



Session Report

Wildlife Economy Side-Event

SADC TFCA 25th Anniversary Conference and Summit

TITLE: Unlocking the Potential of Wildlife-Based Economies for Livelihoods and Regional Prosperity

DATE: 21 May 2025

TIME: 08:30 – 10:30

VENUE: Rainbow Hotels, SADC TFCA Summit, Harare

THEME:

Advancing the SADC Wildlife Economy Strategy through policy alignment, investment innovation, and community-led models to drive sustainable development in SADC Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs).

ORGANISERS/Hosts: Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC); African Wildlife Economy Institute, Stellenbosch University (AWEI) and African Leadership University-School of Wildlife Conservation (ALU-SOWC)

PRESENTERS & PANELISTS:

The session started with opening address and keynote by GLTFCA International Advisor Mr. Gwinyayi Muti, followed by purpose of the side event remarks by Dr. Thabang Teffo - SAWC Nature Based Economy Lead. Ms Irene Mhlanga (Senior Research Assistant) presented the ALU-SOWC project focusing on the state of wildlife economies in the Kavango-Zambezi Region. A Panel discussion was then convened - Looking into TFCA initiatives and challenges around Wildlife Economy and Livelihoods Initiatives and programmes.



PANEL DISCUSSION

Facilitator: Dr Wiseman Ndlovu

PANELISTS

Mr. Aubrey Maluleke – Makuleke Contractual National Park Coordinator

Mr. Robert Nyamini – GLTFCA Programmes Officer

Mr. Cornelio Miguel - Mozambique TFCA Focal Point

Mr. Michael Molaodi – Botswana TFCA Coordinator

Mr. Gwinyayi Muti – GLTFCA International Coordinator







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AUDIENCE: 120+ attendees from SADC member states, NGOs, private sector, Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities (IP&LCs), and development partners.

KEY OUTCOMES

1. *Policy Harmonization:*

- Calls for aligned regional policies to enable cross-border wildlife trade and investment, addressing disparities in national frameworks.

2. *Investment Mobilization:*

- Highlighted blended finance and de-risking tools to attract private capital for community-led enterprises (e.g., eco-tourism, bioprospecting).

3. *Community Empowerment:*

- Successful models like Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE** and South Africa's Makuleke 80/20 benefit-sharing underscored the need for institutionalized community roles and equitable revenue distribution.

4. *Innovative Practices:*

- Kruger National Park's wildlife by-product value chains (e.g., jewellery from bones/skins) demonstrated scalable economic opportunities.

5. *Challenges Identified:*

- Trade barriers (e.g., Chipinge-Chimanimani border inefficiencies) and health risks (e.g., lead contamination in elephant meat) require urgent action.

EMERGING PRIORITIES (From Audience Engagement)

1. What is needed to scale wildlife economies in TFCAs?

- Policy harmonization
- Community capacity-building
- Transboundary trade facilitation
- Evidence-based impact metrics

2. Key opportunities?

- Blended finance mechanisms
- Youth innovation hubs
- Cross-border certification schemes

3. Barriers to address?

- Fragmented governance
- Lack of accessible funding
- Limited technical skills

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Conclusion and Next Steps

The OECM side-event at the SADC 25th Anniversary Conference and Summit, held on 21 May 2025 at Rainbow Hotels in Harare, served as a pivotal platform for advancing the SADC Wildlife Economy Strategy. Under the theme "Advancing the SADC Wildlife Economy Strategy through policy alignment, investment innovation, and community-led models to drive sustainable development in SADC Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs)," the session illuminated the transformative potential of

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wildlife-based economies as a cornerstone for sustainable livelihoods and regional prosperity. The rich discussions underscored a shared recognition that the wildlife economy transcends mere conservation it represents a profound opportunity to redefine rural development paradigms across the SADC region. In harmonizing policies, mobilizing innovative financing, and centring community-led models, the session charted a clear path toward equitable and sustainable growth in TFCAs, while addressing critical challenges such as trade barriers and health risks.

Key outcomes from the session highlighted the urgent need for regional policy alignment to facilitate cross-border wildlife trade and investment, as disparities in national frameworks continue to hinder progress. The emphasis on blended finance and de-risking mechanisms opened new avenues for attracting private capital to community-driven enterprises, such as eco-tourism and bioprospecting, while successful models like Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE and South Africa's Makuleke 80/20 benefit-sharing framework demonstrated the power of institutionalized community roles in ensuring equitable revenue distribution. Innovative practices, such as Kruger National Park's wildlife by-product value chains, further showcased scalable economic opportunities that could be replicated across the region. However, challenges such as inefficiencies at borders like Chipinge-Chimanimani and health risks from lead contamination in elephant meat underscored the need for immediate, coordinated action.

Audience engagement revealed emerging priorities that will shape the future of wildlife economies in TFCAs. Scaling these economies demands policy harmonization, enhanced community capacity-building, transboundary trade facilitation, and the development of evidence-based impact metrics to measure success. Opportunities such as blended finance mechanisms, youth innovation hubs, and cross-border certification schemes were identified as critical levers for growth, while barriers like fragmented governance, inaccessible funding, and limited technical skills were flagged for urgent resolution. These insights collectively reinforced the session's overarching message: the wildlife economy is a catalyst for inclusive development, but its potential can only be unlocked through deliberate, collaborative, and innovative action.

Moving forward, the session galvanized a resolute commitment to actionable next steps that will sustain the momentum generated. The development of a SADC Wildlife Economy Implementation Roadmap stands as a cornerstone initiative, set to integrate peer-to-peer learning in 2025, alongside the training of champions and the launch of pilot projects to test and refine scalable models. This roadmap will serve as a strategic blueprint, ensuring that the insights and priorities identified during the session translate into tangible outcomes for SADC member states, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IP&LCS), and other stakeholders. By fostering a collaborative ecosystem that bridges policy, investment, and community empowerment, the SADC region can rewrite the narrative of rural development, positioning TFCAs as engines of economic and environmental resilience for generations to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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