



**African People  
& Wildlife**



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **African People & Wildlife Joins the National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project**

November 18, 2021

**Arusha, Tanzania**—African People & Wildlife announced today its participation in the National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project as an invited partner in collaboration with the National Geographic Society and the Wild Bird Trust.

Since 2015, the National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project has been working to secure permanent, sustainable protection for the Okavango River Basin, which spans the countries of Angola, Namibia, and Botswana and is the main source of water for a million people. As one of Africa's richest places for biodiversity, the Okavango River Basin is home to over half of the remaining elephants on the planet, as well as populations of lions, leopards, wild dogs, buffaloes, giraffes, hippos, and rhinos.

“We are pleased to be invited into Angola to oversee the community engagement aspect of this exciting partnership,” said African People & Wildlife CEO Laly Lichtenfeld. “We look forward to working hand in hand with rural communities surrounding the Okavango-Zambezi Water Tower to support their vision for conservation today and for future generations.”

Kerllen Costa, Angola Country Director: National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project said, "We are excited to have APW join us in the field. I have found that their

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respectful and considered approach to communications is greatly appreciated by the members of the indigenous community."

The Okavango-Zambezi Water Tower, which begins in Angola, is the primary water source for the Okavango Delta. This region's vast landscape of lakes, peatlands, miombo woodlands, and rivers provides sanctuary for a high concentration of biodiversity and acts as a significant carbon sink. Protecting this water tower—known by the Luchaze people as Lisima Iya Mwono, or "Source of Life"—is fundamental to the future of the Okavango, Kwando, and Zambezi rivers.

The local communities have been resident stewards of the Lisima landscape for centuries and hold a deep understanding of the ecosystem as well as traditional knowledge about the source lakes, forests, and rivers. Over the coming years, African People & Wildlife will work together with these communities and other project partners through its ACTIVE® Community Engagement outreach program to co-develop programming that meets mutually identified conservation and sustainable development goals. Initial activities will include:

- Assessing community priorities to help inform programming linking conservation and development goals
- Ensuring a rights-based approach to land use by advocating for community ownership and management of natural resources
- Conducting social and economic surveys to identify opportunities for nature-friendly income generation

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African People & Wildlife's ACTIVE approach has benefited 35 communities across six conservation landscapes in Tanzania through educational opportunities, improved livelihoods and well-being, and a healthier environment while also helping critical wildlife populations to thrive.

“Our women’s group received training from African People & Wildlife so that we could start a beekeeping enterprise,” said Helena Mbarnoti, a member of the Women’s Beekeeping Initiative. “In addition to gaining entrepreneurial skills, we learned about the environment and all the ways beekeeping protects the trees and the land. Now many women in this landscape are successful business owners. Beekeeping benefits our families and allows us to educate our children while also conserving the natural world we depend on.”

Follow the partnership’s progress through the @africanpeoplewildlife, @natgeo, and @intotheokavango social media handles.

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