

NATURE: THE FOUNDATION OF SUSTAINABILITY



Robert-Jan van Ogtrop

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The last two years have put the value and vulnerability of nature in crystal clear focus. The latest 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report boldly states that time is running out for humanity to secure a liveable future. The report however also gives us a tiny sliver of hope: that we are not out of time, yet. The science is clear – while the earth is at a grave tipping point, the surest way to prevent further catastrophes, from climate change to global pandemics to economic collapse, is to protect nature. While we need action from all sectors and all actors to do this, African Parks provides one very clear solution for protecting nature now, for people and for planet.

When I became Chairman 12 years ago, African Parks was managing just four parks in three countries, which was no small feat at the time. It had taken eight years to convince those first few governments to trust us with the protection and effective management of their natural assets. Fast forward to today, and African Parks is managing 19 parks across 11 countries spanning 14.8 million hectares – the largest area under protection for any one NGO in Africa. As I write this, there are at least six parks in the pipeline in Angola, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Zambia – mega transboundary parks that, if brought under African Parks' care, would almost double our footprint by securing 30 million hectares under active management.

Our 20-year track record is proof of how to protect nature and, in turn, how nature creates the very foundation of sustainability. We have shown how, through our Public Private Partnership model of full, delegated responsibility, poaching can be practically eliminated; parks can approach financial self-reliance; and can provide employment and safety, food security, health, and educational services for some of Africa's most vulnerable people. Research has also shown that protected areas under fully delegated mandates generate almost 15 times more funding than state-run areas, and stimulate the rural economy, increasing both tax revenue to governments and incentives for conserving nature among local communities.

Our model works. We also now have a roadmap for expanding our impact. A mapping analysis we conducted in 2020 shows us the most critical and viable landscapes. There are just 161 of them, all of which need to be protected now to ensure the long-term sustainability of Africa's biodiversity. This analysis sets the stage for our, and the continent's, conservation efforts for the next ten years. Along with bringing new parks fully under our management, our unique Incubation Programme also sees us invest expertise and technical support in local and international NGOs and practitioners who meet a set of criteria, including passion and strong will, to replicate our model. If there was ever a moment in our African Parks history to scale – it is now.

What is most heartening to me is that we are not alone. I wish to personally thank each and every one of our current government partners who are a powerful coalition, heeding the call to set aside 30% of the planet for nature, and choosing us as partners to protect Africa's natural assets for a sustainable future. I also wish to thank our current funders – without whom we would not be where we are today, nor would we have the ability to consider scaling during what is the most urgent decade for our planet.

Sincerely,
Robert-Jan van Ogtrop

