

COMMUNICATION IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

THE ROLE OF NGOs

I. Background

In studying the communication strategy and approach of wildlife conservation organizations, partnerships and networks stands out as the key elements for effective outreach and development. Each of the organizations is a network that acts as part of a larger network to accomplish wildlife conservation work. Manuel Castells (2009) defines a network “by the program that assigns the networks its goals and its rules of performance” (p. 20). Each organization is a social actor with a set of values and interests that interacts with other social actors with the same goals to assist in preserving wildlife. Internet, satellite and other technological advancements have assisted in globalizing these networks and helping to create new effective strategies for wildlife conservation. The power of globalization as “network power,” lies in their ability to mutually exchange ideas and program strategy. While networks and key partners play a part in the ultimate shared goal of conservation organizations, different organizations conduct program work differently based on the size and influence established by each organization. Castells notes that based on communication ability, networks cooperate or compete with one another (p. 20). Although as AWF notes, competition does arise between the top executive leadership of each organization who all want their particular organization to succeed above the others, on regional and local levels the strategic participation of each organization is used to effectively protect these animals and stop poaching. As WCN notes, with the rise of ivory poaching, collaboration has become even more essential to saving wild elephant and rhinoceros populations. This section of research will examine WWF, WCN and AWF, observing the scope of program development based on the

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strength and extent of each organization's network. It will determine how these transnational actors use communication and program strategy to influence government and perceptions of wildlife.

II. NGO Case Studies

A. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

WWF, is a global organization with more than 1300 ongoing global conservation projects. ("WWF - History, People, Operations," 2012). It is one of the largest conservation organizations with about 2500 full time employees. As part of its mission to conserve 15 of the world's most important natural places and protect nature by 2020, it works in the field and with government to protected endangered species. The organization notes that the majority of its work would not be accomplished without partnerships. WWF breaks its partnerships off into three categories: corporate, humanitarian and marketing. In working with businesses, WWF works to help companies minimize their ecological footprint and use sustainable business solutions. The organization also has smaller NGOs administer projects on-the-ground, as well as sponsors that assist in promoting and raising awareness to specific causes.

The WWF approach to elephant conservation involves reducing conflict between elephants and local communities. Elephants are often killed because they wander into the fields of the local community, killing their crops and profit. The organization assists in training local wildlife managers and communities to create a "flying squad" that propels wild elephants away from farms and back into their natural environment. ("WWF – African Elephant Programme," 2012). WWF works with wildlife managers and helps

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them utilize technology to protect their crops and create elephant monitoring techniques. The goal is to provide elephants with enough space for their seasonal movements while at the same time protecting the agricultural economy of the local community. Another approach WWF uses in Kenya and Namibia, is to create a wildlife tourism sector that allows for communities and elephants to live together side-by-side.

In response to elephant poaching, WWF has partnered with the government in Mozambique to create the Quirimbas National Park. This park encompasses more than 2300 square miles of miombo woodland for elephant preservation. Park guards are trained to thwart the efforts of poachers. WWF also conducts training for staff in Lao, Cambodia and Vietnam to assist in protecting elephants. Together with Fauna and Flora International, WWF developed a national elephant action plan that was adopted by the Vietnamese government. WWF also partners with international wildlife monitoring network TRAFFIC in helping to decrease major threats from the illegal ivory trade.

a. WWF Communication Outreach:

Regional offices work on-the-ground to implement various training and protection projects WWF conducts. These field officers in each location are also the advocates who speak to local governments and communities. On a wider scale, WWF's large size assists in the construction of its communication strategy. Of the three organizations studied, WWF's website demonstrates the most interactive and user-friendly content and information. As such the communication focus of the main office appears to be in educating the Western public about wildlife issues and garnering Western support. Under the media relation's page on its website, WWF even has a separate press contact for emergency calls. Its media relation's page is comprised of conservation news and

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stories that are updated as much as twice a day. WWF's website has an active social media component including the "donate a tweet a day" feature that allows supporters to retweet one of WWF's constructed outreach tweets. A Facebook campaign cosponsored with TRAFFIC, keeps supporters updated on all of WWF's developments.

In reaching a Western audience and gaining support, WWF wants them to make a difference by donating, volunteering and encouraging others to live green. WWF also wants people to sign petitions, pledges and send emails as a way show a surplus of support for their causes that will lead to additional pressure on government and decision makers' actions concerning wildlife.

B. Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN)

Based in California, WCN is a "global network of individual conservationists who are working on the ground with species." (Tracy Elsen, WCN Marketing & Communications Manager, personal communication, Nov. 2012) The organization acts as a venture capitalist for entrepreneurial conservationists who need donor funding. It works within its network to accomplish its goals. The group's extensive network includes wildlife groups, corporate partners and media groups. Each partner has its own communication and marketing strategy, which WCN works to support. In working to protect elephants, Wildlife Conservation Network partners with WildAid and Save the Elephants (STE). STE is a non-profit founded by Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton. Dr. Hamilton is credited with producing groundbreaking research on his study of elephant behavior in Tanzania. His work in the 1960s helped to raise support for more elephant research and conservation. In his current attempts to protect wild elephant populations, Dr. Hamilton regularly speaks with the media, this year he testified in front of Congress

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and in partnership with WildAid, hosted Chinese former basketball star Yao Ming at his elephant camp in Kenya in 2012. . ("AP – Ex-NBA Star Yao in Kenya for Poaching Awareness," 2012). Unlike its partner, although WCN recognizes the importance of government outreach, it focuses its communication strategy on donor outreach. The group works to support their partners with “fundraising, marketing, strategic planning, human resources.” (Tracy Elsen, personal communication, Nov. 2012) In addition, WCN is working to strengthen the ties between San Francisco-based donors and conservationists. The annual Wildlife Expo, which brings together over 800 people with more than 20 speakers and exhibits, is essential to strengthening those partnerships.

Through its various partners, WCN works on the ground to combat wildlife trafficking. Local projects often incorporate “alternative income programs,” that hire local residents. These programs subsequently transform the perspective of wild animals from destructive to a source of economic empowerment. In addition, programs incorporate children through educational outreach. Local communications strategies have community culture and outreach deeply embedded. Many of our programs have alternative income programs, such as ecotourism in the Himalayas program created by Snow Leopard Conservancy, or ranger programs such as those created by Niassa Lion Project that employ local people, that transform the perception of these animals from destructive to animals that create local economic opportunities. Children are also an important part of education; many of our programs include school outreach.

WCN creates local public spheres through the Snow Leopard Conservancy’s PhotoVoice project. This provides adults and children with cameras to take photographs of the most important things in their life, fostering dialogue and inspiring conservation

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solutions. Niassa Lion Project each year hosts Lion Days, a day of fun and celebration focused around the lion. Grevy's Zebra Trust employs local Samburu warriors to monitor the zebra herds and collect data, and other warriors become Ambassadors, providing security for the zebras. Cheetah Conservation Botswana works with local farmers on stock management techniques as well as training of livestock guarding dogs. All of this community outreach is a key part of not just the communications strategies of these partners, but their full conservation strategies, as well. WCN recognizes the importance of communicating understanding to the communities it works in. In order to assist endangered species, a two-way conversation must be established to protect animals and reduce wildlife death while still respecting and valuing local communities.

b. WCN Communication Outreach:

WCN focuses its communication efforts on connecting donors with entrepreneurial wildlife conservation groups that need funding. This communication outreach works to serve its main purpose as a venture capitalist or a hub that inspires innovation in protecting wildlife. Its team is much smaller than WWF and its website is much less interactive. The primary purpose of the website is to introduce WCN and highlight the wildlife conservation groups it strives to support. WCN's conservation entrepreneurs work on the ground to collaborate with local communities and target the needs in the community. They then work to balance the needs of local people with local endangered species.

C. African Wildlife Foundation (AWF)

AWF focuses its conservation efforts specifically in 14 African countries and has a staff of more than 120. It is a well-known and established organization in Kenya, with

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little name recognition elsewhere. Staff members have direct contact with wildlife park workers who frequently spot poachers attempting to steal ivory. In aligning with its goal to empower both African people and wildlife, AWF contributes educational and development support in the countries it works in, including educating and training for future African conservationists and scientists. Similar to WWF, AWF also works with local communities in viewing elephant protection as economically beneficial rather than viewing elephants as a nuisance. Its plan includes ecotourism, agricultural production and marketing and a partnership with Starbucks that brings African coffee to the global market.

AWF assists in elephant conservation through research, including a wildlife census in the Kilimanjaro Heartland. The Zambezi Heartland, located in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, is home to one of the largest elephant populations in Africa. Starting with a research approach, AWF completed the first coordinated cross-country aerial survey of the area and counted all large herbivores. As a result of their efforts, governments in all three of the Zambezi heartland countries collaborated on a Regional Elephant Management Plan, which led to trans-boundary law enforcement.

Contrasting from the WCN, AWF's key partners are government organizations including USAID, the Royal Netherlands and several other European nations. In fact, the majority of AWF's funding comes from government. (Mayu Mishina, AWF Senior Writer and Publications Manager, personal communication, Nov. 2012) In addition, conservation foundations in Europe and several US zoos are also heavy supporters of AWF's work. Organizations that partner with AWF include Swedish Post Co, the Lottery

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Foundation, the Tiffany Foundation, the Mava Foundation and Endangered Species Chocolate.

c. AWF Communication Outreach:

Although AWF has no formal written communication strategy, its base in Nairobi, Kenya frames its communications outreach. (Mayu Mishina, AWF Senior Writer and Publications Manager, personal communication, Nov. 2012) Nairobi's staff is about 80 percent African, which allows for an easier communication with the local community. The goal is to demonstrate to the community that their commitment to African wildlife conservation comes from their own community, and is not solely propelled by Western faces and ideals. AWF is concentrated in Africa and so its key partnerships are with African governments, the US State Department as well as European governments and organizations. It also works with key international organizations such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank. AWF also recognizes that the demand focus is in Asia and has visited China and other countries to form partnerships there as well.

III. The "CNN Effect" as it relates to NGOs

One of the more dominant ways these conservation organizations influence government and popular opinion to bolster support for their goals is through media. As Elizabeth Hanson observes, media coverage often creates additional pressure on government to act on a given situation (p. 102). Recent international reporting on wildlife

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conservation conveys a message of severe vulnerability of elephants and rhinos worldwide due to illegal ivory trade and rhino horn market. AWF attributes the rise in foreign policy attention to large elephant deaths in Northern Cameroon. Prior to the mass killings in Bouba N'Djida National Park, less than 600 elephants were believed to live in the park. Elephants in northern Cameroon account for 80 percent of the total savanna elephants in Central Africa. WWF and TRAFFIC believe that the poachers were Arabic speakers from Sudan aiming to transport the ivory to Asia. In response to the killings, the Cameroonian military sent 100 soldiers into the park to protect the remaining animals from poachers. A few weeks after the military action, 12 suspected poachers were arrested and 14 elephant tusks were confiscated. France News 24 reports that the WWF had warned the government of the growing concern before the attacks.

Aside from this singular tragic incident, WCN observes media attention surrounding ivory trafficking has been driven by reports in *Vanity Fair*, the *New York Times* and the *National Geographic*. These reports have added layers onto the discussion, examining ties between the ivory trade and religion or to African warlords. Articles in the *Economist* and NPR have also been noted as well as documentaries on BBC and Discovery. Coverage in local papers in Kenya, Tanzania and other countries has grown as well. Celebrity support has also helped to spur media attention. After Yao Ming visited Kenya, he blogged about his trip in Chinese, which earned one million readers on his blog in a week. His actions address the demand-side in dealing with ivory trafficking and resulted in public service announcements in China as well as a possible documentary. In the case of the elephants deaths in Cameroon, increased pressure from conservation organizations and news reports assisted in eventual government action. Although

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increased action has resulted in face of media reports, can be argued efforts of these transnational networks themselves pushing their agenda been driving force to government action, rather than media itself. (Livingston, 2011). Worldwide the media is still an acquiescent power to state power. As Christy observes, ivory trafficking is a problem in countries where media is controlled by the government. As a result, reporting on illegal wildlife trafficking is left to foreign news outlets and local news sources can only refer to these stories (Bryan Christy, personal communication, Dec. 2012). In many countries where ivory trafficking is a problem (and much wildlife crime) the domestic media is government controlled. While these news organizations may be limited, even their limited attempts can have a positive impact on government policy. Christy's article in National Geographic allowed Malaysian news sources to refer to the issue which led to new legislation in Malaysia as well as the arrest of Kingpin Anson Wong and the temporary shutdown of his business. In the U.S., as wildlife conservation issues surface in the media, visible foreign policy action also ensues.