



AFRICA CHANGE MAKERS

Learning from the impact of the Covid shutdown, a new collaboration in the safari industry seeks to permanently address funding for conservation and community projects. By **Sue Watt**

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together..." This African proverb has been a mantra to Zimbabwean safari operator Beks Ndlovu throughout his professional life. Today, it's more relevant than ever.

Some 25 years ago, as a private guide in wilderness areas, he saw the "challenging imbalances" facing rural communities and wanted to make a difference. "I couldn't do it on my own" he told me. "I needed to have more guys on board, and more ambassadors rallying behind Africa."

Today, he employs over 600 people in his company African Bush Camps (ABC), with 17 lodges in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana. Its charitable arm, African Bush Camps Foundation, currently supports over 40 projects benefiting thousands of people in community development, education, and conservation, funded essentially through tourism.

But tourism is a fickle friend, as proved when Covid reared its ugly head. International travel ground to a screeching halt, simultaneously drying up vital funding for

ABC's projects and for those supported by safari operators throughout Africa.

Covid wasn't the first crisis to hit the continent, and it won't be the last. But it exposed like never before the vulnerability of Africa's people and wildlife when such calamities hit.

So how could the industry meet these challenges next time?

In conversations around this conundrum, the Africa Change Makers movement was born. Its four founding members are ABC and Chilo Gorge Lodge in Zimbabwe, Ultimate Safaris in Namibia and Gondwana Private Game Reserve in South Africa.

Another 14 partners have already joined, with more to follow.

"We want to shape a different industry, to be prepared for the next crisis, and ensure that organisations in Africa can continue their amazing conservation and community work," Beks said.

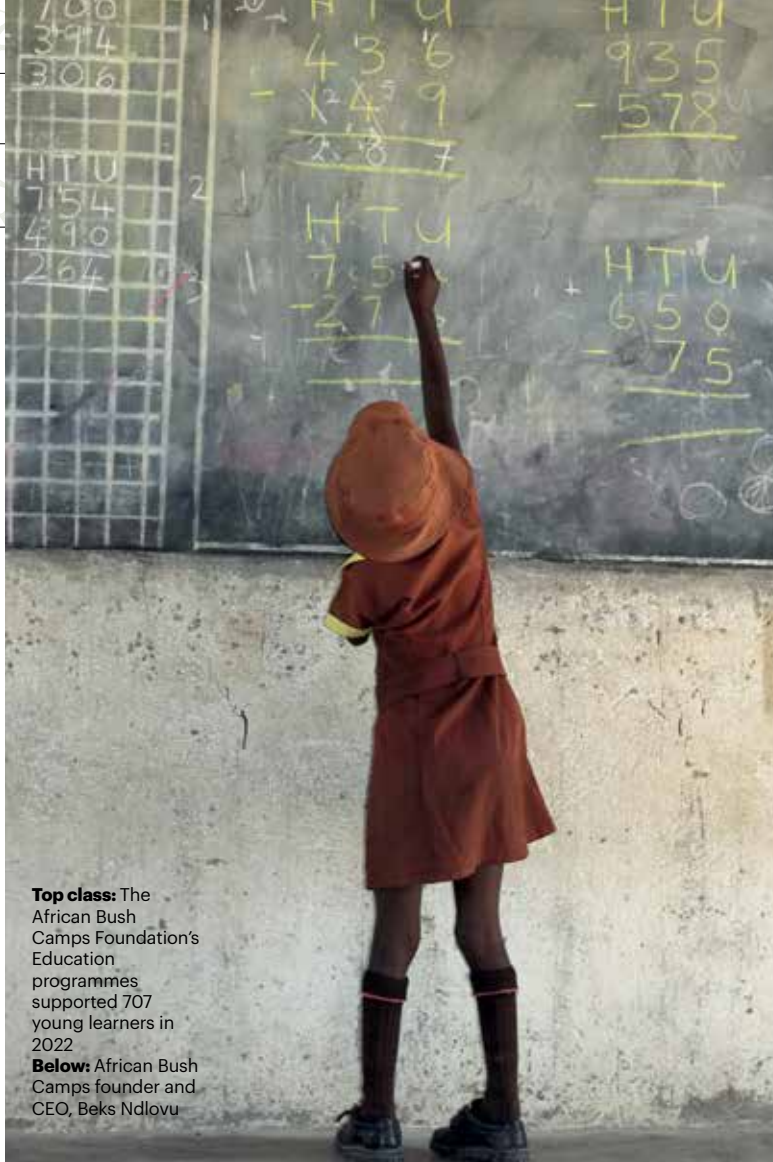
The concept is simple: partners including tour operators and safari

properties will contribute US\$5 per bed-night booked to a resilience fund — paid by the businesses rather than as a guest levy. This accumulating 'war chest' will come into play when that next crisis hits. It doesn't sound like a lot of money, but then the power of collaboration kicks in.

"In 2023, ABC has potential to book 30,000 bed-nights at \$10 each. That's \$300,000 for the emergency fund we never had before," Beks explained. "By 2025, with two or three new camps, we're projecting 50,000 bed-nights a year. With Ultimate, Gondwana and Chilo alone, we'd have at least \$10 million annually of conservation capital to build a resilient future for our communities."

As for clients, Africa Change Makers aims to raise their awareness "about the challenges of Africa and the meaningful contribution they can make through travelling wisely." By choosing partners from the collective, Beks says, they too "are part of the power of collaboration that stems from the shared passion and concern for the continent we all love."

africachangemakers.org



Top class: The African Bush Camps Foundation's Education programmes supported 707 young learners in 2022

Below: African Bush Camps founder and CEO, Beks Ndlovu



BELOW: CHILO GORGE SAFARI LODGE; LEFT: AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS

Top left: For every night a guest stays at any ABC camp (like Lolebezi, pictured), the company gives US\$10 to the operational costs of the African Bush Camps Foundation.

Right: A community liaison officer from Chilo Gorge Safari Lodge in southeastern Zimbabwe. Chilo was a pioneer in community conservation in the early 1980s

Below: Camp Sossus, one of Ultimate Namibia's camps. Ultimate contributes 2.5% of all commercial revenue to conservation projects

Bottom right: Kwena Lodge, one of the accommodation options at Gondwana Private Game Reserve in South Africa, which supports the Gondwana Conservation Foundation



LEFT: ULTIMATE NAMIBIA; RIGHT: GONDWANA PRIVATE GAME RESERVE; OPPOSITE AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS (2)