



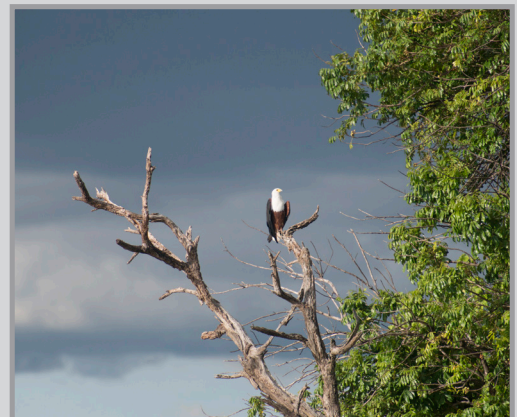
NACSO PICTURE STORIES

THE ELEPHANTS AND THE LADIES

JOINT VENTURE LODGES BRING JOBS TO CONSERVANCIES



The elephants were gathering to drink from the Chobe River across from Serondela Lodge. Guests on the terrace were enjoying the view after breakfast while a flock of red-billed quelea settled in a flurry on a nearby bush.



Serondela is situated on the Namibian bank of the Chobe River, overlooking Botswana's Chobe National Park.

The lodge is a joint venture with Kabulabula Conservancy, where Fish Eagles compete with the locals for a catch from the river.

In the kitchen Georgina, Cecilia and Esther were washing up plates and starting the lunch preparations. While they were busy they told NACSO about the benefits they receive from Kabulabula Conservancy and the lodge.

Esther exudes confidence bred from experience. She has worked in joint venture lodges for almost twenty years, starting out as a waitress. She is now the chef at Jackalberry Camp, but has made the trip upriver to help out at Serondela. The two lodges have the same private sector investor.

As she makes cookies for tea she says that since her husband, a tour guide, died, she has supported her four children from her wages. The eldest, a boy, is 17, and she hopes he will go to college. She opened a bank account and saves regularly for college fees.



Georgina is much shyer than Esther. Her village in Kabulabula Conservancy is small and cut off from the outside world by flooding for much of the time. Apart from fishing, there was no real cash economy in the area until the lodge was built.

She and her mother grow maize, but the elephants destroy a whole field in just minutes. She did earn some income from making reed mats and drying fish for sale in the market across the river, but not enough to feed her three children.

Without Esther's experience Georgina was "in darkness" when she applied for a lodge job at the conservancy office. She thought she might make beds. Now she is making fancy desserts – and money.

"I can buy clothes for my kids and I bought 2 beds," she said. Until then she and her girl slept on one mattress on the floor, and the boys on another. "And I bought a door for my hut."

Small things make a big difference.

Perhaps the biggest difference that working in a lodge brings is exposure to new ideas and entrepreneurs, like the Michelletti family that have invested in three lodges in Zambezi Region. For Esther it has paid off. She wants to start her own catering business, delivering meals.



Small things make a big difference

From housewife, to chef,
to businesswoman.



Outside the kitchen Cecilia is laying the table for lunch. She also farms with her grandmother and complains about the elephants raiding the crops. But the conservancy does pay some compensation, and should be able to pay more with income from the lodge, the first in the conservancy.



For ladies who once only saw elephants as a menace, the herd grazing across the river is now an income generating opportunity.



It's not just the ladies who benefit



Tour guide Benito was a local fisherman, and he knows all of the wildlife on the river. But fishing is seasonal and risky – the hippos are a real danger. A pay packet at the end of the month makes all the difference – and the tourists benefit from Benito's knowledge.



Photo: Silke Felton