

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HONOURABLE GARBA DATTI MUHAMMAD, MEMBER, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, NIGERIA AT THE 4TH AFRICA ANIMAL WELFARE CONFERENCE – ACTION 2020 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE, 7-10 SEPTEMBER 2020

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you today at the 4th Africa Animal Welfare Conference, an event which literally brings together all the critical stakeholders in any discussion on animal welfare, wildlife, environmental conservation and sustainable development and to extend a warm welcome to all the distinguished participants.

At the pain of repetition, this conference comes up against the background of the global Covid-19 Pandemic, which has placed multiple obstacles in the way of our way of life. In that context, let me place on record my immeasurable gratitude to the organisers of the conference that, owing to our spirit of endeavour and innovation, the pandemic has not found the capacity to thwart our annual exertions in the pursuit of a functional, sustainable and fair planet.

The discussion is timely because although animals are no less important in the scheme for the existence and survival of man and the universe, they are regrettably always at the base in the hierarchy of concerns. In my country, a long standing conflict has existed between pastoralists and crop farmers. Much of the focus has been on the pastoralists, the farmers, the farmlands and the crops. Who has spared a thought for the animals? Little has been said of the impact of the conflict or denial of pasture on the cattle. With Covid-19 now, the only reference to animals has sadly been with respect only to animal to human transmission.

The theme of this conference revolves around conservation and sustainability. The latter, in the context with which we are concerned here, is said to be satisfactory if the “system or procedure ... is *acceptable now and if its effects will be acceptable in future*, in particular *in relation to resource availability, consequences of functioning and morality of action*”¹ (emphasis added). Animal welfare can hardly be overstated given the cruel and unusual punishment that animals are usually subjected to in our continent and elsewhere. The threats to wildlife are innumerable including the reckless and self-serving activities of poachers. The threats to environmental

¹D.M. Broom, F.A. Gallindo and E. Murgueitio, ‘Sustainable, Efficient Livestock Production with High Biodiversity and Good Welfare for Animals’, Proc R Soc. (2013) 280:20132025<<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/full/10.1098/rspb.2013.2025>> 25 August 2020.

conservation are similarly numerous including oil spills and deforestation. These components of the theme, therefore, have at their mutual core the sustainability of Africa's animal resources. So do Nature-based Solutions (NBS), a term popularised during the Climate Action Summit 2019 and which is increasingly expanding in scope depending on whether it is loosely defined or defined in a specialised sense.

And so the question - what is it about NBS? Globalisation and increasingly liberal market policies mean that transnational agricultural companies and corporations will have greater access to loamy African pastures with its cheaper labour force. The moral arguments for conservation will be shunted to the fringes of discourses on animal productivity. There has been long standing concern at the prospects of degradation that will have a bandwagon impact on animal welfare, wildlife and conservation. The seemingly loose concept of NBS encompasses several sub-concepts, which present a clear need for studies and enlightenment with respect, amongst others, to:

- (a) How it assists in emission reductions;
- (b) How to maximise yield while at the same time protecting rural communities and regulating all environmental contaminants and pollutants thereby preserving our key resources of land, water and air for the use of future generations;
- (c) The all-important question of the prevention of deforestation as well as reinstating our despoiled forests;
- (d) How to incentivise small and medium scale rural farmers (still a force in Africa's agricultural landscape), whose farming methods actually comparatively carry substantially less threat to conservation and consequently to wildlife;
- (e) The place of Agro ecology in our configurations going forward; and so on and so forth.

It is commendable that the theme of this conference underlines the neglected link between animal farming, wildlife and animal conservation on the one hand and sustainable development on the other. A group of erudite scholars critically note that the SDGs do not acknowledge the impact of animals towards their attainment. They state:

The contribution of animals in achieving the SDGs is not recognized nor made explicit. Nevertheless, there are obvious areas where animals play an important role in the context of sustainable development. These include for instance food security, transport, employment, and livelihoods. There are less positive effects of man's interaction with

animals also, as well as a number of drawbacks associated with continuous growth and intensification of the animal sector. These include challenges to the environment (gaseous emissions, water and soil pollution, and ecosystem damage), issues regarding animal welfare (animal abuse and negative consequences of intensive selection and production), and animal and human health (zoonotic diseases and inappropriate use of antimicrobials and anthelmintics) (emphasis added).²

Not a mention of animals in the SDGs! Take donkeys, for instance - according to some statistics, over six hundred million households in rural communities around the world depend on the donkey, which is now classified by the United Nations as “working livestock”, for their survival. Just donkeys. What about chickens, goats, cattle etc.? However, I prefer to see this enormous vacuum, upon which many might call the SDGs elitist, as an innocent lacuna. After all, even the elite eventually, if not invariably, interact with animals and livestock.

Yet, in a sense, these scholars merely understate the challenges. The SDGs do not only not mention livestock and animals, they also, consequently, do not mention NBS. Yet, NBS are not only those closest to the grassroots, they are almost the most favourable not only to the animals, but to us and our planet.

Ladies and gentlemen, this conference is clearly a fertile setting for the cross-pollination of far-reaching ideas on a selfless theme and I do not intend to bore you stiff with elaborate musings. The challenges are many but we are here to forge unity and engagement so that tomorrow humanity does not bite its tongue crafting convenient but ultimately pointless excuses for fatal inaction. I wish us happy and fruitful deliberations.

Honourable Garba Datti Muhammad

Member, House of Representatives,
National Assembly,
Three Arms Zone,
Maitama, Abuja.

² L. Keeling et al, ‘Animal Welfare and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals’, *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, October 2019, Volume 6, Article 336, 2<<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2019.00336/full>> 25 August 2020.