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Five countries unite against wildlife crime

📅 Aug 12, 2020

The five Partner States of the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) – Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe – have joined forces to defend their borders against those who seek to deprive the region of its natural beauty and resources.

Working with the KAZA Secretariat, supported by Peace Parks Foundation and the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC), and funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the KAZA Partner States have embarked on an initiative to improve capacity, synergy, and effectiveness of customs and law enforcement agencies responsible for controlling movement of goods through all of the TFCA’s 33 ports of entry and exit.



This innovative project enables the TFCA to make great strides in implementing the South African Development Community's (SADC) Law Enforcement and Anti-poaching Strategy (LEAP).

The SADC LEAP focuses on reducing poaching and illegal trade in fauna and flora species as well as enhancing law enforcement capacity in the SADC Region by 2021. The trade of environmental contraband decimates key species and devastates biodiversity, destabilizing ecosystems and depleting natural resources.



Illegal trade of targeted fauna and flora species, mostly endangered and/or threatened, also impacts the economic viability and attractiveness of conservation areas as tourist destinations. In turn, livelihoods for local communities which depend on tourism are significantly affected. Furthermore, COVID-19 has placed the spotlight on the hidden danger of trade and consumption of exotic species. Zoonotic diseases are now a global concern, adding another motivation for strengthening preventative laws and regulations, coupled with improved disruption along the illegal supply chain.

The KAZA TFCA spans an area of approximately 520 000 km² and includes 36 proclaimed protected areas. With a multitude of transit routes and an abundance of biodiversity – that includes Africa’s largest contiguous elephant population and the largest connected lion population in southern Africa – KAZA is a prime target of organized wildlife crime groups.

Traffickers exploit vulnerabilities in transportation and customs capability to move illegally sourced natural resources and Africa remains one of the major global source regions. In a cross-border landscape like KAZA, challenges are compounded by differences in permitting systems and regulations, the species that are protected, and the fines and sentences for different types of offences in each country – all providing potential loopholes for criminal syndicates to exploit.



These variances can also undermine the integrity of the KAZA TFCA as strong penalties in one country may displace the problem of **poaching** and trafficking to neighbouring countries.

The governments of KAZA's five Partner States, in partnership with various non-profit, private and community stakeholders, work tirelessly to protect and develop the resources on the ground. However, an opportunity was identified a few years ago to strengthen customs officials' capacity to enforce CITES regulations, augmenting the multi-agency and sector approach to fighting illegal trade.



Due to their mandate of managing the movement of goods across borders, customs officials, with the right capacity and equipment, can significantly increase the rates of detection and apprehension at border check-points.

Doug Gillings, Combating Wildlife Crime Manager for Peace Parks commended the collaborative approach of the KAZA Partner States: "Custom officials are a primary line of defense against the illegal trafficking of our continent's natural treasures. The capacitation and resourcing of customs officials is key to the disruption of trafficking.

It is a significant achievement for five countries to come together to strengthen this important link in the law enforcement chain – collectively understanding their shared trafficking landscape, and initiating a process to crack down on illegal natural resource trafficking, together."

The new collaboration in Combating Natural Resource Trafficking, works to address these threats by creating and implementing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) – common to all 5 countries, developing an accredited training curriculum for customs and other law enforcement officials, as well training such officials in the five Partner States. This curriculum has been accredited as a graduate level qualification. It will equip officials to effectively enforce CITES, state action plans, the newly produced common SOPs for application of CITES regulations, as well as engage in the efficient use of technical equipment to enhance efficiency.



Dr. Nyambe Nyambe, the Executive Director of the KAZA TFCA Secretariat at the Kasane Elephant Summit held in Botswana last year (2019)

Additional training will be provided in species identification to improve the capacity of these officials to respond to the challenges in their areas, effectively implementing CITES and improving the chances of intercepting trafficking. Furthermore, it will institutionalise and entrench procedures into the respective operations.

Once the travel restrictions implemented in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic are relaxed, the next phase of the project will be initiated, with an estimated 200 customs and other law enforcement officials to be trained.

Dr Nyambe Nyambe, Executive Director of the KAZA Secretariat, added: "This project augments SADC and KAZA aspirations to a multi-agency approach to combatting illegal trade in wildlife species.

We are looking forward to the commencement of the training and the unique and strategic role that customs officials bring to the fight against illegal trade"



Photo caption: (fltr) Kirsten Schuijt (CEO, WWF Netherlands), Dr Nyambe Nyambe (Executive Director, KAZA Secretariat), Peter Fernhead (CEO, African Parks), and Werner Myburgh (CEO, Peace Parks Foundation). Photo: Roy Beusker Fotografie.

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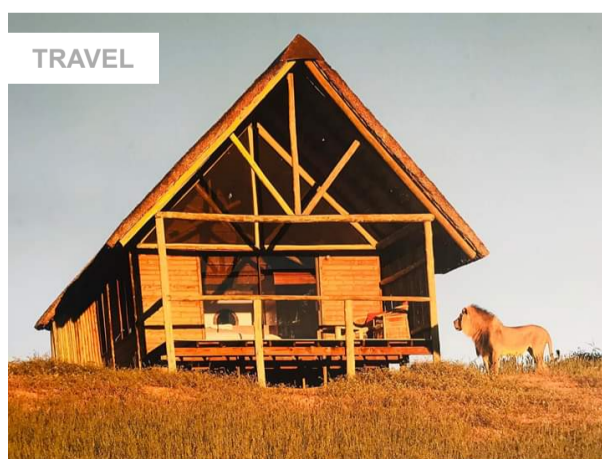
Moagi Madisa

"Although journalism is the activity of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and information and also the product of these activities; for me its science - our surroundings"

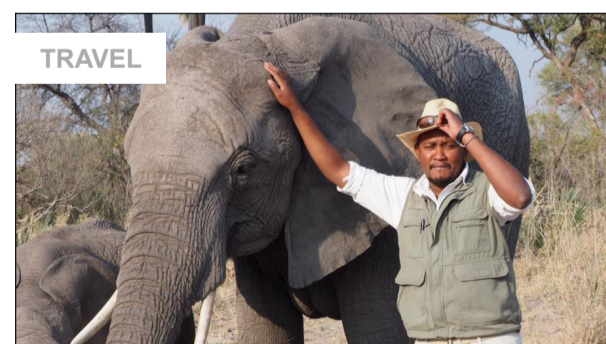
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