

# The paradoxes of wildlife conservation in Africa

*Jenny Macgregor, Researcher at the Africa Institute, looks at some frequently neglected aspects of Africa's wildlife conservation programmes and at the implications of the decisions on the ivory trade taken at the recent Cites conference.*

Over the last few decades large numbers of people in the Western industrialized nations have become conscious of an approaching global ecological crisis. One manifestation of this developing awareness has been a growing interest in the environmental problems of Africa, where human and animal life, soils and vegetation seem to be vulnerable as never before. The Western media, especially television with its use of stark and compelling images, have helped to focus public attention, thus linking Africa's predicament to the mainstream of European and North American concerns.

In Africa itself, a continent frequently depicted as providing wilderness for the world at large, conservation has been commonly identified with the preservation of wildlife and its natural habitat. Unspoilt Africa is seen as symbolizing the eternity of nature, in contrast with the artificiality of industrial, urban societies. This romantic vision of Africa as an "Eden" teeming with wildlife has resulted in a broad notion that the conservation of the African environment is a largely technical exercise, devoid of political considerations. Eager to protect Africa's declining wildlife, conservationists have carried out idealistic but narrowly focussed programmes in which the political and social changes needed to implement their policies either have not been understood or have been ignored.

More recently, however, the threat to the existence of the big, spectacular spe-

cies — elephant, rhino, lion and gorilla — which conservationists frequently describe as part of the "common heritage of mankind", has led to a re-evaluation of conservation practices, particularly in the light of the rapid decline of both the black rhino and elephant populations.<sup>1</sup>

Dramatic visual material showing the wholesale destruction of elephants and rhinos at the hands of poachers understandably arouse an emotional public, yet both the media and conservationists can be faulted for omitting an important part of the story, thus distorting and misrepresenting the issues in question. The decline of Africa's wildlife has as much to do with the competition for space between man and the animals as it has with poaching and the international trade in hides, ivory and rhino horn.

Africa's human population doubles every twenty years, and the range land of elephants, which are notoriously destructive, and of other wild animals is shrinking as pressures on arable land increase. The retreat of wild animals into remote areas and their decimation by poachers have been paralleled by the encroachments of cultivators and pastoralists, which have effectively restricted their mobility to ever smaller areas.

The preservation of species such as the black rhino and the elephant is vitally important. However, the prescriptions now being put forward as panaceas for the salvation of Africa's wildlife threaten to be hazardous for both the wildlife and

people of Africa if they fail to take into account the social context in which they are to be applied. For its part the public at large must temper its enthusiasm for conservation with a sober understanding of the politics of conservation and the history of outside intervention.

## The traditional ethos of conservation and the early ivory trade

As John McCracken points out "Until recently, conservation as a means of providing long-term protection of the natural environment was often assumed to be an essentially 'modern' concern, introduced to Africa by expatriate experts and unrelated to the perspectives of African producers who were believed to be interested only in the short-term exploitation of natural resources."<sup>2</sup> In fact many pre-colonial communities for whom the hunting and gathering of wild products was a traditional way of life, had developed institutions, often religious in character, designed to enforce restraint in their handling of the environment. In order to ensure their own survival and that of the soils, plants and creatures which they needed in order to live and which formed a basic part of their rural existence, these people developed a deep awareness of these products and their interrelationships and ecology. Thus, for generations the untameable African

elephant has been hunted by the men of Africa — but only to fulfill their needs. They ate the meat, made tools and weapons from the bones, fashioned cloaks, belts and sandals from the skin; only for the tusks did they have little or no use. In some cultures, the elephant was venerated as a mythical creature and hunting was conducted according to strict tribal customs, and then only for specific ritual purposes.

Unfortunately for the African elephant, its magnificent tusks have held an age-old fascination for all the great civilizations of Asia and Europe. Combs, knife-handles, carved figures and other items revealing a high degree of skill and which date to as far back as 3000 BC, have been found in Egyptian sites. King Solomon's great wealth was symbolized by his ivory throne, which was overlaid with gold.

known to the classical civilizations of the Mediterranean littoral. By the end of the fourth century AD there were no elephants north of the Sahara — they had been ruthlessly exploited for their ivory by the Carthaginians and later by the Romans, who consumed great quantities of ivory for staffs of office, insignia, curule chairs and, in some areas of the empire, for use as currency.

The fall of the Roman Empire brought some respite to the African elephant, enabling its numbers to increase. However, by 1000 AD the Muslim Arabs, who had invaded North Africa three centuries earlier, had established trading routes south of the Sahara in search of commodities which the rest of the world prized highly — gold and ivory. The ivory was sold to India and China, countries with a long

Europe, that marked a turning point in the ivory trade. Initially the Ivory Coast was the chief source for the European trade, but as Portuguese navigators opened up routes to the East, outflanking the Moslem world, and began to establish fortified trading posts around the African coast, more and more African rulers were drawn into the new commercial network.<sup>4</sup>

### Hunting in the nineteenth century

The nineteenth century witnessed a massive and sudden expansion in the international trade in ivory. The industrial revolutions in Europe and North America threw up a new, wealthy and leisured class, whose life-style created a demand for ivory in the form of billiard-balls, piano-keys, card-cases, letter-openers, buttons, fans, ornaments and other artefacts. Ivory soon became one of the principal objects of many trading voyages.

As European interest in Africa itself grew, culminating in the division of the continent into colonial territories, so East, Southern and later Central Africa became hunting grounds for explorers, missionaries and pioneers who were working their way inland from established areas of settlement. The statistics for the export of ivory and the consequent destruction of elephants in this period sketch a shocking picture: at the peak of European hunting in the 1880s an estimated 900 000 kgs of ivory was exported from Africa annually, a figure that translates into the deaths of about 53 000 elephants each year. Some individual hunters achieved almost incredible feats of destruction: William Finaughty, active between 1864 and 1875, shot 95 elephants in one trip in 1868, yielding 5 000 lbs of ivory; Henry Hartley killed between 1 000 and 2 000 elephants in his career. Men like Gordon Cumming, William Oswell, Cornwallis Harris and Samuel Baker became hunting legends.

European and African hunters both operated on a large scale in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in the 1860s and 1870s. Between 1872 and 1875 Lobengula's hunters and Europeans cleared most of the big tuskers off of the Rhodesian highveld. The ivory obtained during this period is estimated to have totalled about 100 000 lbs, some 60 per cent of it procured by Lobengula's large band of hunters.<sup>5</sup> By the time Frederick



Photo: Clive Walker

Elephants were to be found originally throughout the African continent, even in areas where today life is impossible for wild animals and difficult for man. By about 3000 BC, however, Egypt's herds were disappearing. By 500 BC there were no wild elephants left in the Middle East; Ethiopia, the northern Sudan, parts of Somalia, and the Maghreb remained the only major sources of African elephant

history of craftsmanship using native ivory, supplies of which were beginning to dwindle. In China, the kings and their military and civilian officers used carrying-chairs of ivory; in India the most important use was (and still is) in the manufacture of marriage bangles for Hindu women.<sup>3</sup>

It was the early sixteenth century, when the product began to reach medieval

Selous arrived in Central Africa in 1872, the elephant herds were already retreating to the remoter areas, and he devoted the later part of his career to the largely unsuccessful search for a new elephant-hunting ground.<sup>6</sup> It has been estimated that more than one million elephants were killed during the hundred years prior to 1930.<sup>7</sup>

While the early great white hunters and traders were interested only in the personal fortune to be secured from the ivory and skins, elephant hunting gradually came to serve another purpose during the European period of colonial acquisition, conquest and settlement — that of subsidizing the private concerns of missionaries and explorers, settlers and administrators. Robert Moffat and David Livingstone both hunted with famous hunters like Gordon Cumming. The London Missionary Society's Thomas Morgan Thomas hunted and traded to finance his mission; both Karl Mauch and Thomas Baines funded their prospecting expeditions from the proceeds of ivory sales, while the exploits of Frederick Lugard illustrate the manner in which hunters, campaigners, and administrators fused in the years around the establishment of white rule.<sup>8</sup>

## The beginnings of conservation

By the 1890s, the remnants of the vast herds of buffalo, antelope and zebra which a few decades earlier had roamed the highveld south of the Limpopo had already largely been destroyed. Those that remained were ruthlessly exploited by professional hunters, sportsmen and pioneers. As the game retreated, the nature of hunting began to alter from being a practical exercise, to become what we know today as "The Hunt" — a ritualistic activity symbolizing manliness and sportsmanship. At the same time, and in the name of "conservation", access became restricted to politically and economically dominant groups.<sup>9</sup>

A small but growing colonial elite, lamenting the retreat of the game frontiers and the extermination or near-extermination of some species, a process in which they themselves had participated, introduced game regulations which virtually restricted hunting to members of their own class: gentlemen, sportsmen, administrators and army officers. The concept

was initiated in South Africa, but soon spread to other areas of European settlement in Africa. Although there had been a number of conservation regulations in the Cape since the 1820s, the first adequate legislation for game conservation came with the Cape Act for the Preservation of Game in 1886. This was subsequently extended, many exemptions removed and licence fees were increased, thereby establishing the "Hunt" as a rich man's diversion in the remoter corners of Africa.

Under these laws, Africans were entirely excluded from hunting on their own account — licences were set at a price well beyond their reach; prospectors, farmers and travellers were exempt provided they were shooting for their own consumption only. Hunting became both a symbol of European dominance, and an indicator of status within the dominant community.<sup>10</sup>

unsuccessful. Motives were not altogether altruistic, there was also a practical element: because of the development of settler agriculture early conservation laws were directed toward controlling elephants, rhino and other game which were perceived as a nuisance.<sup>11</sup>

The first reserve was the Sabi Game Reserve, established in 1898; this formed the basis for The Kruger National Park, which was established in 1926 with the consolidation of the Shingwedzi and Sabi Game Reserves. As Wilson and Ayerst point out, "South Africa was at least forty years ahead of the rest of the continent in the development of game reserves but the success of the Kruger National Park in restoring to some extent the balance upset by generations of ivory hunters was a spur to the development of the conservation idea."<sup>12</sup> Support gathered momentum slowly with a growing number of reserves

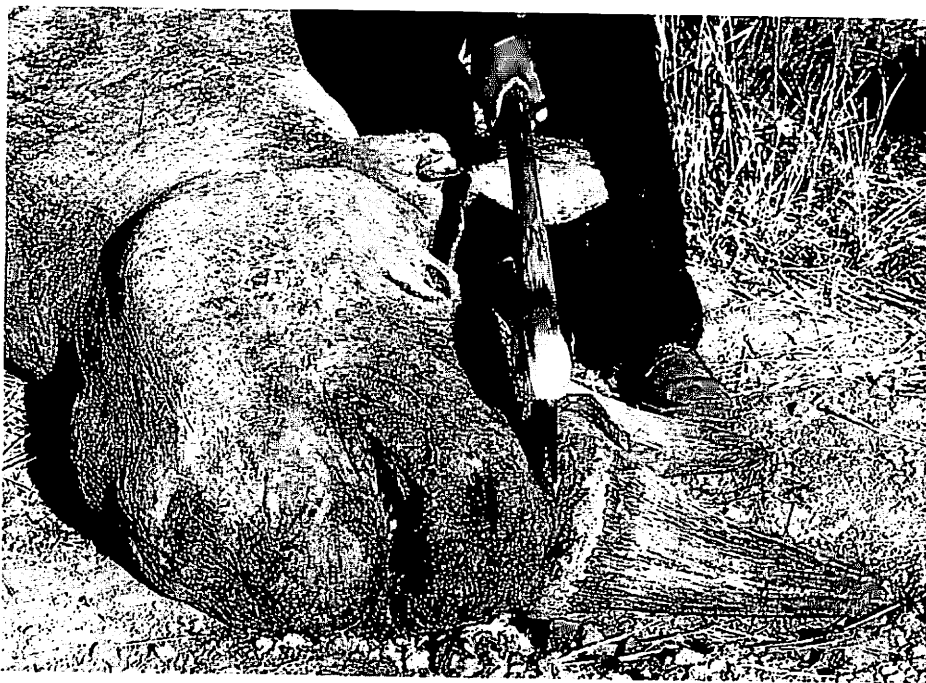


Photo: Clive Walker

## Game reserves

It was in the early twentieth century that game reserves were first demarcated on a significant scale. Initiated by only a handful of individuals, the first game reserves were demarcated during the 1890s in South Africa, after it had become evident that other game protection legislation had been

coming into being between and after the two world wars.

Since the independence of most African states in the 1960s, the number of national parks and equivalent reserves gazetted has more than doubled, a growth stimulated by the rapid increase in wildlife tourism. It is now widely accepted that the viewing and study of game animals constitutes a

legitimate, and financially viable, form of land use and that the state should provide land for this purpose. Today the protected area situation in Africa is relatively favourable — there are now well over a hundred game parks throughout sub-Saharan Africa covering an estimated 4 per cent of the continent.<sup>13</sup> Several African countries, including Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia, have allocated over 10 per cent of their land area to national parks or equivalent reserves. In 1981, the total allocation to wildlife conservation in Africa other than South Africa was about \$75 million and the majority of these funds were derived from government rather than external donations.

### Africa's endangered wildlife

The development of game reserves and the clamp-down on hunting has not brought an end to the trade in animal products; on the contrary over the last sixty years, and especially since the 1970s, this commerce has burgeoned into a highly lucrative and technologically sophisticated business. Today there are a considerable number of endangered and threatened species in Africa, including about 180 varieties of birds and several types of vertebrate. Among the latter, conspicuous cases are the scimitar-horned oryx, possibly already extinct in the wild, and the northern white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*), which had been reduced to 19 at the last count, all of them in Zaire's Garamba National Park.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, the southern sub-species of the white or square-lipped rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum simum*), once on the verge of extinction with a total population of perhaps fewer than 150, is thriving in South African game reserves and its numbers now total over 4 000.<sup>15</sup>

The black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) population has been drastically reduced over the last decade, largely because of illegal hunting for horn, but also as a consequence of the reduction in suitable range-land brought about by rapid agricultural development and by hunting as part of tsetse control operations. Historically the most abundant of the world's five rhino species, the black rhino's existence is now precarious. In 1960 there were still about 100 000 black rhino, but by 1980 there were only 15 000, and by 1989 the number had dwindled to around 3 500 — a 75 per cent decrease in nine



Photo: Clive Walker

years. Twelve African countries have either lost or are about to lose their remaining black rhino — and only six have more than 100. About half the remaining population is in Zimbabwe; in South Africa effective conservation has resulted in an increase in numbers since 1960 from about 300 to over 600, and in the establishment of ten new populations in reserves from which the species had disappeared during the last century.

In most countries the penalties for rhino poaching and horn smuggling are negligible compared with the potential profits to be made: the man who kills the rhino may make a year's income with a single horn, while the middlemen who control the trade make upwards of \$60 000 each time.<sup>16</sup> Trade in rhino horn is as old as the ivory trade, being highly prized in the Far East as an essential ingredient in the preparation of medicines to reduce fever; nevertheless, the market has always been very small. The very sharp increase in trade over the last twelve to fifteen years is a direct consequence of the increased demand among wealthy Yemenis for ornamental dagger-handles.<sup>17</sup>

Much attention has also been given to the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), whose numbers are already in steady decline, though it is not yet an endangered species. In 1979 there were an estimated 1.3 million elephant on the African conti-

nent; by 1987 the total had fallen to 750 000, and the latest estimates put the population at 625 000. Despite the imposition of stiffer penalties by several countries, including a shoot-to-kill policy in operation in both Kenya and Zimbabwe, governments have been unable to put a stop to poaching and the lucrative trade in illicit ivory.

Ian Parker, a Kenya-based elephant expert who has worked as a consultant for both ivory dealers and conservation groups, estimates that about 1 400 tonnes of ivory have been shipped out of Africa during the past two years — representing perhaps 150 000 dead elephants.<sup>18</sup> Some conservationists claim that as many as 800 000 to a million elephants have been slaughtered for their tusks over the past ten years, principally in East and Central Africa. Most of the surviving animals are concentrated in the dense equatorial forests of Zaire, Congo, Central African Republic and Gabon. East Africa has been losing an average of 14 500 elephants a year; Uganda's once thriving herd of 20 000 has been reduced to less than 2 000; in Burundi, once one of the richest sources of ivory in the world, the elephant is extinct; a decade ago Kenya had 65 000 elephants, now there are less than 18 000, (Kenya's Tsavo National Park, which had a herd of 45 000 elephants in 1969, had barely 4 000 in 1989); and Tanzania has lost most of its herd of 200 000 over the last decade.

### Numbers of black rhino in African countries 1980-1987 as estimated by the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group of the IUCN<sup>19</sup>

| Country      | 1980          | 1984         | 1987         |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Tanzania     | 3 795         | 3 130        | 255          |
| Zimbabwe     | 1 400         | 1 680        | 1 775        |
| Zambia       | 2 750         | 1 650        | 95           |
| South Africa | 630           | 640          | 572          |
| Kenya        | 1 500         | 550          | 511          |
| Namibia      | 300           | 400          | 440          |
| CAR          | 3 000         | 170          | ?            |
| Mozambique   | 250           | 130          | ?            |
| Cameroon     | 110           | 110          | 30           |
| Sudan        | 300           | 100          | ?            |
| Somalia      | 300           | 90           | ?            |
| Angola       | 300           | 90           | ?            |
| Malawi       | 40            | 20           | 20+          |
| Rwanda       | 30            | 15           | 15           |
| Botswana     | 30            | 10           | 2            |
| Ethiopia     | 30            | 10           | 2            |
| Chad         | 25            | 5            | -            |
| Uganda       | 5             | -            | -            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>14 795</b> | <b>8 800</b> | <b>3 717</b> |

### Africa's elephant population: Regions and selected countries<sup>20</sup>

|                               | 1981             | 1989           |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Zaire                         | 376 000          | 103 000        |
| CAR                           | 31 000           | 27 000         |
| Congo                         | 10 800           | 25 000         |
| Gabon                         | 13 400           | 92 000         |
| <b>Central African total</b>  | <b>436 200</b>   | <b>278 100</b> |
| Kenya                         | 65 000           | 18 000         |
| Tanzania                      | 203 900          | 75 000         |
| Sudan                         | 133 700          | 21 000         |
| <b>East African total</b>     | <b>429 500</b>   | <b>125 600</b> |
| Botswana                      | 20 000           | 58 000         |
| South Africa                  | 8 000            | 8 200          |
| Zambia                        | 160 000          | 45 000         |
| Zimbabwe                      | 47 000           | 49 000         |
| <b>Southern African total</b> | <b>309 000</b>   | <b>203 300</b> |
| <b>West African total</b>     | <b>17 600</b>    | <b>15 700</b>  |
| <b>Africa total</b>           | <b>1 192 300</b> | <b>622 700</b> |

### The impact of conservation on the ivory trade

There was very little official control over ivory dealing until the end of the nineteenth century — after the payment of duty, suppliers and buyers were free to make their own transactions and export arrangements, but towards the end of the century Mombasa, which had held ivory auctions under government control for some years, began to dominate the export scene. After the Second World War auctions came under the control of the Game Department and every tusk legally exported had to carry the Department's stamp. Despite this, by 1973 an estimated 12 000 elephants were being killed every year in Kenya alone.<sup>21</sup> Aware that a problem was developing, the government stopped all elephant hunting licences and closed the Mombasa auction rooms to all except government ivory. The basic motive behind this decision was the desire to preserve the elephant by protecting it from the further depredations of ivory traders and trophy hunters. There was also a commercial motive: tourism had become the country's principal industry.

The 1960s saw a massive increase in the number of foreign tourists to Africa. Many of them visited the continent's famous game parks, to enjoy the experience of viewing and photographing wild animals in their natural habitat. Hunting was strictly controlled and permitted only in the non-protected areas (outside the parks) and licence fees were too expensive for hunters to be able to recoup their expenses by selling tusks. The future of the elephant seemed secure, but in fact all that had happened is that the restriction on hunting had given a new lease of life to the poacher, while tourists, not content to simply photograph wildlife, also demanded animal products as souvenirs — elephant hair bracelets, lion and leopard claws, skins, teeth and even elephant feet turned into stools.<sup>22</sup> As consumer demand grew, the price of ivory rose: until 1969, it fluctuated around \$5.45 per kilo, in 1970 the price was \$7.44, and by 1978 it was fetching as much as \$75.00 per kilo. By 1989 the price had reached \$300.<sup>23</sup>

Today the ivory trade continues to be dominated by the traditional craft centres, though the final destination of raw ivory varies from year to year. Some of the biggest importers, like Belgium and Hong Kong, are also big exporters, while some

net importers, such as Hong Kong and Macao, export much of what they buy as worked ivory. The most important market has long been in East Asia, and especially in Japan, the world's biggest importer of both raw and worked ivory, where ivory is particularly prized for making hankos, personal seals used by some Japanese in place of a signature. The Japanese ivory industry employs some 30 000 people and Japan alone accounts for perhaps 40 per cent of the ivory market. Demand is growing as the country becomes ever wealthier. Japan is followed closely by the United States, which imported \$29 million worth of elephant products — skins and ivory — between 1984-86, with a retail value of over \$100 million. It has been estimated that more than 32 000 elephants were killed to supply the US with worked ivory in 1986.

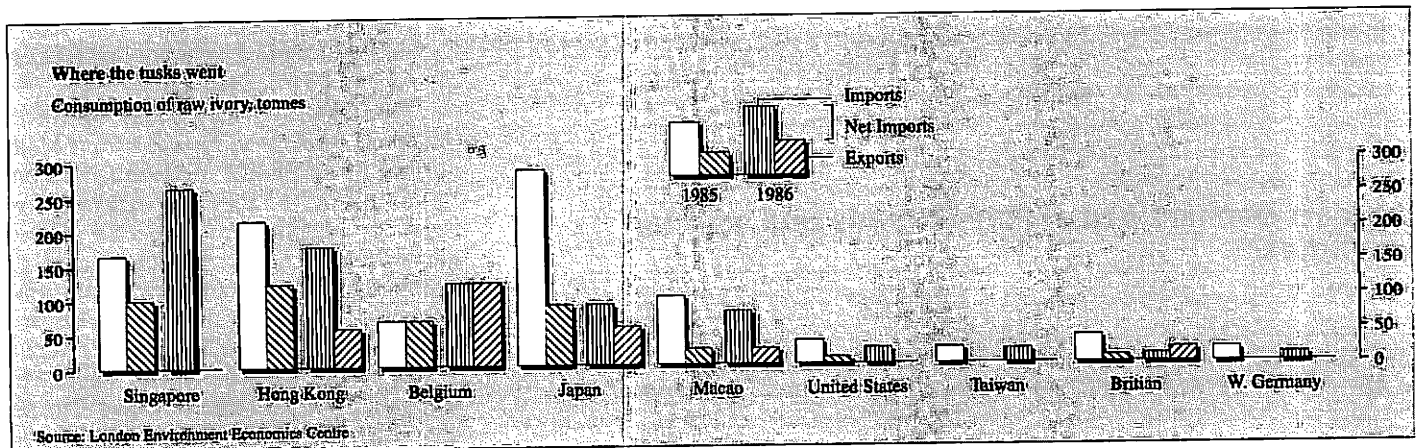
restricts trade so that a species does not become depleted through excessive sales. At its meeting in October 1989, the delegates to the Cites conference voted 76 to 11 in favour of upgrading the status of the African elephant from Appendix II to Appendix I, thereby applying a total embargo on the international (though not domestic), importation and exportation of ivory by any signatory nation.

Despite its good intentions, however, in its fifteen years existence Cites has proved unable to control trade either in rhino horn or in ivory. The black rhino was placed on Appendix I in 1976 — thereby forbidding by international law the sale of rhino horn — since then the rhino population has declined by 75 per cent, and by as much as 90 per cent in some countries. Under the quota system established in 1986, ivory exports are supposed to be authorized by

have found many willing allies at senior levels of government and bureaucracy across the continent, willing to assist in the acquisition and export of poached ivory.

There are more than 100 separate elephant populations in Africa, but in only five of the 36 African countries with elephants — South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Namibia — is the ivory trade controlled and the elephant population stable. At the October 1989 meeting of Cites, therefore, these five Southern African countries objected to a total ban on the ivory trade, feeling that they were being penalized for the high level of poaching and the misguided policies of other African countries, especially those of East Africa, and for this reason they voted against the ban. Burundi, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, South Africa and Mozambique have lodged a

### Consumption of raw ivory: imports and exports<sup>24</sup>



### Cites and the ivory ban

In October 1989 the growing influence of environmentalism in the West and African governments' realization that their countries' wildlife was more important to them alive than dead, culminated in an international ivory trade ban. The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites), set up fifteen years ago by a group of member nations to regulate what was then uncontrolled trade in hundreds of species of rare animals and plants, has been trying to control the ivory trade since 1976. In that year it placed the African elephant on its Appendix II, which

Cites, but most traders have found it simpler to smuggle rather than bother with the paperwork needed to obtain a quota authorization.

The centre of the world's ivory trade is Hong Kong, where hundreds of ivory carving establishments thrive. Trade is controlled by a small number of Hong Kong-based syndicates, which arrange for poached ivory to be smuggled out of its African countries of origin by middlemen and dealers, few of whom are themselves African. The syndicates then rely on the legal trade to "launder" the poached ivory. International controls have never constituted any real restriction for traders, who

"reservation" on the decision, which thus excuses them from abiding by the ban. South Africa, however, has agreed not to trade in ivory for a year, in order to stay within the spirit of the convention and to help Cites trace the illegal traders. In an effort to reconcile the two different positions adopted by its members, Cites has proposed that after a two year moratorium certain member countries with viable, well-managed elephant populations be granted the opportunity to apply to a panel of experts to have their elephants retransferred to Appendix II, thereby allowing controlled trade.

The momentum behind a ban rapidly

gathered pace during 1989, triggered both by the upsurge in poaching and its negative effect on tourism in Kenya and Tanzania, and by media reports of the possible extinction of the African elephant. The proposal for an international ivory trade ban was introduced by Tanzania, with the support of, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the US-based Wildlife Conservation International, the US Department of Fish and Wildlife and the European Community. However, even prior to the historic Cites ban in October 1989, several ivory-consuming countries had voluntarily implemented import bans earlier in the year: Australia and Britain, followed by the rest of the European Community, Canada, Switzerland and the USA. Surprisingly, the United Arab Emirates, which is one of the main entrepôt centres for the ivory trade, followed suit shortly afterwards, after seizing 70 tonnes of ivory smuggled out of Tanzania. In the UAE's old smuggling port of Dubai, the tusks are carved into ornaments, which are free of the international controls on raw ivory. Persuaded by conservationists and Western governments, however, the Emirates are believed to have closed down the carving business, and are now co-operating in an effort to stop the illegal trade in ivory and rhino horn.<sup>25</sup>

A week after the UAE's decision, Japan and Hong Kong, which in the past have resisted efforts to curb their highly profitable and fast-growing ivory trade, finally agreed to a number of stringent measures to control the global commerce, by continuing trade only with countries with well-managed elephant populations and refusing to deal in processed ivory. However, wildlife conservationists interpret Japan's partial ban as intended to protect Japan's Y20 billion annual ivory trade, rather than the African elephant.

### Deficiencies in Africa's conservation policies

Conservationists are hoping that the international ban on the ivory trade will be effective, but this is only a part of the solution. The ban will be ineffective unless African governments are able to police and manage their game reserves successfully. It is also imperative that they

appreciate that while they cannot support development that does not take care of the environment, neither can they continue to support ideologically narrow conservation programmes which ignore the social and political context within which they are applied. In the past African governments have failed abysmally in their efforts to control trade, to win the support of the general populace, and to preserve and conserve their wildlife, because of poor management and misguided policies.

### Poor management

Most national parks and game reserves suffer from severe neglect and inadequate funding. The lack of efficient management has resulted in the degradation of their ecosystems, in bad roads, and of course in an increase in poaching. One of the main causes of inefficiency and corruption within wildlife conservation departments has been the lack of motivation among the staff, mainly because of low remuneration and the absence of lucrative benefits. When a warden or ranger can make more money from the sale of a couple of contraband tusks than he can from a year's honest work then the temptation to poach becomes considerable.

Poor training and equipment are also factors: rangers armed with only bolt-action rifles can hardly be expected to frighten off far better equipped poachers whose methods have become increasingly elaborate. Africa's rebellions and civil wars have also encouraged poaching, both as a method of raising funds for the purchase of arms and by making those arms available for non-military purposes. Poachers who ten to fifteen years ago hunted elephants with bows and arrows are now mowing them down with automatic weapons.

But it is the professional poacher who augers danger. As the price of ivory has continued to rise on the world market, so poaching has become more sophisticated. Spotter planes, high-powered landrovers equipped with walkie-talkies, and men who move rapidly and easily, armed with machine-guns and electric buzz-saws make the game-rangers task nearly impossible. In the last three months of 1988, for example, bands of heavily armed men killed more than a hundred elephants in Kenya,

and five white rhinos, closely guarded by rangers in Meru National Park, were also killed.<sup>26</sup>

Even South Africa, which is able to claim with confidence that its elephant and rhino herds are well-managed, has proved incapable of preventing the passage of illicit ivory through its territory. It has now established a Police Endangered Species Protection Unit which is having some success in intercepting illegal consignments, but it is thought that there are still some big operators who remain untouched.<sup>27</sup> As recently as October 1989, and within weeks of the Cites ban, an ex-game ranger from the famous Kruger National Park was arrested on suspicion of having illegally shot several elephants and rhino in the reserve. Yet, although not immune from management problems, South Africa has not suffered to the same extent as other African states from the inertia or greed of corrupt officials or politicians turning a blind eye to illegal trading.

The year 1989 appears to have been a turning point for the rest of Africa in this regard. Swept up in a wave of emotion about the ivory crisis, in July 1989 Kenya's President Moi ordered the burning of 12 tonnes of ivory worth \$3 million. This symbolic act highlighted the growing awareness among African governments that the potential financial gains from tourism outweigh those from illicit ivory trading. In East Africa, where elephant herds are fast approaching extinction from poaching, the sudden awakening at the eleventh hour to the threat to the tourist industry has caused officials to "jump into action"; hence Tanzania and Kenya's enthusiasm for an international ban on all ivory dealings, a move which enjoyed the support of Somalia and Zaire.

Yet until 1988, when poachers were reported to be killing an average of two elephants a day, the Kenyan government did not seem to take the poaching menace seriously enough to warrant the commitment of sufficient funds, material or personnel to the anti-poaching units. It was only when tour operators told the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife that poaching in the game parks was ruining their business and the tourism industry (which has become the country's principal foreign exchange earner, with earnings for 1988 in excess of \$330 million), that the government began to act decisively.<sup>28</sup> Early in 1989, President Moi appointed Richard Leakey, the Executive Director of the

National Museums of Kenya, as Director of Wildlife Conservation and Management, with a mandate to put a halt to elephant poaching. The Kenyan authorities have now adopted a military-style campaign against poachers: poorly-equipped and ill-motivated game rangers have been reinforced, and a shoot-to-kill policy, similar to that of Zimbabwe, has been initiated. Poaching has apparently fallen off dramatically, to an average of three elephants in two months, but at some human cost: twelve men have died, although hundreds more have been arrested. White wildlife conservationists, for once, have praised the government.<sup>29</sup> A white Kenyan conservationist is reported as saying "Personally, I don't mind if they shoot a few people, there's too many people anyway. It's the elephants I'm worried about."<sup>30</sup>

Tanzania, whose elephant population has declined from more than 300 000 in 1979 to no more than 100 000 today, has also taken a stand against poachers. Following the incident in January 1989 when the Indonesian ambassador in Dar es Salaam was caught trying to smuggle out 184 elephant tusks, a new Director of Wildlife was appointed and a national crackdown on poaching initiated. By September 1989 it was reported that police, troops and game wardens were arresting nearly a hundred suspected poachers a week. Unlike the gangs of "shifta" (wandering bands of armed Somalis) operating in Kenya, however, most of the local poachers were found to be villagers hunting game to supplement their diets and incomes. The penalties for ivory poaching have been increased, with sentences of between 10 and 20 years imprisonment being imposed.

In Zimbabwe, where wildlife activities currently bring over Z\$200 million to the national economy, most of it in foreign exchange, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management has been operating a controversial "shoot-to-kill" policy since 1984.<sup>31</sup> During the first five years, more than 70 poachers were killed and 42 captured.<sup>32</sup> Defending his country's policy, Zimbabwe's Vice-President Simon Muzenda, recently stated: "These poachers are identical to economic saboteurs. It would be suicidal to have mercy on such people."<sup>33</sup>

While the decimation of elephants by poachers is generally abhorred, what is seldom realized is that the elephants being poached probably represent only about half those killed. As the well-known South

African conservationist Clive Walker points out "The African elephant is also dying because man is invading its ranges, and the conservation of wildlife vies directly with the need to provide food for a rapidly rising population."<sup>34</sup> As some 70 per cent of Africa's elephants live outside of any form of protected environment, there is growing competition for space with man. These large mammals, which are incompatible with most forms of rural development because of the damage they inflict upon human life, property and crops, are being slaughtered because they are a nuisance. They are also hunted because of their value as a supplement to the diets and incomes of poor rural people, who process the hides, and sell the meat, bones, and even the tails and feet; for the villager ivory is often the perk, not the prime reason, for killing the elephant.

### The politics of conservation in Africa

On no other continent do so many people live in such close proximity to wild, and often large and dangerous, animals, yet Africa's hundreds of national parks and game reserves have been established and run with animals and tourism almost exclusively in mind, and with little consideration for local Africans. Large amounts of money have been spent on game lodges, park roads, transport and catering facilities for the tourist industry, the revenue of which goes into government or hotel bank accounts, not to rural people whose participation or consent has apparently been of little importance to conservationists or African governments. This is because much of conservation thinking in Africa, as defined and exercised by Europeans, has in the past been directed to a desire to protect the natural environment of Africa as a special kind of "Eden" for the ease of the European psyche, rather than as a complex and changing environment in which people actually have to live. Anderson and Grove encapsulate the situation thus: "at its crudest, Africa has been portrayed as offering the opportunity to experience a wild and natural environment which was no longer available in the domesticated landscapes of Europe."<sup>35</sup> As a result, a naive and idealized picture of apolitical conservation has dominated, which has been characterized by a lack of

awareness of the broader social implications of conservation efforts. To rural societies in Africa conservation — which has frequently meant their simple exclusion from national parks and forest reserves in the interests of the protection of large animal species and preservation of habitats — is a very political issue.

In rural Africa the management and ownership of land, as both the dwelling place and means of production of the majority of the population, is of major political importance, yet the principle of setting aside separate blocks of land for the sole use of wildlife remains an essential element in conservation thinking. As income from wildlife-oriented tourism has increased, the position of governments has grown closer to that of conservationists who have actively lobbied for the setting aside of national parks and reserves. However, the costs in terms of alienated land, damage to life and property, and restrictions on resource use are mainly borne by rural populations, particularly those at the interface between settlement and conservation areas, while the economic benefits are enjoyed by the governments, and the aesthetic and recreational benefits mainly by foreigners or, as in the case of South Africa, mainly by whites.

The potential for conflict over land use has become greater in recent decades because of the increasing intervention of modern governments in pastoral life-styles, and because of growing population pressures. Reference has already been made to indigenous methods of conservation and, as has been shown, it was with the establishment of colonial rule that governments began to intervene in the shaping of African environments. By the 1970s growing concern about the worsening environmental crisis led to an increase in state intervention, much of it inspired, financed and directed by agencies external to Africa. Excluded from the decision-making process, farmers and herders have found themselves uncertain about who was ultimately responsible for regulating the use of natural resources.

Almost every game park that has been established has caused the displacement of the local peoples' hunting areas. A well-documented case is that of the Masai pastoralists in Kenya who systematically slaughtered rhino and elephants in Amboseli during the 1970s as a protest against the loss of dry grazing lands, expropriated



for wildlife preservation. Likewise, the Matabo National Park in Zimbabwe has been controversial.<sup>36</sup> Cecil Rhodes carved out a huge personal estate in this area south of Bulawayo, the south of which had long been occupied by Banyubi and Ndebele people, whose security of occupation Rhodes guaranteed. But in his will he also designated part of his estate as a nature reserve, so in 1962 the people were removed and resettled in an area which was agriculturally useless — boreholes failed, grazing deteriorated and real ecological disaster loomed — while the park became a preserve for rangers, scientists and visitors, most of whom were white. The site of shrines of important African cults, this was also Rhodes' chosen burial spot, which added to the conflict over the Park and its environs. Typically the conservationists' concept of a national park is of a preserve for plants and animals and free of human habitation. In the Matobo National Park (Matopos) this has implied the reconstruction of a supposedly "natural" state which had not in fact existed for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. "Nature", as Rhodes and the early settlers experienced it, had been deeply shaped by African settlement. The calls by conservationists to "be more vigilant" because "we cannot afford to lose our national heritage" beg the question "Whose heritage is it anyway?" Not only wild creatures make up wild regions — people have a right to exist there too.

Conservation has also made poachers out of communities for whom hunting has always been an integral part of life. For many centuries the Liangula of southern Kenya lived off the elephants migrating from the swampy regions of the Tana River District to the north through to Kilimanjaro and the Serengeti plains. Within their tribal culture the whole elephant was used — the skin, the meat and the tusks. But with the arrival of traders at the beginning of the twentieth century, the killing of large numbers of elephants for their tusks alone was encouraged. When the Tsavo area, the Liangula's traditional hunting ground, was made into a national park in 1947, the killing of elephants became illegal. But the Liangula, whose life had become economically and socially entwined with the traders, could not stop hunting. They had been deprived of their livelihood and nothing had been done to replace it. Today the Tsavo area still has a severe poaching problem.

The irony for many of these people is

that they have had to witness the legal hunting of game in the catchment areas surrounding game reserves. When the idea of sanctuaries for wild animals was first mooted, very little was known of the complications of ecology. Game animals, especially elephants, are never static, so in the early days of conservation, before a system of game rangers had been developed, professional hunters were called in to locate and destroy troublesome elephant herds which had wandered out of reserves in search of additional pasture. Because the hunters were allowed half the ivory, (the remainder went to the Game Department) they were encouraged to kill the biggest tuskers. The local population living on the boundaries were forbidden to hunt. Today many national parks are unfenced but are divided into different zones. Fairly heavy land-use around the perimeter gives way to a "buffer zone" or several zones graduated according to use, in which farming and herding are controlled. A chronic problem of the integration of wildlife with other forms of land use has frequently developed, necessitating control hunting. Where local peoples have not been allowed to kill for meat the animals in their own areas, as they have done for many generations, rich men from overseas who know and care little about the place have bought shooting licences and hunted in these buffer zones, merely for trophies. The local population, unable to afford a healthy supply of protein food, have to watch rich foreigners who live in the greatest luxury, and who obviously do not need the game meat for survival, shoot animals for "show". Similarly, local people have witnessed annual culling in parks and reserves which are surrounded by fences. Deprived of the full range of their grazing lands, the larger mammals are liable to upset the ecological balance in the reserve within which they confined, necessitating the practice of "cropping" or culling.

### The conservationists' changing perceptions

Conservationists are beginning to realize that it is no solution to protect Africa's game simply for the aesthetic benefit of European tourists. So long as the great majority of local people are excluded from

any tangible benefits of wildlife conservation, they cannot be expected to support the cause of conservation, nor can national parks be expected to survive very long. As Clive Walker succinctly puts it: "Most disadvantaged communities cannot consider conservation, as we know it, when their bellies are empty. Their own survival is the issue ... (only) well informed and well-fed people understand why we need wilderness and wildlife from an aesthetic point of view."<sup>37</sup> In order to secure that support, conservationists are beginning to redress the problems of the lack of communication with, and tangible benefits experienced by, the communities concerned.

### Spreading the benefits

The approach now being more widely adopted is that revenues earned from protected wildlife or land is fed back to the community bearing the cost, in the form of a rent for the sequestered resources. An early example initiated in the 1940s was that of Nsefu Game Reserve, Zambia, where revenues from tourism were returned to the chief in whose area it was established. Similar arrangements are in operation today in the Amboseli and Mara areas in Kenya. In northern Namibia the Auxiliary Game Guard System, whereby the local people become the conservationists, has been remarkably successful in combatting the poaching of rhino and elephant. Although having no legal status, the local community, via the headman, is paid a salary and provided with uniforms to carry out the task of monitoring and reporting on the status of the game in its area.<sup>38</sup>

Revenues from reduction culling in Sebungwe region, Zimbabwe, allocated to district development committees under Operation Windfall are also reported to have led to a decrease in illegal hunting in the area. These revenue allocation schemes are a positive step, but have not always been as successful as expected, firstly because fund allocations are not always targetted accurately enough on affected sectors of society, and secondly because the recipients are essentially passive, neither participating in decision-making nor enjoying the direct aesthetic benefits associated with personal use of wildlife areas and resources.

In Zimbabwe a step has been taken towards participation in the decision-making process, with the institution of local wildlife boards and owner's control of wildlife on private land, a policy based on the belief that wildlife should not be viewed as museum pieces in parks, but should be harvested as a renewable resource. This has triggered the growth of a large and lucrative game ranching industry. The government has carried the concept even further with its 1985 "Campfire" proposal (Communal Area Management Plan for Indigenous Resources), in terms of which residents in communal lands may form companies owning and controlling the use of all natural resources on a communal basis, within certain limits. Cash earned from animals killed in a professional hunt, culling operations or from the shooting of animals that have repeatedly destroyed crops or threatened people, bypasses the Treasury. Ten per cent of the proceeds is deducted by the district council to cover administrative costs, the remaining 90 per cent is handed to the people of the ward for their own disposal. In the pilot project which was initiated in 1987 in the Dande Communal Land, Guruve District, income was invested in six schools and a clinic.

By encouraging the adoption of wildlife management as an alternative form of land use in an area where arable agricultural activity is marginal and population pressures great, the community has been enriched financially and socially. The result, helped by favourable shifts in the exchange rate and international demand for wildlife-based recreation (mainly hunting), has been the blossoming of wildlife schemes in many of Zimbabwe's Communal Areas. With the help of Zimbabwe, Botswana is also planning wildlife utilization programmes.

Such programmes, which test the concept of conservation with a human face, hold out hope, though conservationists also need to be aware that it is a misconception that the only interest in wildlife is utilitarian and that people can be bought off with development schemes or cash. If African societies are to link the aesthetic significance of wildlife and conservation to land-use strategies then greater attention must be paid to the problem of local involvement in conservation-related activity. Conservation areas are widely seen as playgrounds for wealthy expatriates, from which national residents are effec-

tively excluded. For example, in Malawi nationals account for 1,0 per cent of all fee-paying visits to national parks although they make up 99,75 per cent of the resident population.<sup>39</sup> It is basic to effective conservation planning that access be provided for nationals, in the form of cheap accommodation and transport to the commodity — the recreational experience of wildlife — for which the community has paid a considerable price. Particularly in Southern Africa, where aesthetic appreciation of wildlife is largely confined to whites, the ethics of conservation must be understood and developed by both privileged and underprivileged communities.<sup>40</sup>

## The future

Governments and conservationists are becoming increasingly aware of the objectives of conservation and are asking fundamental questions about which species to conserve and in what numbers, where to conserve them and how to utilize them. Such a strategy implies a policy defining the relationship between man and his environment, and recognizing that development and conservation go hand in hand. Implicit in this is a growing awareness of the need to put people back into conservation. At the same time governments are now realizing that in order to protect their wildlife (and indirectly their tourist industries), they need to be much harsher and more effective in the fight against poachers, many of whom are merely in the service of highly professional international traders. The difficulty for those instituting conservation policies is to determine the difference between the professional poacher and the local hunter who is trying to supplement his diet or to rid his community of a pest. The former has no regard for human or animal life and must be dealt with accordingly; the latter needs to learn about and experience the benefits of animal conservation.

What role Cites can play is open to question in the light of its past record. The current ban has its pros and cons, which in the light of the social and political issues debated earlier, can now be more clearly assessed.

Proponents of a blanket ban, namely the East African countries, the Interna-

tional Wildlife Coalition (IWC), and a consortium of animal welfare and conservation groups, submit the strong argument that this is the only way to close the loopholes exploited by the illegal traders despite the Cites restrictions. (Between 80 to 90 per cent of ivory on the market is illegally obtained.) But the effectiveness of this measure would ultimately depend on all concerned abiding by the rules — in reality corruption is rife and no government in Africa can plead innocence. Even Cites officials have been accused of not acting "by the book". If neither Cites nor even the Southern African states are able to control the trade, then the solution will lie in the complete closure of the consumer market. A temporary ban will not work because stockpiling could take place (as it has done previously), while traders wait for the price to soar again. The high prices would in turn further stimulate poaching.

Zimbabwe, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the other Southern African countries whose elephants are not threatened, have argued that the countries pressing for the ban are precisely those that have failed disastrously in the management of their elephant populations and those most in need of the elephant as a tourist lure, but that have been too inept or corrupt to prevent poaching. This group opposes the ban on the grounds that the trade will always continue and that money from the sale of legal ivory can actually aid the conservation of elephants. Culling operations to maintain the ecological balance of well-managed herds in Zimbabwe and South Africa have enabled these countries to reinvest the money earned in conservation — in South Africa this has amounted to approximately R6,5 million annually, money that conservationists are reluctant to do without.<sup>41</sup>

Another argument is that the ban will constitute a setback to conservation as a whole, and particularly to some of the most exciting innovations in conservation in Africa, notably the Campfire project in Zimbabwe. For the communities reaping the benefits of conservation, the ban will represent a loss of an estimated US\$5 million in 1990, as well as bringing about the imminent reduction of the elephant population as the incentives to protect wildlife disappear.<sup>42</sup>

The additional argument, that in any event, a blanket ban would be ineffective and would drive the ivory trade completely

underground, seems valid in the light of events. According to the quota system introduced in 1986, by which ivory exports are supposed to be cleared with Cites, some 108 000 tusks were authorized for export in 1986 — a figure that would have represented more than 50 000 dead elephants, ten times the annual figure some conservationists regard as Africa's sustainable yield.<sup>43</sup> In that same year Burundi, which has only one elephant according to its government, exported 23 000 tusks, all carefully documented as originating in that country. At the October 1989 Cites meeting, however, no objection was made to Burundi taking a "reservation" on the decision to ban, thereby allowing it legal trade. Burundi's objection to the ban, however, had nothing to do with management of its elephant(s) — it is through Burundi that most trade is channelled. Likewise Somalia, which is a signatory to Cites, has only 4 500 elephants, but has exported more than 21 000 tusks over the past three years, representing a minimum of 10 500 elephants.

However, even an effective ban on the ivory trade by itself would not put an end to the slaughter of elephants, because the majority live outside the reserves. Increasing pressures for arable land have served to highlight the extent to which elephants compete with man. Yet restricting elephants to poorly managed reserves leads to problems of ecological imbalance, and can be detrimental to the health of the elephants themselves.<sup>44</sup> A degree of culling is essential to avoid these problems, and has the advantage of helping to pay for the running of game departments. Unfortunately the gradual clamp-down on poaching has made "legitimate" ivory, most of which comes from culling, all the more valuable. (In the four years after the introduction of the Cites quota system, the price of legally documented ivory increased by 400 per cent, making legally acquired ivory far too expensive to use for the production of traditional artefacts.<sup>45</sup>)

The irony of all this is that it seems that ivory is destined to remain a valuable commodity, at any price. Therefore, given conditions in the international market, which operates according to its own agenda, and taking into account the inadequacies of Cites, it is up to African governments to focus their efforts on protecting and controlling their wildlife against poachers, and on eradicating official corruption. One of the major problems they face, however,

is the cost of conservation: experts have calculated that African governments need to spend at least \$200 per sq km annually to adequately protect wildlife in their national parks. Few are able to afford this.<sup>46</sup> International aid, which has been in short supply until recently, is needed by governments to assist them in their enforcement efforts. After all, it is from the West that most of the tourists come. The international community must also play a role in educating the consumer against the purchase of ivory, as was done in the case of seal skins and fox furs.

Governments and conservationists must now ask the question "For whom are we conserving our wildlife?" and assess carefully what is realistically possible in a continent plagued by poverty, disease and hunger and facing an annual population growth rate of 3.1 per cent. Can they, and should they aim to, maintain the status quo? The time has come for each government to establish a conservation philosophy applicable to its own complex set of circumstances, but one in which conservation is practised as if people mattered, and development as if nature mattered. In the final analysis conservation is concerned not only with "preserving species", but also with human beings and with sustainable development.

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**AFRICA**

ISSN 0256-2804

vol 19 • no 4 • 1989

Reg. No. 61/00002/08

**INSIGHT**

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# 1989: A turning point in Southern Africa

*The year 1989 brought Namibia to the threshold of independence and saw a change of leadership in South Africa. Pieter Esterhuysen, Assistant Director of the Africa Institute, discusses some of the possible consequences of these developments.*

Events in South Africa and south-western Africa over several decades provide textbook examples of: one, the futility of suppressing legitimate nationalist movements and waiting too long to come to terms with them; two, the limitations of the military and non-military components of counter-revolutionary strategy in drawing nationalist support away from the perceived liberators; three, the cardinal error of not allowing enough time for wide-ranging political competition and democratic culture to take root in the pre-independence or pre-majority rule phase; and four, the inevitability of political solutions or negotiation in bringing to an end unwinnable and stalemated insurgency wars.

The protracted South African military campaign in northern Namibia and southern Angola, waged primarily to prevent Swapo from seizing power in Namibia, demonstrated South Africa's capacity to engage in power politics when provoked. Not only did it improve its diplomats' bargaining position, it also encouraged the notion that the best way to deal with the South African government was through negotiation.

Nevertheless, the change in the region's fortunes in the closing years of a momentous decade was rather the result of two historical reversals: the decline of communism world-wide and of apartheid in South Africa. These decisive developments implied a turning of the tide for both freedom fighters and defenders of minority rule and, most important, set the

stage for the politics of negotiation. Thus Swapo's accession to power is less significant than the fact that it has done so through democratic procedures dictated by negotiated, international agreement.

## Frontline responses

This point was taken by the Frontline States and Zaire, whose economic difficulties have sensitized them to the urgent need for the normalization of traffic through Angola and Mozambique and the expansion of existing ties with South Africa. The world-wide retreat of the Soviet Union and the successful implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 in Namibia — both much to Africa's surprise — have strengthened the hand of those African leaders, who, in concert with the US and the Soviet Union, are currently urging governments and their opponents to stop fighting and start talking.

This approach is likely to be vindicated when, sooner or later, Africa begins to feel the impact of a diversion of Western resource flows to the fledgling democracies of Eastern Europe — an anticipated consequence of the epoch-making events in that part of the world. Then, more than ever before, the need for stability and economic survival will dictate increasing interaction with Africa's most developed economy.

Although the first consequential attempts to bring together the Angolan and Mozambican governments and their opponents were made in 1989, the main focus has shifted to South Africa. Despite widespread unrest in this country during the period 1985-1987, the ANC and the PAC have failed to convince African leaders of their capacity to overthrow the South African government. On the contrary, President Kaunda, the Frontline chairman, became concerned that these movements would be excluded from the negotiation process that seemed to be gathering momentum under the new South African government. For this reason and also in order to further their own interests, the Frontline leaders used their considerable leverage on the ANC and the PAC to come up with a peace plan that was ratified by a committee of 13 OAU member states in Harare on 21 August 1989 — a week before President-designate De Klerk's visit to Kaunda. (The PAC had opted out as it did not agree with this approach.)

The ANC and its sponsors' definite statement on the former's negotiating position suggested that favourable conditions for negotiation existed if the South African government was prepared to create the proper climate. The ANC-OAU preconditions for real negotiation exclude demands for the repeal of apartheid legislation but insist on far-reaching concessions in the security sphere. Significantly, the proposals envisage the establishment of a transitional government with international involvement — an indication that