



African Parks Network

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Dear Mr. Benoit Breville and Mr. Serge Halimi,

The article titled “Who is the land for” by Jean-Christophe Servant, published in the February 2020 edition of your newspaper, contained multiple factual inaccuracies and unsubstantiated claims about African Parks, despite us providing full access to information, including interviews with several representatives and access to the park. In the interest of integrity, it is important that the content in question, where it misrepresents facts and context, are addressed. The below excerpts from the article refer:

- The author quotes Bram Büscher (without any citation) stating that “In 2004 AP caused outrage because of its involvement in relocating several thousand Mursi nomads living in and around Omo National Park in Ethiopia”; and that African Parks was involved in “relocating several thousand Mursi nomads living in and around Omo National Park in Ethiopia”;

This is factually incorrect and is misinformation that promotes a narrative that conservation and protected area management is fundamentally to the detriment of people and violates their human rights. Firstly, African Parks only became involved in Omo National Park in November 2005, but more importantly African Parks was never involved in any way with the relocation of a single Mursi individual, let alone thousands.

- The author states that African Parks is in “the quest for profit”; “AP’s environmental credentials are important to its brand in Africa, which helps it develop lucrative networks”; “keeping locals out for the benefit of rich international tourists”; “catering mostly for affluent western clients”;

The author deliberately fails to disclose in the article that all revenue generated, whether by tourism or other initiatives, goes back to the parks and the communities supported by the parks (as evidenced by independent audits). His framing of African Parks as an organisation operating for profit is egregious and untrue.

Putting people at the centre of the rationale for conserving these areas, especially local people, is fundamental to long-term sustainability, and is core to African Parks’ model. In addition to creating significant local employment (96% of staff are locally recruited), four of the parks we manage have at least 93,000 people legally living within or moving through those landscapes. These local people often have legal rights to use the natural resources, which are protected by African Parks from illegal use by

external syndicates. Last year, half of the paying tourists that visited parks managed by African Parks were local residents of the country. International visitors pay higher park-entry fees than local residents, thereby carrying a disproportionate burden of maintaining the parks. In some cases, local residents are also able to enter the parks for free and many of the parks actively host thousands of local school children each year as part of a targeted access program.

The article fails to capture a true account of this model of park management, adapted in consideration of national and local contexts, with both Government and local communities represented on park governance boards.

Our model is to not “run [the parks] with military discipline”, but rather to professionalize park management, to uphold the country’s wildlife laws, and to protect the country’s natural resources for the benefit of local people and wildlife. Stability, safety and security are foundational requirements for sustaining natural ecosystems. Equally, they are necessary for people to enjoy their human rights and for attracting public and private investment, generating jobs and stimulating enterprise.

African Parks, its boards and partners, are committed to ensuring that some of Africa’s most vital landscapes are ecologically, socially and financially sustainable in the long-term. This is based on principles of sound management, full accountability and absolute integrity.

We hope you are able to make corrections on the French and English versions of the article online.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrea Heydlauff" followed by a stylized flourish.

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