

Opinionista • Tony Weaver • 14 August 2019

Man Friday: Hunting and rural conservancies — not quite the end of the game

Botswana's 2014 ban on hunting has had a devastating effect on rural communities living daily with human-wildlife conflict, with a collapse in some of more than 40% of micro-GDP.

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Much has been written about the decision by Botswana to lift the ban on hunting, introduced by former president Ian Khama in 2014.

Khama's ban was welcomed by global animal rights movements, just as there is outrage from the same quarter over President Mokgweetsi Masisi's decision to lift the ban. Much has been made of the fact that Masisi — Khama's anointed successor — lifted the ban just before the October 2019 elections, the most controversial since independence in 1966.

Khama, son of founding president Sir Seretse Khama, has stepped up his attacks on Masisi, saying Masisi was "immature and intolerant... I have come to realise that maybe I have misjudged [him]". Khama's outbursts are, according to Botswana analyst Joel Konopo in *Daily Maverick*, "born out of a realisation that he cannot pull the strings behind his presumed loyalist".

The lifting of the ban is being widely interpreted by outside, ie non-Motswana, analysts, as an election ploy to win the rural vote. The truth is, the ban has had a devastating effect on rural communities living daily with human-wildlife conflict, with a collapse in some of more than 40% of micro-GDP.

This was clear from a meeting I recently attended in Gaborone on the issue, attended by representatives of many of the affected communities, but more of that in a later column.

Botswana's reinstatement of hunting is heavily informed by neighbouring Namibia, a world leader in community-based natural resource management (CBNRM).

Namibia has an impressive 86 community-run conservancies which are critical in conserving that country's wildlife and boosting rural economies through photographic and hunting tourism.

Those 86 conservancies met in Otjiwarongo on 17 July, addressed by Minister of Environment and Tourism, Pohamba Shifeta. He noted that in isolated cases, corruption, "blatant theft" and self-enrichment had occurred, and better management was being put in place.

One of the management controls is that "at least 50% of the total annual income from tourism concessions and hunting activities... must be allocated towards the implementation of community development projects".

Shifeta said "the fact (is) that hunting or what we call conservation hunting is at the heart of the success of communal conservancies... (it) provides livelihoods for communities, encourages the protection of wildlife populations and maintains the health and functioning of ecosystems. However, reckless and irresponsible acts of

hunting can be highly damaging... In the age of social media, these acts can be disseminated around the world at the touch of a button, resulting in negative impressions for the industry and our country.”

His ministry is developing ethical guidelines so that “hunting plays the part it can in eradicating poverty and furthering conservation”.

It is a stance that will not find favour with the anti-hunting, animal rights movement globally. Personally, I don't quite understand what motivates hunters, but intellectually, as I have said many times before, I fully support hunting as a critical conservation tool for preserving Africa's wildlife and wild places.

It is a position supported by virtually every single professional wildlife manager and field conservationist I know, an African perspective that should not be allowed to be drowned out by social media keyboard warriors who have no real-world experience of sharing their daily lives with wild animals. **DM**

Botswana hunting Namibia rural conservancies



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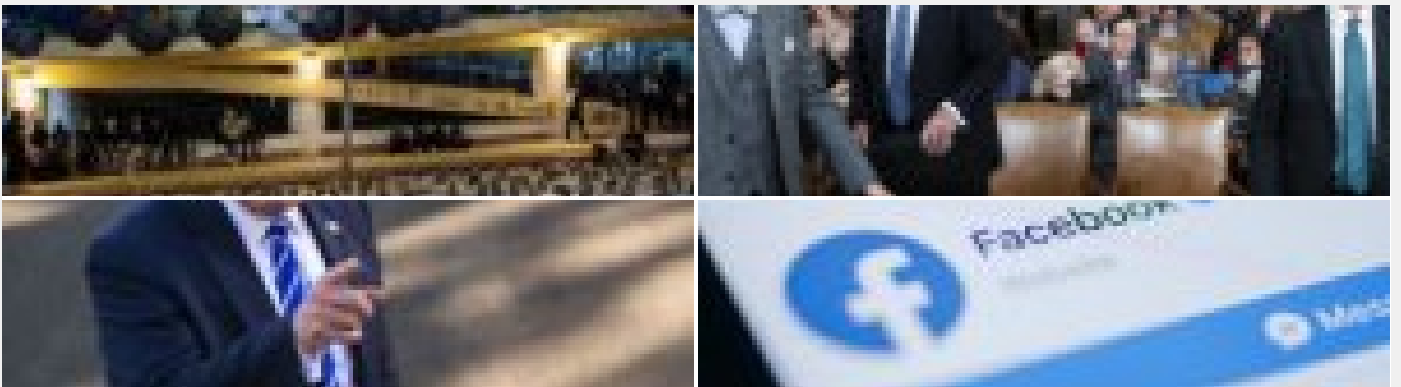
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