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[00:00 - 00:33] Man Narrator: [music starts playing] Welcome to protecting Hope stories of successful sustainable tourism. Join us as we travel the globe listening to impactful stories about how sustainable tourism to protected areas contributes to environmental conservation, local economies, and human well-being. This podcast is brought to you by the Center for Protected Area Management at Colorado State University[breathes], in partnership with the US Forest Service International Programs Office[breathes], and is supported by funding from the US agency for International Development.

[00:39 - 00:44] Woman Narrator: Episode 4: Inside Chaos We Have Hope with Gloria Mwangi.

[00:48 - 01:36] Ryan Fincham: Hello everyone. My name is Ryan Fincham. I'm the director of our Center for Protected Area Management at Colorado State University, and I'm going to be one of your hosts of this podcast... Protecting Hope[music stops]. Welcome back everyone to Protecting Hope, the podcast, where we share successful stories and inspiration about sustainable tourism around the world[breathes]. Today I'm with Gloria Mwangi from the Democratic Republic of Congo[breathes]. I have been in touch with Gloria for a number of years now. She participated in one of our training seminars in the US several years back, and then we invited her back to present[breathes] in our first Women's Leadership in Conservation Seminar online[breathes]. Welcome, Gloria. It's so great to reconnect. How, how are you doing?

[01:37 - 02:28] Gloria Mwangi: Hi, everyone. It's always a pleasure to be part of the Process of Hope[breathes] and the sustainable tourism process. So as, uh, Ryan introduced me, my name is Gloria Mwangi. I'm one of the[breathes]... promoter of sustainable tourism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo[breathes]. I have been in the industry for the last ten years whereby[breathes], uh, I will be promoting, uh, the guerilla conservation[breathes] while allowing the rest of the world to come and visit and contribute to sustainability of its environment, by the environment. Um, seeing the surrounding communities as well as the lands which need to be protected[music starts playing].

[02:29 - 02:47] Ryan Fincham: And so you- it sounds like you've- one of the things you've done recently, um, is started a, a non-profit organization, an NGO. That's, that's working in this kind of conservation and sustainable tourism space. Um[breathes], what, what you want to tell us a little bit about that NGO and what you all are working on, what your future plans are.

[02:47 - 04:10] Gloria Mwangi: So, um, after working for such a long time for the government[breathes][music stops], I just feel like you can get what you want because of all these long procedures. And as you know, my country[breathes], sustainable tourism is not one of their priorities because they are dealing with war on one side or on the other side. They are just, you know, they have in common quite a number of[breathes] emergencies. So, uh, we decided to start up an NGO which aims on gender and sustainable tourism, as well as wildlife conservations. Uh, we aiming on transforming or on transforming poverty into opportunities. So when you are around protected areas[breathes], most of the villagers are farmers. But unfortunately they really don't know how to farm and they start growing food which are going to be consumed by the... wild animal[breathes]. And this will bring about, you know, conflict instead of, you know, facilitating the collaboration between the, uh, the park rangers or management and the surrounding communities.

[04:10 - 04:28] Gloria Mwangi: So we train these, uh, farmers, mostly women and youth, on how to[breathes] which are the good... or better types of, uh, uh, of, uh... agriculture type. I don't know, my English-

[04:28 - 04:28] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[04:28 - 04:29] Gloria Mwangi: Is like-

[04:29 - 04:29] Ryan Fincham: Yeah[laughs].

[04:31 - 04:31] Gloria Mwangi: Yeah.

[04:31 - 04:31] Ryan Fincham: Yeah, yeah.

[04:31 - 04:32] Gloria Mwangi: So we-

[04:32 - 04:34] Ryan Fincham: The different crops, the different crops they might consider.

[04:34 - 04:34] Gloria Mwangi: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[04:35 - 04:35] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[04:35 - 06:00] Gloria Mwangi: That they might consider so that we may reduce the human and wildlife conflict[breathes]. On the other side, we train the youth to be guides... in the protected areas around us. So we empower them on the[breathes] tourism management principles on languages and also sometimes communication skills so that they might be able, you know, to assist, or to do the guiding for... tourists. Unfortunately, uh, I can say that Covid... affected our plans and strategies, which is, you know[breathes], which is, uh, with happened like all over the world[breathes]. And we are yet to recover because, uh, suddenly all the borders were closed and[breathes] due to tension in the region, we have really... noticed that not many people are, you know[breathes], coming in the country. That's why we like change the strategy[breathes]. So we are now mobilizing more nationals, you know, to kind of get involved and come and visit or appreciate what they have instead of waiting for tourists coming from, uh, outside the outside the country[breathes].

[06:00 - 06:29] Gloria Mwangi: So for the future, we, uh... would like to have like[breathes], a training center where we can just train volunteers or... I don't know how you know surrounding communities on different topics, on sustainability, not only about tourism[breathes], but about sustainability and the peace restoration.

[06:30 - 06:30] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[06:30 - 07:21] Gloria Mwangi: Um, and this, uh, may allow them to, like, heal or to understand that, yes, they have been victim, but there is a life after being victimized or after, you know[music starts], after the trauma and everything that my people have been suffering here. Let me give you

an example, which is like a success story for us. In 2020, we had conflicts between the natives. We call them "pygmies" here and the "rangers" [music stops]. So the natives were claiming that the land is theirs and they don't want people to come around. They don't want people to come and, you know [breathes], uh, disturb or... eat their land. I mean, which is theirs.

[07:21 - 07:21] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[07:21 - 07:41] Gloria Mwangi: But unfortunately, most of these rangers are also from the surrounding communities. So how do we balance it? So in the morning, you wear uniforms. You are a ranger. In the afternoon, you come back home and you are about to be killed by your people because you are the one, you know, working for the other side, you know?

[07:41 - 07:42] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[07:42 - 08:18] Gloria Mwangi: And thanks to tourism. So we introduced the- I mean a Friday where youth will come and visit for free. The guerillas. We are always having a number of 14 people coming in [breathes] and we are doing like education showing them why we have to protect for the next generation why we are doing what you're doing, what we believe in while we are sacrificing our energy and resources, you know, to protect the wild life.

[08:18 - 08:18] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[08:18 - 08:48] Gloria Mwangi: And after six months, I think we had like 80% of the villagers coming in and going out. We started noticing a difference. So there could be the one explaining to others, you know, during riots or whatever, there will be some people among the villagers will be the one explaining to others that, you know, they are doing whatever they are doing is not because they love it. It's just because they- it's their passion.

[08:49 - 08:49] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[08:49 - 09:36] Gloria Mwangi: They are protecting for us [breathes]. And you could see the other side effect of, you know, climate change and everything. So I can say after... after here, this community's accepted to sit down and discuss with the park [breathes] on like, uh, you know, an agenda on how to end the conflict, how to work together [breathes]. And for us, this is a success story because [breathes] it didn't happen suddenly. It was a process. But I think... most of this conflict we have in and around protected areas, it's because we have neglected the power of communication. We have neglected that [breathes] if these people come in and understand the purpose of whatever, we are taking action [music starts playing], you know?

[09:37 - 09:37] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[09:37 - 09:44] Gloria Mwangi: They might be involved and be great partners so that we can also achieve the expected outcomes.

[09:45 - 10:00] Ryan Fincham: If a protected area becomes viewed, especially by local communities, as a place that's really only available for those people that come from far away [breathes], you don't have much incentive to want to contribute to its protection if you feel like it's for others, not for you [music stops]. And so this idea-

[10:01 - 10:01] Gloria Mwangi: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely.

[10:01 - 10:15] Ryan Fincham: Of opening up the protected area and providing specific opportunities for them, for the local people to realise and enjoy [breathes] the benefits that those protected areas have and make it more user friendly for the locals first.

[10:15 - 10:15] Gloria Mwangi: Yeah.

[10:15 - 10:20] Ryan Fincham: And then think about the international tourism. I think that's a fantastic approach.

[10:20 - 10:21] Gloria Mwangi: Yeah, that's the point.

[10:21 - 10:40] Ryan Fincham: Yeah. In all your work, I know you've worked for the government and now you work for NGO, and you've done a variety of different kinds of activities. Um[breathes], what are, what are some or one of the key lessons you've learned about sustainable tourism[breathes] from your work over the years that you think might be, be of interest to share with our listeners around the globe?

[10:41 - 12:07] Gloria Mwangi: Sustainable tourism is my passion, so I can talk about it the whole day[breathes][laughs]. But what I've learned the most is that... I was born in a country which has a very bad reputation. You know, when you Google about it, all you hear is war, rape, riots, and so on. And I know many countries, many people around the globe will share the feeling with me if they have been in such kind of environment, but what the media hasn't been telling us that inside all the kills and everything, we have... hope... and we can help natives, citizens or, you know, uh, visitors to come in and appreciate what is left or what nobody is talking about[breathes]. So I've seen people have mobilized people around the world about my country, and I've seen that communication is the key[breathes]. When you communicate with passion, when you can take people genuinely to come and understand the purpose of all your actions. I mean, people come in. I've seen, I can say, out of 10 people who have been in there, nine will go in press.

[12:07 - 13:31] Gloria Mwangi: They have memorable time. They will always be ready to advocate positively for the country[breathes], comparing to those ones who have never been here[breathes]. So for me, it brings me hope. Um... because I know that[breathes] if one day we open the borders, if one day we allow citizens to come and understand why we have to protect our country[breathes], not just because we have gold or resources, but also because we have[breathes]... natural resources, wildlife resources. We can appreciate the nature[breathes]. So, uh, the other point, the other... aspect of it is that[breathes]... we're so busy with our lives. You know, you wake up in the morning, you start rushing all over. We don't have time to appreciate what the Mother Nature has just offered to us[breathes]. So I think... the hope I have is that people can call, cool down, you know, take time to appreciate what they have around[breathes], and even to explore what they have around, because Covid has taught us that yes, we can do tourism. But not only visitors from abroad are tourists, even citizens.

[13:31 - 13:43] Gloria Mwangi: You know, they can also be[breathes] visitors and they can contribute, sustain the effort of, uh[music starts playing], what life conservation in their country.

[13:45 - 14:08] Ryan Fincham: In the beginning of the call, you also mentioned, um, your work and your interest in, in gender, uh, in women empowerment. Um, in the DRC, I wonder if you could tell me a little bit more just briefly about why you have this a focus? Uh, why, why is it important for you and your[breathes], your NGO to have this, um, women empowerment focus[music stops]?

[14:10 - 14:46] Gloria Mwangi: Yeah. Thank you for the question. First of all, I'm a woman, so I'm being selfish[laughs]. But apart from that, I'm saying young girls don't have access to school[breathes]. And I'm seeing some other women leaders who have such brilliant ideas and skills. But since they did not go to school, they don't know how to express this properly[breathes]. And on the other side, it's because of the domestic violence aspect of the women.

[14:47 - 14:47] Ryan Fincham: Mhm.

[14:47 - 16:13] Gloria Mwangi: These women don't have the autonomy to sustain their lives, so they end up in early marriages, poor marriages, and this affects the community. So most of the time, uh, when you want to reconcile wildlife conservation and gender equity or, I don't know, gender activities[breathes], you'll find that women are at the key center of the actions. They are

the mothers. They have the kids[breathes]. So if you want to have change tomorrow, if you want a next generation with different ideas, we need these women to be empowered[breathes]. First of all, to have resources to be able to sustain their families. Secondly, to understand the purpose of why, you know, conservation action are being taken. And thirdly, is to allow these women to be able to speak up[breathes]... and not to be seen as passive actors in the process of restoring hope and, you know, and, uh, sustainability in their societies. But at least[breathes], at least if we get them to be active, we empower them with resources... skills, this will allow them to be part of the process.

[16:13 - 16:26] Gloria Mwangi: So for me, women play a bigger role not just at the motherhood, but they are really at the center of the communities and they can help us achieve, uh, our goals.

[16:26 - 16:37] Ryan Fincham: And I don't think it's being[breathes], being selfish. I think it's, uh, it's pulling back the power because, uh, the power has been[breathes], uh, too imbalanced towards men all over the world. And I love what you do.

[16:37 - 16:38] Gloria Mwangi: Absolutely.

[16:38 - 17:11] Ryan Fincham: And, and building this equity, uh, path forward is, is so important just from a, from a humanity perspective[breathes]. But it also obviously has, um, so many other potential benefits for, for our countries as a whole[breathes], for women individually, for our protected areas and for our wildlife. And so I really commend you on that work. It's, it's not easy work. It can be very difficult, especially[breathes] when trying to break, um, kind of cultural paradigms that have existed for a long period of time. So[breathes], um, definitely wish you, uh, best of luck in that, in that arena. It's, it's very, very important. Well, I-

[17:11 - 17:13] Gloria Mwangi: Thank you Ryan.

[17:13 - 17:51] Ryan Fincham: Yeah. And, and, you know, Gloria, I think, you know, we can- I'm sure we could we could talk forever. Like you said, we both love sustainable[laughs] tourism so much, but I really just want to thank you for your time today. I want to wish you the best of luck with your, with your NGO, with all the work, with the communities[breathes], uh, with the women in, in these, uh, in these communities around protected areas with the youth[breathes]. Um, there's so much positive work to be done. I also invite our, our listeners to, uh, to, um, to have a closer look at the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, and see all of the amazing opportunities that it has to offer[music starts playing]. Um, so thanks so much, Gloria, for joining us.

[17:52 - 18:04] Gloria Mwangi: Thank you so much, Ryan, and thank you for having this, uh, idea of protecting for hope, sustainability, and hope for the future. It's such a great topic.

[18:05 - 18:16] Man Narrator: Thank you for listening to Protecting Hope. To find links and resources from today's episode, visit the center for Protected Area Management's website or follow us on Instagram and Facebook.

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