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Sustainable Hunting – Best Practices for Central Asia

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to meet you in Ashgabat and to be able to exchange ideas with you for two days. Some faces are familiar to me from earlier visits.

- Let me start with three questions to guide us into the scenario for today and tomorrow.
- Thereafter I shall differentiate three different property regimes respectively management approaches for wildlife and what the consequences for conservation are. You will find them in one form or the other in the country presentations.
- Finally I will outline the management practices that are indispensable for efficient wildlife conservation; some of which will be explained and discussed in more detail later today.

I.

Why have ... people from ... countries come together today and tomorrow?

Because we want to save, to conserve and to increase central Asia's wildlife: not only the iconic animals, but also the less spectacular ones. And if we succeed, we shall at the same time have conserved habitats, environments, wild landscapes and biodiversity in general.

Why do we want to conserve them?

Well, all of us love wildlife. Some like to look at it, some like to film it and others even like to hunt or eat it. In addition wildlife is a national heritage, something to be proud of, something with an intrinsic value, worth to preserve. But wild animals also play a crucial role in maintaining ecosystems. Their destruction is part of a greater degradation the

consequences of which everybody will suffer, our children and grandchildren more than us. But finally, wildlife is also a resource that can be utilized for the benefit of people, if it is done wisely. If the use is done stupidly, if it is unsustainable, if more is consumed than what can regenerate, then wildlife will disappear.

Is it right to kill wild animals?

Some of you might smile about this question. In Central Asia it is still rather normal to think about wild creatures in terms of food and hunting prey. In the Western world this is different. When you live in Hamburg or New York on the tenth floor of a high-rising building it is difficult to understand why it might make sense to shoot a mountain goat or what it means for a poor peasant, if a snow leopard takes all his goats. And there are powerful NGOs that make hundreds of millions of dollars out of animal-lovers. They drum into an uninformed public that it is sinful to kill wild animals and that all wild animals will flourish once again, if only pursuing them for food or profit is halted. Many of you might have followed the worldwide “shit-storm” skilfully pushed by animal rights campaigners about a lion that was poached by an American hunting client this summer. This campaign highlights what I mean. Interestingly they concentrate on Africa. Central Asia has so far avoided their attention. And even more interesting that many airlines, intimidated by the campaigners, have declared that they will stop transporting hunting trophies from Africa. However, they continue transporting hunting trophies from Central Asia. But this may change, if the “animal welfare organizations”, as they are called, see a chance to make headlines and profits from a campaign centred on your countries.

Whether to hunt or not to hunt is a question of personal belief, perhaps even of personal ethics. I could also say ideology, dogma, or creed. You believe in it or you don't. This is ok, as long as you do not force others to follow your opinion.

As far as hunting is concerned, I prefer to see whether it is supported by the international environmental conventions. And it is indeed.

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has the sustainable use of natural resources as one of its pillars, and this includes hunting. Several CBD statements of principles are relevant for the management of trophy hunting: most importantly, the Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity. These Principles are based on the assumption that it is possible to use biodiversity in a manner in which ecological processes, species, and genetic variability

remain above the thresholds needed for long term viability, and that all resource managers and users have the responsibility to ensure that such use does not exceed these.

- CITES included hunting in one of its very first resolutions, where it is said that even hunting for endangered species is in line with the convention, provided it contributes to the survival of the species. Today it supports the transport over international borders of hunting trophies and recognises hunting and other sustainable use in its livelihood strategy.

- The CMS equally recognizes the important role that sustainable use of wildlife resources can play in Central Asia. Such use can provide potential alternatives for the local livelihoods and engage the communities in wildlife management and conservation. A number of CMS instruments include recommendation on the sustainable use e.g. the International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Argali (2014).

Dear colleagues, I summarize: We stand on firm ground when we practice sustainable hunting as a tool to conserve biodiversity and to contribute to rural livelihoods and poverty eradication. Those who repudiate this must say where the revenues generated from wildlife should alternatively come from. I have not heard this even once from one of the campaigners in all the agitated publicity storms about hunting in recent months.

II.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

some eight years ago, when I was responsible for the Central Asia region in the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) I thought that the wildlife in this part of the world was in dire straits. Today I see this differently. Yes, there are problems. However, people here discuss solutions, reforms are being introduced, and there are success stories: some wildlife populations recover slowly from their previously low numbers.

The last two years have seen me deeply involved with wildlife in Africa, with efforts to boost anti-poaching. This was a deeply frustrating and depressive effort, mostly unsuccessful. In African wildlife ranges disaster reigns. The iconic wild animals, elephants and rhinos, are being poached into extinction. Lions and others might follow. The reason is an exploded demand in China and some other Southeast Asian countries for products

of rare species. Legal use of widely available legal ivory or rhino horn from farms in South Africa, which could have satisfied the demand, was mostly not available due to a worldwide ban. Consequently prices were skyrocketing. In view of the possible profits, organized crime has now taken over the business.

Let us see how we can stabilize wildlife management in Central Asia, before this deadly virus can settle in here.

There are three basic approaches to manage wildlife. They differ according to the ownership of game respectively the user rights and the status of the land on which it occurs. This has important consequences for decisions about the use of wildlife, in particular who derives the benefits, and for the management of sport hunting.

All three approaches are to be found in Central Asia, and they will be presented in the country studies. Let me try to analyse these three approaches and present them as structured models.

Model 1: The state as owner of wildlife

The state owns the land and consequently the wildlife. Or, it does own all game anyway, irrespective of the ownership of land. Often the game is also regarded as “res nullius” under Roman law. Nobody owns it, and the state therefore claims the right to decide about its use.

There are different ways how the state regulates the use of the game, mostly by direct licences, by granting leases of the land or concessions. In Central Asia this model is common, however, with exceptions.

Practical experiences from countries with weak executive powers of Governments or poor Governance prove that the state is mostly not in a position to protect the natural resource that it owns. Generally, the State is not a good manager or entrepreneur. This is also valid for the wildlife sector. Often the state also sets negative incentives. The rural people bear the disadvantages, the costs and the opportunity costs of game, but do not derive any benefits. A particular problem are the state organisations, established to protect and administer this public resource. Mostly they are underfinanced and understaffed and cannot do the job properly. Often staff is poorly motivated or exploits the resource themselves without suffering penalties. In all such cases poaching prevails, and often this results in eradication.

Efficiency can be improved, if the state decides to lease out the resource use, as it does in Kazakhstan with the concession system that is a true innovation in this part of the world. In such a case, however, conditions and rules must be set in a way that the private users, apart from executing state responsibilities at their own costs also derive benefits. This is not the case in most concessions in Kazakhstan. The system is therefore in danger of stalling.

There is one largely successful example for state ownership of game. This is the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. The wildlife is held as a public trust, irrespective who owns the land. Commercial hunting and the sale of wildlife is prohibited in order to secure sustainability. Hunting is allowed as a citizen right and is allocated by law and in a democratic way as an opportunity to all. The user pays. Just licence fees and taxes amount to 3 billion USD a year. By reinvesting such payments for conservation, this model has been extremely successful in conserving game and wild habitats. However, the situation in North America is very specific and this system cannot be transferred to other parts of the world. In fact the system inherited for citizens' sport hunting in many post-soviet countries is based on similar principles and under the conditions of poor governance, weak law enforcement and lack of obedience to the law it has contributed to disastrous declines in wildlife populations.

Model 2: Private ownership of wildlife

Wildlife can be the property of the landowner or it is a "res nullius" that becomes the property as soon as it is killed in accordance with the law. In order to safeguard sustainability of use certain legal regulations on the take-off must be in place. It is also advisable to have minimum area sizes in order to be allowed to use. Whereas in Denmark owners of three hectares of land may hunt, in Germany such smallholders would have to join a cooperative of at least 150 hectares of land. In larger hunting areas the sustainability of off-take is normally better.

Let me give two examples that show the potential of this model:

- 50 years ago in South Africa there were three game ranches, half a million head of game and four species (all figures approximately) nearly extinct: black wildebeest (34 animals left), mountain zebra (11), bontebok (17) and white rhino (28). Today there are over 12,000 private game ranches covering over 210,000 sqkm – more than three times the area of all national parks and reserves in the country. And there are 19 million head of game. The mentioned four species have increased

approximately by the factor 500, including over 20,000 white rhino. Resident hunters pay 375 million € and foreign hunters pay 70 million € to the game ranchers for the privilege to hunt on their land.

My second example is Germany, a highly industrialized country of only 360,000 sqkm. The private ownership of land model safeguards high numbers of wild animals as reflected in an annual harvest of about 1,2 million roe deer, 500,000 wild pigs and 150,000 other large hoofed animals.

The secret behind the success of both cases is the economic incentive system facilitated through the model.

Model 3: Collective ownership of wildlife

There is a third model, which has been in existence for centuries, but science has ignored it until Professor Elinor Ostrom described it and received the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economics for her work. In many rural areas wildlife like forest, fish, water or other natural resources are used collectively by many individuals in common. The resource might be owned by the state or – at least in the perception of people – by nobody. We all know the dilemma that results out of this, and it is called “the tragedy of the commons”. People compete for the use of such common pool resources. Nobody feels responsible for the preservation, and everybody tries to maximise his or her benefits: “If I do to not take this bird or that tree now myself, somebody else will take it, and I shall not find it anymore tomorrow.” The result of this is overuse, depleted forests and extinct game.

The quick-fix solution is that the Government should intervene, but experience proves that this is mostly not successful. Interesting enough, communities have found sustainable solutions. My own home village is a perfect example, as we have managed our forests for centuries in such a collective way, and we still do.

Environmental economist Ostrom has shown that if users work together, community assets can be effectively used locally in self-administration. People cooperate, if they realise that unity is for their benefit. Overexploitation is not a natural law, but can be prevented by reasonable group rules and positive as well as negative sanctions. Wild animals remain common property, but through the self-interest of the users and agreements between them, the open access is restricted.

One of the most successful examples for model 3 has been Namibia. In the 1970ies the country introduced private ownership of game (model 2) on large private farms. The result was that wildlife multiplied there. However the indigenous African people lived on communal lands where the “tragedy of the commons” had driven game into extinction. The introduction of model 3 in these communal areas at the end of last century led to a great expansion of wildlife there.

We find all three models in one or the other form in Central Asia. Model one, the state as owner, is the common one. And it is one of the reasons why wildlife management is mostly poor. Kazakhstan has transferred not the ownership, but the management on a long-term lease basis to private individuals or companies. One could argue, whether this is still model 1 or already model 2. There are similar arrangements on a smaller basis in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In both countries, first attempts have been made to experiment with model 3, in the form of user-groups of local traditional hunters that collectively manage hunting grounds. In Tajikistan, where these pilots have been started since 2008, already first successes are visible.

The incentive that regulates use in all models are the economic benefits that accrue to the owners and/or the users. Possible uses of wildlife are

- meat and horns and skins: low revenue; danger of overexploitation
- photographic tourism: possible and lucrative only in few selected areas; low or medium revenue potential
- trophy hunting tourism: clearly the highest revenue potential with little ecological impact.

Central Asian countries are in the process to reform and improve their hunting industries in order to make them more efficient and sustainable and increase at the same time wildlife populations and revenues. The road map to this target must first include a debate of the different models and options. It is possible to introduce different models at the same time and in the same country.

After this, structural political decisions have to be made and, if possible, codified in the law. Then management has to be optimised. Every model demands its own management procedures.

III.

Therefore I am coming to the end of my introductory speech by pointing out the most important management issues for hunting. There is not the time to explain them here at any length. Some issues like monitoring,

quota setting or export regulations are covered later by other speakers. Much implementation work remains to be done in the follow-up to this conference. The GIZ Practitioner's Guidebook "How to... conduct trophy hunts for international clients" is an excellent example on how to achieve excellence!

Why are the best management practices so important? The answer is simple: Wrong practices kill the industry.

Two examples:

- If a Government multiplies the licence fees shortly before the hunting season starts, this will be disaster, as the forthcoming hunts have already been sold one or two years ago. The industry needs a dependable framework of Government rules and prices.
- If the companies earn on average hundred monetary units from the hunts they sell, but the Government requires them to do monitoring and counting exercises costing 50 monetary units or even more, you do not need higher mathematics to calculate the outcome. And this is even more annoying, if these exercises are of doubtful value.

Managing a hunting industry by the respective Governmental authority or managing hunting enterprises by the owners needs knowledge in the field of business administration. It is a special form of business management. This discipline was pretty much developed in the old Soviet system, but this applied to a centrally planned and Government-owned economy. These practices are not useful any more in a changed economic system.

We do not have to reinvent the wheel. This discipline has been pretty much developed in those countries where hunting plays a major economic role, i.e. in Southern Africa. There exists a specialised discipline and state of the art procedures for hunting management and economics and contents can easily be transferred and adapted to Central Asia. It would be great to have a respective textbook in Russian language. This book would covers issues as follows:

Duration of safaris, daily rates; fee structures; licences versus permits; hunting packages; marketing strategies; leasing of hunting areas and duration; conditions and fees for concessions; auctions, competitive tenders or other methods of allocation; qualifications of concessionaires and professional hunters; monitoring of wildlife numbers; different methods of counting wildlife; quota setting and planning of off takes: scientific, adaptive, precautionary; relationships with communities; reporting procedures; trophy handling and paper work; export

procedures (CITES); administering the hunting sector and the different stakeholders;

I could continue, but I will stop here, as my time is over.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Hunting is a business, no matter if done by a private commercial enterprise or by a non-commercial community based organization. With poor management the business will fail, and with good management it will produce profits. However, profits are not enough. Business has to be conducted in a way that at the same time the resource flourishes. And this requires that those living on the lands, i.e. the local communities feel the benefits. If this is the case, use is sustainable and business can be conducted in the long term. This is the goal. This serves best the interests of all stakeholders: the state, the land-owners, communities, hunting companies, professional hunters, clients – and last, but not least, wildlife and nature.

Thank you for your attention.