

# **WWF Speech at the SADC TFCA International Conference**

**BY**

**THE COUNTRY DIRECTOR**

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**Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Esteemed Partners, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a profound honour to speak to you today on behalf of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), as we mark a remarkable milestone—**25 years since the birth of the Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) vision** here in Southern Africa.

A bold and uniquely African idea, TFCAs emerged from a powerful belief: **that nature knows no borders**. This belief has now grown from a dream into a dynamic reality—transforming conservation, cooperation, and community livelihoods across the continent.

Today, the SADC region leads the world in demonstrating that when **Africa comes together for nature, prosperity follows**. TFCAs are no longer just conservation zones—they are **corridors of connectivity**, bridges between nations, cultures, ecosystems, and economies. They represent **regional integration in action—not only in conference halls, but in the savannahs and forests where real people live, herd, farm, and thrive**.

WWF is proud to have walked this journey alongside SADC, Member States, local communities, traditional leaders, and development partners for over two decades. From **KAZA to Great Limpopo, Ruvuma, and SOKNOT**, these transboundary landscapes have become **models for the world**—where diplomacy and ecology go hand in hand.

Let us celebrate a few transformative successes:

- In **KAZA**, over **227,900 elephants now roam** across five countries—thanks to aligned policies, coordinated wildlife protection, and shared monitoring like the 2023 KAZA Elephant Survey. A global conservation success story.
- In **Ruvuma**, community forest patrols supported by WWF and partners have led to a **33% drop in illegal logging**—a win for biodiversity and local empowerment.
- In **SOKNOT**, peaceful cross-border cooperation has secured migratory routes for elephants and wildebeest—while **over 20,000 pastoralist households** have regained access to critical grazing land.
- And in Zimbabwe, in the **Hwange-Kazuma-Chobe corridor**, nature-based tourism and sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products are **transforming rural livelihoods**.

But what is a great TFCA without great tourism?

After all, nature-based tourism is the only industry where your star employees—like lions and elephants—**don't ask for a salary**, yet contribute up to **10% of GDP** in several SADC countries and support **over 3 million jobs**—many of them for youth and women. With the right investments in infrastructure and peace, the potential in places like KAZA could **multiply fivefold**.

Together with communities and partners, WWF is helping grow **inclusive, locally led ecotourism** that keeps value in the village—not just the capital city.

Yet even as we celebrate, we must confront the hard truths.

Climate change is drying rivers, shifting wildlife movement, and compounding human-wildlife conflict. Expanding infrastructure such as mining and land-use change important to economic development continue to fragment critical corridors. Uncertainty with funding sources, under-resourced conservation efforts, and insufficient community benefit-sharing **threaten the long-term viability** of this shared vision.

These are not reasons to retreat. They are **reasons to act—with urgency, ambition, and innovation.**

WWF believes the next generation of TFCAs must continue to evolve—**from protected areas focus to connected economies.**

We propose five priority actions:

1. **Invest in nature-based economies**—including ecotourism, non-timber forest products, carbon and wildlife credits.
2. **Secure ecological corridors** through joint land-use planning and incentives for community stewardship.
3. **Champion One Health approaches** that link people, wildlife, and ecosystem health—because our futures are intertwined.
4. **Strengthen youth leadership and local governance**, fuelling innovation and entrepreneurship at the grassroots.
5. **Institutionalise sustainability**—moving beyond temporary projects to long-term investments and lasting political commitment.

Let us align our work with Africa's own vision—the **African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the Global Biodiversity Framework.** Let us make TFCAs engines of peace, prosperity, and planetary health.

Friends, 25 years ago, we dreamed of an Africa where **lions, leopards, and livelihoods** could thrive across borders.

Today, that dream is **real—but not yet realised.** Our task is to complete that vision—so that in another 25 years, a child growing up in Chobe, Niassa, or Binga can become a ranger, a community leader, a policymaker—or even the next speaker at a TFCA summit.

As Nelson Mandela reminded us: *“It is in the character of growth that we should learn from our experiences, move forward, and build a better future.”*

Let us move forward—together.

Let us protect our shared natural heritage—together.

Let us walk, like the elephant—**bold, connected, and determined.**

**Thank you.**