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#### SECOND SESSION – NINETH PARLIAMENT

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#### SECOND REPORT

**OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM**

##### ON

##### ELEPHANT MANAGEMENT IN HWANGE AND GONAREZHOU NATIONAL PARKS 01-06 JULY 2019

###### PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT MARCH 2020

**S.C. 24, 2019**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Zimbabwe’s wildlife resources have a great potential to contribute to economic growth in the country. Elephants are critical resources that can contribute to the economic and social well-being of the local communities and the nation at large. However the potential is hampered particularly by elephant management challenges and human-wildlife conflict. The challenges have not only become a conservation crisis but also pose as a danger to human beings. The Committee resolved to conduct a familiarization visit to Hwange and Gonarezhou National Parks. The visit was compelled by the desire to understand the challenges relating to human wildlife conflicts relating to the ballooning elephant herds in Zimbabwe. The Committee wanted to get an appreciation on how ZIMPARK managed elephants in National Parks ahead of the 18th edition of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora to be held in Geneva (Switzerland), from 17 to 28 August 2019.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE FAMILIARISATION VIST**

The broad aim of the visit was to appreciate the challenges faced by Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZIMPARKS) regarding the management of elephants in the country’s biggest National Parks. In more specific terms, the Committee sought to;

1. Understand ZIMPARKS’ elephant management activities,
2. Appreciate the benefits of wildlife co-management partnership model as practiced by the Gonarezhou Conservation Trust.
3. Appreciate the human wildlife conflict in communities surrounding National Parks
4. To come up with recommendations for improved wildlife management and harmonious co-existence of human and wildlife;

**3.0 METHODOLODY**

In order to understand Hwange National Park’s elephant management activities, Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority’s Chief Ecologist gave a presentation to the Committee at Main Camp in Hwange National Park in July 2019. The Members also had an opportunity to tour Hwange National Park so that they witness how huge elephant populations had severely impacted on habitat change, fragmentation and loss in the Park. The Committee further visited the Hwange Community leadership at Chief Nekatambe’s residence. Finally, the Committee toured Gonarezhou National Park where ZimParks had a new wildlife co-management partnership model called the Gonarezhou Conservation Trust that is governed by the Parks and Wildlife Act.

**4.0 COMMITTEE’S FINDINGS**

**4.1 PRESENTATION BY ZIMPARK AT HWANGE MAIN CAMP**

The Committee learnt that Hwange National Park was managed under the Hwange Zambezi Cluster that is made up of seven stations namely; Main Camp, Sinamatela, Robins, Matetsi, Katombora, Kazuma and Zambezi. It was submitted that Hwange Zambezi Cluster had the largest elephant population in the country with 53 991 elephants. With regard to elephant poaching trends, Zimparks explained that 115 elephants were killed between 2013 and 2014 but the trend gradually decreased to below 10 elephants being killed by 2018. It was submitted that poaching activities in the Park disrupts research efforts on human wildlife conflicts currently underway.

Elephant mortality in Hwange Main Camp was generally low with elephant poisoning topping the list followed by riffle poaching and natural death causes. It was submitted that ZIMPARKS employed numerous anti-poaching strategies. These included patrols, surveillances, informer based deployments and awareness programmes. The Committee learnt that aerial surveillance was strategic when monitoring water-points, carcass location, vegetative mapping among others.

ZimParks collaborates its efforts with various stakeholders to co-ordinate its wildlife management programs. ZimParks made successful arrests and secured significant convictions between 2016 and 2018. Out of 85 arrests, 80 convictions were secured in the courts. Because of its successful security and investigations activities, it managed to recover 121 firearms and 37 kgs of cyanide within the same period. As a result of human-elephant conflict, unquantified crops were damaged as a result of the conflict. The Committee was not apprised of the exact number of people’s lives that were lost because of the conflicts. It was submitted that a total of 36 elephants are collared and are used in human-wildlife management related researches in Hwange National Park.

It was presented to the Committee that Hwange National Park’s Water Supply was mainly powered by solar with only 13 water points at Main Camp being diesel powered pumps. Game water supply in Hwange National Park and the effects of climate change on the water table were recognized as the key drivers to elephant population dynamics and habitat.

The Committee was informed that ZimParks had a number of Trans-frontier Conservation Area and Community Participation programs. These included the Hwange Sanyati Biodiversity Corridor project and the Human Wildlife Conflict Management Strategy for the Hwange Ecosystem. It was presented that these projects assisted in the conservation of the national biodiversity including wildlife management efforts.

**4.2 SUBMISSIONS FROM WILDLIFE PRODUCERS AND HWANGE RDC COUNCILLOR.**

The Committee was informed that the major challenge faced by in wildlife producers’ was security of tenure. The producers have permits of occupancy and as a result they could not make long term investment decisions. Their belief was that they had great potential to contribute to the Gross Domestic Product of our country if security of tenure was put in place. The Hwange RDC Councilors pointed out that the major challenge posed by human-wildlife conflict was the lack of compensation for lost crops and livestock destroyed by elephants.

**4.3 TOUR OF HWANGE NATIONAL PARK**

The Committee observed the destruction of vegetation by elephants. Secondary vegetation was growing in certain areas where elephants had continuously destroyed the primary vegetation. In other areas the vegetation species were facing extinction owing to the persistent damage by elephants year after year. Most of the damage was concentrated around waterholes where elephants tend to congregate in search of drinking water.

**4.4 SUBMISSIONS FROM CHIEF NEKATAMBE’S RESIDENCE**

The Community leaders raised a number of concerns. Their major concern was the lack of community benefits accruing from the wildlife proceeds. This acted as a disincentive for communities to conserve biodiversity in all forms.

They complained about human wildlife conflict especially with elephants. The local leaders informed the Committee that they were not happy that their community members were neither being employed by Parks nor benefit anything from wildlife management in Hwange National Park. Parks was also not contributing towards the development of their local infrastructure such as the construction of roads and schools. They informed the Committee that the entire district had only one Boarding School called Marist Brothers in the entire district. Therefore, they called on Government to channel more resources within the district towards the construction of schools.

They informed the Committee that they were baffled by the lack of compensation mechanism for people who would have lost their crops and relatives due to human-wildlife conflict. They stressed the need to realise the benefits associated with wildlife management. They complained that CAMPFIRE proceeds were not benefitting them at all. Mr Ncube, the Hwange Rural District C.E.O explained to the Committee how the CAMPFIRE model worked within the four conservation hotspots namely; Mabale, Silewu, Chidowe and Chikandabubi ward.

Chief Nekatambe informed the Committee that the idea of relocation of the local people was a very complex process which was neither understood nor contemplated by them. The local leaders complained that Ministers responsible for Environment, to whom they repeatedly lodged their complaints to, often get out of office before having brought tangible solutions to their grievances.

Replying to the issues raised by Community leaders, ZimParks explained that according to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) regulations, Zimbabwe is allowed a quota of only 500 elephants per year. This is what is shared amongst the National Parks dotted around the country as well as CAMPFIRE making the allocations too small to make any significant impact in terms of development.

**5.0 SUBMISSIONS BY ZIMPARKS ON ELEPHANT MANAGEMENT IN GONAREZHOU NATIONAL PARK**

The Committee learnt that ZimParks had a new wildlife co-management partnership model called the Gonarezhou Conservation Trust that is governed by the Parks and Wildlife Act. This new structure ensures a sustainable long term financial support for the Park through infrastructure development, investment in the tourism sector, increased security for elephants and rhinos, improved road and connectivity infrastructure and healthy buffer zones as well as the recruitment of sufficient and effective staff.

The Committee was informed that the underlying principle under the co-management model is that Gonarezhou remains both 100 percent a National Park and a property of Zimbabwe. The rationale for the Trust was to employ a full staff compliment and structure to manage the Park, develop a tourism plan and infrastructure with a retention scheme for re-investment, accessing larger donor funding and as an entity to positively engage with local stakeholders.

**6.0 ANALYSIS OF KEY ISSUES**

**6.1 Impacts of Elephants on Ecosystem Structure, Function and Species Diversity**

The Committee observed the need to maintain numbers or densities of elephants at levels that do not adversely impact on biodiversity conservation goals. Huge elephant populations have the capacity to destroy woody biomass while tree canopy cover can decline in a short space of time. An elephant needs a lot of food and water. An elephant consumes up to 200kg of plant matter and between 150 to 200 litres of water in a single day. The extent of biodiversity destruction in our national park has already surpassed the sustainable thresholds. Parks is in a dilemma. On one hand there is an attempt to protect as many elephants as possible while on the other hand it was grappling with the need to preserve a full range of plant and animal species in protected areas and this was proving to be a nightmare.

What the Committee witnessed underlined the consequences of making single resource decisions, such as preserving all elephants, which can result in multiple resource consequences, for instance, loss of large trees, plant species, and animal diversity. The Committee agrees with ZIMPARKS that high elephant densities do not increase eco-tourism opportunities and their associated ecological costs are not a requirement for eco-tourism financial sustainability.

**6.2 Elephant Conservation Benefits for communities surrounding National Parks**

Zimbabwe, as with other African countries pursuing in-situ wildlife conservation, requires significant funding, for the conservation agenda. Communities that are living adjacent to protected areas continue to experience unprecedented human-wildlife conflicts. They risk being maimed or killed and their crops destroyed. They must experience the value and developmental benefits of living with, and conserving wildlife. However, the management of such expansive land area requires a significant amount of funding and investment. We welcome partners and investors to optimally manage and unlock value from our wildlife towards helping build 'nature-based economies'.

It was the Committees observation that to have a future, elephants must have a shared value between ZIMPARKS and the communities surrounding National Parks. The greater the value, the greater the tolerance of elephants is likely to be. The local people who live closest to them will determine the long-term survival of species such as elephants. It is noteworthy to stress that Wildlife can be a most valuable asset and in turn empower local communities and provide basic necessities. Thus, appreciation of wildlife and biodiversity can contribute to reducing poverty and providing jobs amongst rural communities and empowering to become meaningful and effective partners in economic opportunities. The Committee believes that long-term solutions require nurturing the tolerance of local communities for elephants by ensuring that they benefit from having elephants adjacent to their communities. Tolerance is likely to increase if communities realise the economic returns arising from the sustainable use of elephants.

This view was echoed at the AU-UN Africa Wildlife Economy Summit held in Victoria Falls from the 23rd to the 25th June 2019, by His Excellency, President Mnangagwa when he said “Zimbabwe’s Government recognizes that the survival of wild animals depends entirely on those among whom they live. Unless local people want to save them, wildlife will be poached to the point where just a few remain in fortified reserves”. The Deputy Executive of the UN Environment Program Joyce Msuya also supported this view. She opined that “I am confident we all acknowledge that communities must be equal partners in the conservation of wildlife. When communities living closest to wildlife have a clear role and stake in managing nature, they have a stronger incentive to conserve it.’’

The Committee observed that if the huge elephant herds challenges causing human-wildlife conflict are not resolved amicably, the first four objectives of the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) that was approved by 37 African elephant range states at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (Doha, Qatar 13-25 March 2010) to protect African elephants would, not be achieved. It is a logical that when wildlife is viewed as a valuable asset, wildlife conservation becomes an economically competitive land use in Zimbabwe, which leads to habitat preservation. The Committee is of the view that the presence of regulated hunting can also reduce illegal activities.

**6.3 Gonarezhou co-management partnership model benefits**

The other way that ZIMPARKS can scale up conservation efforts and community participation is the use of the co-management partnership model. The Committee noted that this model helps in areas such as the renovations of road and building infrastructure, the procurement of communication and vehicle equipment as well as their maintenance. It also helps in ecological monitoring, provision of patrol rations and for training of rangers. The Committee realised that this model facilitates employment opportunities and revenue generation that are underpinned by good corporate governance.

Resources could be mobilized from within Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA), the private sector, and by inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. Partnerships between ZPWMA and other stakeholders are some of the innovative measures that could be developed to secure funding for elephant conservation. There is need for Government to provide additional support to the conservation of elephants given the present poaching crisis affecting the species nationally.

**6.4 Poaching Crisis Affecting Elephant Populations**

The present poaching crisis affecting elephant populations in central and eastern Africa and associated public sentiment militates against the introduction of culling to manage elephant populations in Zimbabwe. The Committee notes that the sale of ivory was previously done to cover the costs of large-scale population reductions. This opportunity was effectively closed in 1989 by the CITES listing of elephant on Appendix I. Despite the listing of Zimbabwe’s elephant on Appendix II in 1997 and the subsequent sales of stockpiled ivory in 1998 and 2008 trade in ivory has since continued to be constrained by a nine-year moratorium on the sale of ivory

**6.5 Ecological researches on elephant population impacts**

The Committee was pleased to note that ZimParks, in conjunction with other conservation stakeholders, was carrying quantitative research on the spatial ecological changes that are being caused by the increasing elephant population. However, the research is yet to be completed especially those relating to human wildlife conflict. The initial results are indicating that there is overpopulation of elephants which is negatively impacting on their management.

**6.7 Culling**

The most straightforward method of dealing with over-population of a species is culling. This is a definite option to contribute to the management of elephant overpopulation. In Hwange National Park, the number of elephants is so large that one of the only realistic ways of bringing the population under control is culling using sustainable methods. However, culling is capital and skills intensive which could still be a challenge for the authority**.**

**6.8 Contraception**

Contraception is method which can be used to control the explosive growth of the elephant population. It alone will not reduce elephant population numbers in the short term. Contraception can slow down or stop an elephant population's growth rate, though it does not actually reduce the numberof elephants in already overpopulated areas such as Hwange National Park. It has the potential to prevent further increase and reduce numbers in the long run. There are cost implications for the authority to employ this method.

**6.9 Translocation**

Translocation is one of the older solutions to the problem of elephant overpopulation.It is a very complex process when done properly, but it is not as cost prohibitive as other options. This method is useful for small populations. It is stressful to elephants and can cause behavior problems especially if family groups are disrupted. Translocation, while producing valuable knowledge into elephant society, is now becoming a limited option as there are few remaining places that can accommodate elephants successfully in the long term that have not already been utilized in Zimbabwe. Translocation is expensive and labor-intensive and can only help remove a limited number of “unwanted” elephants. Trans-locating one elephant can cost as much as US$8,000.

**7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Informed by these observations and analysis, the Committee made the following recommendations;

1. **Elephant Sale and Export**

Based on the scientific researches currently underway, the Committee recommends the Ministry of Environment, Climate Tourism and Hospitality Industry to lobby other like-minded African Countries to negotiate at the next CITIES Conferences of Parties for free trade in hunting products as these have a positive impact on the national and local economies of the country by August 2022. Zimbabwe will realize significant revenue from elephant exports, and such revenue can be used to enhance conservation and sustainable wildlife management programs.

1. **Co-Management of Wildlife**

The Committee also recommends that the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry should, by December 2022, find partnerships to replicate the Gonarezhou co-management partnership model in other National Parks such as Hwange and Matusadonha in order to benefit from donor support and counter some of the challenges being experienced by ZimParks in these Parks.

Zimparks should by, December 2020, devolve decision-making on aspects of problem animal control to communities for better management of the costs. However, the Committee notes that no one management option will successfully deal with all problem elephants and conflict situations.

1. **Funding and resource mobilization**

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development should, by December 2021, provide adequate, sustainable funding and the provision of equipment such as drones as they are important to effective protection of the elephant and curbing illegal poaching of elephants.

1. **Legal and policy framework**

The Ministry of Environment,Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry should, by December 2021, amend the Parks and Wildlife Act to provide for the protection of whistle-blowers and the rewarding system and incorporate deterrent custodial sentences. For instance, illegal cyanide possession does not have a deterrent sentence.

The Committee also recommends that ZIMPARKS prioritizes law enforcement through the Policy and Plan for Elephant Management in Zimbabwe by June 2021.

**8.0 Conclusion**

The Executive needs to be cognizant that the growth of wildlife economy is hampered by elephant management challenges and human-wildlife conflict. The country needs to find ways to solve these challenges which have not only become a conservation crisis but are also a human crisis. All of us must realize that elephants are critical resources that can contribute to the economic and social well-being of the local communities and the nation at large.