr Koro for his writing on sustainable use.

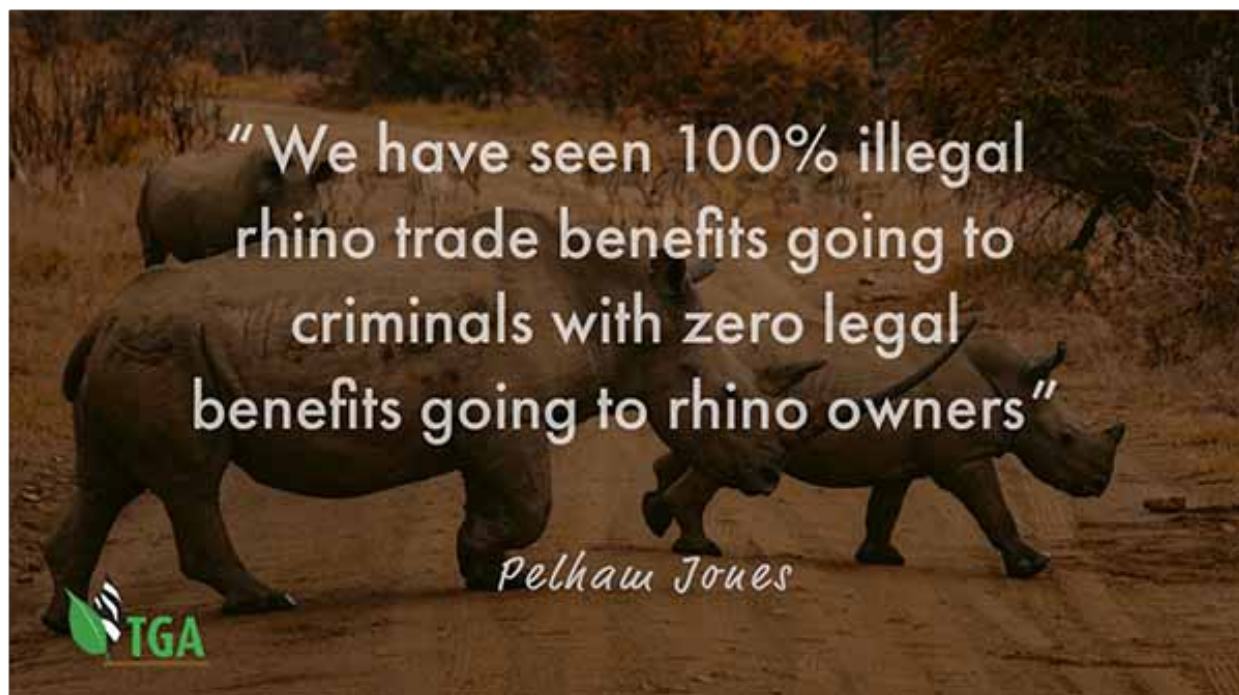
Key finding: The sustainable use stories from Southern Africa written by conservationists such as Ron Thomson and environmental journalists such as Emmanuel Koro, though not published in the Western mainstream media but in the African mainstream media and social media are still being read by animal rights groups. The lesson learnt is that we are having an excellent international public reach. Therefore, we should continue using all media platforms. Thanks to the Internet's worldwide reach.

SADC RURAL COMMUNITIES GIVEN A VOICE TOGETHER WITH OTHER RURAL COMMUNITIES WORLDWIDE:

The rural communities have now been given a voice within the CITES decision-making framework so that their interests and needs would always be catered for. The critical role of local and indigenous communities that live on the frontlines of wildlife conservation and sustainable management, and their need for adequate incomes and livelihoods, was widely recognised. Overcoming a wide range of differing views, the Conference asked Parties to consider how to best engage indigenous peoples and local communities in the CITES decision-making and implementation. The aim is to better achieve the objectives of the Convention while recognizing those people whose use of CITES-listed species contributes significantly to their livelihoods.

South Africa's Position on Community Rhino Conservation Unpacked

South Africa has called for a paradigm shift in rhino conservation, suggesting for the first time that it is high time that it gave its black rural communities ownership of rhinos, in order to breed and grow the population of this iconic species.



“How do we involve local communities in direct ownership of rhinos becomes a very important [question],” said the South Africa Department of Environmental Affairs Director General of Biodiversity and Conservation, Shonisani Munzhedzi speaking at the South African Government organized side event.

“We need to count numbers of certain communities through the land that they occupy [and then give them] ownership of rhinos,” said Munzhedzi.

Elsewhere, South Africa’s President of Private Rhino Owners Association (PROA), Pelham Jones, said that the ban on rhino horn trade has failed to save a single rhino in the world. He said that it ironically has *increased* rhino poaching and illegal rhino horn trade and also removed incentives to continue owning and producing rhinos that don’t pay for their upkeep because of the rhino horn trade ban.

The PROA members own about 50% of South Africa’s rhino populations. Sadly, if international rhino horn trade continues to be banned it would work against rhino conservation. Meanwhile, one hundred rhino producing reserves have already been closed due to the high costs of protecting rhinos that don’t pay their way through rhino horn trade.

“We have seen 100% illegal rhino trade benefits going to criminals with zero legal benefits going to rhino owners,” lamented Jones in his passionate appeal for the resumption of rhino horn trade to incentivise rhino conservation.

Meanwhile, three rhino-related proposals were debated at CITES.

CoP18 Prop.8:

To allow the trade in live Southern white rhinos and their products, including horn from Eswatini. Outcome: rejected.

CoP18 Prop.9:

To allow live Southern white rhinos to be traded from Namibia to appropriate destinations: Outcome: rejected.

CoP18 Doc. 48:

To allow changes to the trophy hunting systems for South Africa's black rhinos. Outcome: accepted with amendments. This means that CITES has effectively increased South Africa's current black rhino hunting quota on unproductive male animals from 5 to 9 or 10, - based on the country's population of 2000 black rhinos.

Abundant Wildlife Ownership, Blessing or Curse For SADC Countries?

SADC countries are beginning to think owning rich populations of elephants and rhinos whose products they continue to be refused permission to trade in is a 'curse'.

But politically vigilant Tanzania, the current Chair of SADC and to whom most SADC states owe their political independence has not given up hope to end the on-going and frustrating injustices within CITES.

"We fought for political independence and we now have it," said Tanzania Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism Director of Wildlife, Dr Maurus Mshu. "The next fight for us is now the fight for the right to use our resources for the development of our own people. "This needs political pressure from our governments who should say that we don't need this anymore (being denied our sovereign rights to trade in our wildlife products)."

Observers who spoke on conditions of anonymity said that the never-seen-before and sharply divided vote against the ivory trade has once again confirmed that African countries continue to be divided by Western forces, including animal rights groups in similar ways that the continent was partitioned into Western countries' economic and political colonies at the 1884-85 Berlin Conference. At the Berlin Partition of Africa Conference they used military force but at the Geneva CITES CoP18 they used dollar power. The interests are still the same; to divide and manipulate Africa for financial gain.

Therefore, the pattern of exploitation from Berlin 1884 to Geneva CITES CoP18 is clear. At Berlin they stole our land and other resources and at Geneva CITES CoP18, they stole our votes, in order to turn our elephants into their moneymaking machines through Western animal rights groups fundraising scams that don't benefit African elephant and rhino conservation. Many SADC delegates were anxious to know that if

our generation doesn't to stop this Western threat to African wildlife and people's wellbeing who else could stop it in the future.

It was therefore not surprising to hear SADC Chair Tanzania represented by Dr Msuha giving the strongest signal of a CITES pullout and alternatively reservation by SADC countries that were subjected to rigged votes, in what will go down as the world's record-breaking and scandalous rejection of compelling scientific evidence that should have led to the affected SADC countries being permitted to use their wildlife and trade in its products.

Below is Dr Msuha's tell-it-all CITES CoP18 closing remarks:



Tanzania Director for Ministry of Natural Resources & Tourism, Dr Maura Msuha says SADC needs to hold consultative meetings of its people – “it’s unfair that those who don’t have resources tell those who owned them how to use them. Tanzania is the current SADC Chair



The poverty that SADC rural communities attending CITES CoP18 will return to with heart-breaking news that the West once again denied them trade in their stockpiled Ivory despite having an elephant overpopulation problem. Trade not aid will save the African elephant is the lesson that the West continues to selfishly ignore.

Photo: Hwange village, Zimbabwe – overpopulated with elephants.

Mr Chairman, Tanzania takes the floor as the Chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and speaks on behalf of the following SADC countries: Botswana, DRC, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe including Tanzania.

We want to express the grave concern that the SADC Parties mentioned here have with regards to the implementation of this Convention.

As members of the global multilateral system and democratic, representative governments, we are obliged to ensure that we meet our commitments to all those international agreements and declarations to which we are signatories, as well as responsibilities to our citizens.

Recognizing that CITES is one of the oldest wildlife and trade agreements, we are obliged to give it due consideration but within the context of subsequent and contemporary agreements and declarations to which it bears relevance and to which we are also signatories. CITES in its Preamble accepted the principle of:

“Recognizing that peoples and States are and should be the best protectors of their own wild fauna and flora” and the Convention on Biological Diversity 1992 in Article 3 provides that:

“States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies,

and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

“We contend that CITES, in form, substance and implementation, is not aligned with other international agreements of equal weight and arguably greater relevance to the challenges of today.

These agreements emphasize the following principles:

- Sovereignty over the use of national resources; Inclusive, equitable development through the sustainable use of natural resources;
- Recognizing that rural communities living with wildlife have inalienable rights over the use of their resources; and
- Recognizing that in today’s world of rapid changes in climate and land use and the accelerating pace of transformation of wildlife habitat, the survival of wildlife depends on the perceptions and development needs of people living with wildlife. The way CITES is currently operating is contrary to its founding principles.

“Today CITES discards proven, working conservation models in favour of ideologically driven anti-use and anti-trade models. Such models are dictated largely by non-State actors who have no experience with, responsibility for, or ownership over wildlife resources. The result has been failure to adopt progressive, equitable, inclusive and science-based conservation strategies. We believe this failure has arisen from the domination of protectionist ideology over science decision in making within CITES.

“This anti-sustainable use and anti-trade ideology now dominates decisions made by many States who are party to CITES. States are increasingly influenced by the dominance both at meetings of the decision-making structures of CITES and in their run up by protectionist whose ideological position has no basis in science or experience and is not shared in any way by the Member States of SADC and their people. This conservation model is based on entrenched and emotive rhetoric and discourse, backed up by intense lobbying, as opposed to science. Foremost amongst these ideas now dominating CITES is the unfounded belief that all trade fuels illegal, unsustainable trade, ignoring clear evidence to the contrary.

“Examples of this are the attempts by others to impose new trade restrictions for species that are effectively conserved – and utilized – in our States, such as lions and giraffe, while the real threats in those States where such species are in decline due to habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict continue to go unattended.

“The Southern African countries have observed, with great discomfort the polarised discussions on African charismatic large mammals at this CoP18. It is very disturbing to see the North- South divide across the African continent rearing its head again. We are further concerned that positions of some Parties appear to be based on national political considerations aimed at catering to the interests of national, intensively lobbied constituencies, as opposed to proven, science-based conservation strategies. This undermines the SADC States, on whom the responsibility to manage species falls, and our ability to do so effectively.

“As it is currently implemented, CITES undermines the rights of people living in rural areas of SADC States to have access to and use in a sustainable manner; the natural resources present in their communities that are required to enjoy adequate living conditions and the right to participate in the management of these resources. The consensus expressed through CITES by the majority of States undermines our region in our efforts to secure social and environment justice through the sustainable use of our natural resources. In doing so it is compromising our ability to meet obligations and responsibilities to other multilateral agreements and to our peoples.

“The populations of iconic African wildlife species in our region illustrates the effectiveness of our conservation models. Similar examples of successful conservation outcomes have not been forthcoming under ideologically driven approaches to conservation. Yet, at previous meetings of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, efforts made by us to advance and strengthen the same conservation strategies that have worked so well have been rejected. Those who bear no cost of protecting our wildlife, nor bear any consequence for decisions of CITES on our species, vote without any accountability against working conservation models in our countries. To this end, we have had to invoke measures such as announcing a dispute, the first time ever in CITES.

“As members of the global community we fully appreciate the importance of multilateral negotiations, such as those that take place within CITES, in identifying and collectively working towards solutions for the greater good of humanity. We have been committed Parties to CITES since its inception or our accession to it and would wish to remain so. But we can no longer ignore these glaring shortcomings and threats to our national interests and to our commitments to the broader multilateral context.

Mr Chairman, time has come to seriously reconsider whether there are any meaningful benefits from our membership to CITES.”

Conclusion

When you enrage sovereign states for 44-years by continuously denying them the opportunity to trade in products harvested from their abundant wildlife and stockpiled at a great cost, you might just have created a recipe for the wild card that most of us expected at CoP18 – that SADC countries were fed up with CITES and would spring a big CITES pullout surprise. That surely happened. Where does it take us now as SADC? It takes us to a stage where there is need for good way forward that doesn't hurt hunting and also rhino horn and ivory trade. This calls for a delicate balance of all sectors of wildlife industry's needs. How that can be achieved, creates the need for an urgent consultative process among SADC countries through the leadership of current SADC Chair Tanzania.

Elsewhere, there is urgent need for CITES to protect its image and integrity as a UN agency. For that to happen, it is high time that CITES investigated the vote-rigging scandal with the view to putting an end to the vote-buying and vote-selling scandals.

Maybe the disappointed nations that are planning to pullout of CITES or go on reservations, might in future return when they observe new and democratic reforms in the UN agency CITES whose tainted voting process has continued to compromised its integrity and public image. If CITES is a curse and not a blessing to the wildlife-rich SADC countries, then its high time that these countries pulled out of it and begin to enjoy their sovereign rights to use their abundant wildlife sustainably and also trade in its products.

About the writer: Emmanuel Koro is a Johannesburg-based international award-winning environmental journalist who has written extensively on environment and development issues in Africa.

