

AN AFRICAN MODEL FOR CONSERVATION IN AFRICA



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The future of our planet depends on Africa. Over a quarter of the earth's biodiversity exists on this continent, along with the majority of the largest mammal migrations. One tenth of the world's irrecoverable carbon is also stored in Africa – most of which is within the Congo Basin. This rainforest, the second largest in the world and rightfully known as one of the planet's green lungs, sequesters more carbon than all the tropical forests of Asia and the Amazon combined. These landscapes are critical in providing clean air and water, food security, and a better way of life. Yet our wild ecosystems continue to be undervalued, and nature continues to be destroyed.

As the world grapples with the interlinked crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, and global pandemics, investing in and securing protected areas is rising to the surface as one of the surest and most cost-effective actions we can take in ensuring our own survival. While Africa is experiencing unprecedented rates of population growth and agricultural development, science has shown how nature is the engine for our socioeconomic development, and that we must invest in nature-based solutions now, before it is too late.

African Parks believes that what is not managed, in terms of protected areas and national parks, will be lost

– and once lost, they are near impossible to bring back. Which means the wild areas that exist today are only more valuable tomorrow, not just for our continent's people, but for all of humanity.

This is why I joined the Board of African Parks, to be part of a unique African solution for uniquely African challenges. I have seen their Public Private Partnership model, which was pioneered for protected area management in Africa, put to the test and succeed, even in the most unlikely places. In the Central African Republic, a country plagued by decades of civil war, they have the mandate to manage a colossal 55,000 km² landscape called Chinko with the goal of it forming the core of a larger land-use plan for the entire eastern part of the country. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, they have transformed Garamba National Park, a place historically plundered by warlords, where wildlife and people's lives had been destroyed, to it now serving as the most stable place in the entire region, with poaching all but eliminated, and where communities are bringing in over US\$800,000 a year from sustainable agriculture. These kinds of transformations are happening in all the 19 parks under their management, where schools have been built, children can learn, health services are available, and people have jobs. All because nature is being protected.

In September, I helped African Parks enter into two MoUs – one with the Government of South Sudan to work on an agreement to manage Bandingilo and Boma National Parks, the other with the Government of Ethiopia for Gambella and Omo National Parks. The sustainability of these contiguous parks, which span 46,000 km² and host the second largest mammal migration on the planet, has global ramifications.

African Parks offers African governments a unique proposition: a risk-free solution to managing their protected areas to safeguard our continent's biodiversity, while walking pragmatically along the path of sustainable development. It is incumbent on us as Africa's leaders, and to which I am personally committed, to recognise this as a critical option, and to shine a light on the benefit of doing so, to protect our irrecoverable heritage.

Sincerely,
H.E. Hailemariam Dessalegn



Ranger, Heritier Madrakele Manda, and his son in Garamba National Park, DRC © Marcus Westberg