



“YOU ARE BORROWING BEYOND YOUR MEANS” – BOTSWANA’S PRIVATE SECTOR WARNED

Botswana’s private sector had an awakening call that “we are all doing business with nature, but some only just borrow from nature”! Global assessments show encouraging progress in reducing poverty and creating jobs.



Gaborone dam (pictured above) and many of Botswana’s dam lack the investment in catchment area management to reduce siltation and pollution.
Source: <http://re-blended.blogspot.com/2013/05/gaborone-dam-and-hill.html>

For these, the private sector needs a pat on the back. A global assessment of the state of natural resources, on the contrary, shows a progressive decline in the health of ecosystems, reduction in wildlife lands and increasing threats of species extinction. So, the private sector may not truly have been prosperous but have simply borrowed from nature. Nations are therefore being motivated to forge coalitions between governments, private sector and civil society to ensure economic growth that can be sustained, is real and does not exist at the expense of the

natural and social capital. Botswana has been quoted for her success in balancing economic development with social and environmental development. This need not be take for granted. Her high unemployment rates demand more jobs.

Kalahari Conservation Society (KCS) took the lead in facilitating dialogue on how the private sector can generate even more jobs, grow the economy even faster and in perpetuity. The answer lies in how we do business with nature. KCS got the ball rolling for business of the environment and sustainable development with the private sector on Tuesday 11 July 2017 at Avani Hotel in Gaborone. The annual KCS Corporate Members Breakfast brought together the likes of Wilderness Safari and World Bank to mention a few under the theme “The Business of Nature”.

In his welcome remarks, the Kalahari Conservation Society Board Chairman and KCS founder Neo Moroka said that the gathering with the corporate marks the beginning of a partnership for sustainable development. He noted that the private sector are drivers of economies globally and they do that by converting natural and social capital into goods and services. A banker by profession, a Wildlife Biologist by training and a beef farmer, Mr. Moroka said that in its 35



KCS Chairman Neo Moroka giving speech at Corporate Breakfast

years of existence, KCS worked hard to protect some of the country's wildlife and wildlands. Some of its work includes establishing the Okavango Research Institute and identifying obsolete veterinary fences which were then causing wildlife mortalities while delivering no veterinary control functions.



KCS Board Member Mr. Ruud Jansen giving speech.

Delivering a keynote address, Mr. Ruud Jansen, a KCS Board Member and the Executive Secretary of Africa's Sustainable Development Secretariat said, "we are all doing business with nature". He challenged the private sector to look beyond just the balance sheet as we know it from auditors. Many companies in Botswana now know of the environment because of the requirement for conducting Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) prior to any major construction. This has been a good step because environment get discussed in the Board rooms, although as an impediment. Jansen argues that there is

more in nature. If we are only worrying about compliance, that is minimum, and so you're just barely surviving. You need to do more than just stay afloat, you need to be thriving in business. It is when you are accounting for all your inputs and investing in securing those inputs can you, as a business, now be set to thrive. If you are running a brewery, you are selling water with some additives. You need to be investing in water conservation so you have an assurance that you will have water of the quality and quantity your business needs. If not, how then do you convince your shareholder you are safe to invest on.

Mr. Jansen also shared how at a global scale, there has been progress in reducing poverty and creating jobs. That progress has however been achieved with immense depletion of the world's natural resources. "We are therefore running on a debt. We look successful because we simply went and borrowed money we still need to return". He noted that investments in protecting natural systems that offer us clean air, clean water and protected us from radiation, etc., need to be protected because the costs of not having these ecosystem services is too high. He added that we are not short of examples but of the inertia to move in the right direction. In the case of Botswana, Mr. Jansen cited Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) as a model for payment of ecosystem services. Local communities are paid (or given economic incentives) to conserve their natural habitats and wildlife and where they do, they reap immense benefits from tourism, from craft markets and cosmetic markets.

He advised companies to protect natural resources, maintain ecosystems in a healthy state and ensure that are globally recognized as environmentally friendly entities. "Communities may be paid for protecting ecosystem services (watershed function, forest cover, non-consumptive wildlife use), those functions are of direct value to business transactions, private sector interest (profit and risk considerations) and carry value," said Mr. Ruud.

KCS has worked with over 100 local communities in Botswana to conserve wildlife and wildlands and has seen households rise from poverty, gain improvements in sanitation, education, better diets and take-up funeral covers for their individual members. The effects were phenomenal and the motivation for conservation was boundless. KCS is also the secretariat of the Botswana CBNRM Forum and is involved in finding ways to expand CBNRM into other parts of the country including peri-urban environment where poverty is rife, especially among young people, unemployment is high and natural resources are fast being depleted as settlement expand.

“Botswana uses 50% of water on agricultural sector” he quoted. Mr. Ruud said the most important part of the breakfast meeting was the engagement of the corporate sector to address core areas of sustainable development. He offered the services of KCS and its experience in working with local communities in both rural and urban environments, to assist private sector in designing projects with long-term, visible and measurable results, which projects can then be financed through Corporate Social Responsibility funds.



Attendees at KCS Corporate Breakfast

Reacting to the keynote address, many of the guests agreed on how revealing the presentation was. On the specific comments, Deputy Director at Botswana Communication Regulatory Authority (BOCRA), Mr. Aaron Nyelesi shared the challenges of having to integrate both the social and environmental elements in the business of telecommunication. He explained how the communication infrastructure roll-out is being slowed by high rentals in tower-hosting and some landowners refusing to host towers and associated infrastructure. We are seeking partners to help in that missing link. Connectivity is needed by all but there are so many knowledge barriers and myths. From

Botswana Fibre Networks (Ltd) (BOFINET), Mabua Mabua said KCS needs a forum to teach people and push the agenda for potential projects that they can do together. Ms. Ewetse Rakhudu from Bank of Botswana expressed how important the meeting has been in dispelling that CRS is not all about issuing cheques but to invest in society. She said companies should run their businesses at the same time helping in conserving nature through long-term investments with defined results.

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