

THE human(e) IN conservation



Dr Julia Baum

Can
coaching
contribute



by Dr Julia Baum
and Isabel Wolf Gillespie

African bush elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), Chobe, Botswana.
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What does conservation mean to you? Does the word awaken images of wildlife and landscapes in you? Memories of a safari drive, a hike in a national park or a boat trip to an island?



There is more to conservation than the intrinsic beauty of biodiversity. Conservation involves people, it needs resources and it is an active effort. Conservation is a value system, a mindset, a behaviour that has to be understood, accepted, implemented and improved.

Conservation actors, such as managers of nature reserves, owners of eco-lodges, and founders of local livelihood and eco-enterprises are all faced with the challenge of having to be leaders. Leaders in their personal lives and leaders in their official roles with responsibility toward larger goals and results.

What do we mean by “being a leader” and how can conservation actors embrace it?

Leadership is the art and ability of an individual to influence, guide and facilitate others to achieve successful outcomes – most importantly in this context with the environment in mind – to sustainably meet the needs of our current societies without taking away the opportunity for future generations and life to prosper. Yet, leadership also means to invest in the well-being and development of oneself and the team.

Leadership is thus at the forefront of conservation. The severity of human-caused environmental impacts is no longer news to us,

and our existence should be shaped by paying critical attention to socio-ecological sustainability – ensuring rewilding of habitats, protecting forests, clean water sources, soil and species biodiversity, embedding nature-based solutions for livelihoods and companies, finding alternative options of energy production... the list goes on. Irresponsible leadership in many situations is the cause of bad choices and behaviour that result in negative impacts.

More responsible leaders are needed, leaders that have a prosperous and peaceful future at heart, and our aim is to contribute to supporting and equipping such leaders with skills and tools to make a positive impact.


“Our existence should be shaped by paying critical attention to socio-ecological sustainability.”





“All success is linked to a magic button, which we believe for our members is leadership development.”

In partnership, **PLCnetwork of the Southern Hemisphere** and **Earth Awareness** have therefore embarked on an exciting journey, with leadership development and conservation support at the core of our mission.

 In February-April 2022, we distributed a survey to the over 90 PLCnetwork members with the intention of gaining insights into their most pressing challenges and needs, and into what services, support and solutions we can possibly offer them.

In total, 35 responses reached us, which represented perspectives from eight different member types across 16 countries from the entire Southern Hemisphere.



The survey revealed a valuable dataset and we are astonished by how cohesively the cross-cultural and cross-border insights paint a bigger picture. Responses indicate that three overarching challenges are commonly experienced among conservation actors, namely:

- 1** lack of capital and resources,
- 2** human-wildlife conflict, and
- 3** long-term management of their property and projects.



Isabel Wolf Gillespie
Managing Founder: Earth Awareness

When asked which support is needed the most, our members raised that the greatest gaps, beyond looking for financial means, occur and need to be addressed in areas of capacity building and communication:

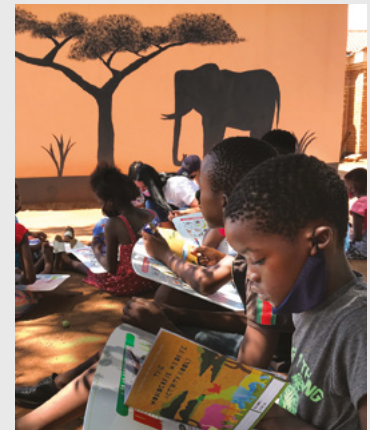
- ▶ Skills training (e.g., grant application, report writing)
- ▶ Coaching and/or advisory (e.g., creating long-term smart goals, team development)
- ▶ Networking (in-sector, in-country and beyond borders)
- ▶ Media-exposure assistance

Based on our preliminary findings, respondents further stated in more detail that solutions should be provided regarding networking and knowledge sharing, marketing

and branding, project and business strategy guidance, as well as team development, coaching and training.

Even at this early stage of our analysis, what shines through strongly is that assistance is needed in the human element of conservation. All success is linked to a magic button, which we believe for our members is leadership development.

John C. Maxwell once said, “a pessimist complains about the wind, the optimist expects it to change, but the leader adjusts the sails.” Conservation leadership enables the awareness to notice that the wind has changed and keeps changing continuously, and provides the necessary management skills of when and how to adjust the sails.



i During various conservation and humanitarian expeditions, Isabel connected with current conservation, political and tribal leaders in various African countries and foster knowledge-sharing between generations and nationalities.

In response to this survey, we are planning to provide our members with a series of diverse solutions to coach them toward flourishing as leaders, both in their personal and professional capacities. We will create offers including themed webinars, team development events, educational materials, knowledge sharing tools as well as the potential for on-site project support.

This, we hope, will encourage them to fully own their roles, further grow their strengths, address their challenges, enjoy their efforts, and ignite increased positive action to achieve positive impact. ■



What is PLCnetwork? Communication, Collaboration, Conservation

PLCnetwork of the Southern Hemisphere is a platform and consulting firm with a passion for private, community and company conservation action. Since its inception in 2017, PLCnetwork invites members to share knowledge, build partnerships and initiate projects. Through communication and long-term collaboration, we engage in nature-based solutions and community development. Our aim is to induce long-lasting social change for conservation.

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What is Earth Awareness? Personal, Hands-on, Committed

Earth Awareness is a philosophy, a way of life driven by an intrinsic passion to leave a valuable legacy behind ensuring the survival of this planet, its rich biodiversity and a better life for all. Our operating principles are built on sound ethics, believing that our work is valuable beyond financial gain. Our services range from environmental education and project management to leadership development and coaching.

Based on mutual respect, we collaborate and work with a variety of organisations and communities on environmental and humanitarian projects within Southern Africa.

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