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UK Aid Cuts Threaten Wildlife and Community Rights Abroad

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UK conservation charities have raised serious concerns over government cuts to the international aid budget, warning that these reductions risk severe damage to vital programmes that protect both fragile ecosystems and the rights of vulnerable communities overseas.

The government's decision to reduce foreign aid spending from 0.7 per cent to 0.3 per cent of gross national income (GNI) has led to significant funding losses for nature and conservation projects. This has direct consequences not only for wildlife but also for the human rights of local populations who depend on these environments for their livelihoods and wellbeing.

One organisation deeply affected is African People and Wildlife (APW), which carries out conservation work in Tanzania. Dr Laly Lichtenfeld, co-founder of APW, explained that two major projects supported by UK aid have been impacted. The first focuses on protecting Lake Natron, an essential ecosystem hosting vast flamingo breeding grounds. This project includes grassland restoration and sustainable grazing practices, enabling local communities to live in harmony with nature and adapt to climate change.

The second project addresses human-wildlife conflict, particularly with elephants and large carnivores, providing practical tools to help communities manage and reduce these often dangerous encounters.

Both projects received funding through the UK government-backed £10 million Darwin Initiative. However, uncertainty over future support has left these critical programmes at risk, with funding for one project ending in March 2025 and the other expected to run out later this year.

Lichtenfeld highlighted the wider impact: "When aid cuts happen, you're not just dismantling a project, you're dismantling an entire ecosystem of support for wildlife and the rights of many African communities." The charity anticipates grants this year to be about 50 per cent less than last year, forcing difficult decisions on reducing essential activities.

While APW identifies as a human rights organisation, it sees community-led conservation as a key way to advance both environmental protection and human rights. Ensuring local people can maintain access to natural resources, manage conflicts safely, and adapt to environmental changes is crucial for their social and economic rights.

Similarly, the Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), which has worked with communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo for over 30 years, fears the impact of reduced funding. Its current Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)-supported project is due to expire in 2025, with bleak prospects for renewal. FPP warns that support for nature and

climate from the UK and other donors is likely to decline, jeopardising long-term community wellbeing.

In light of these challenges, conservation groups are striving to cut costs, seek new funding, and maintain vital work. Lichtenfeld said: “It will be a difficult few years, but our dedicated team is committed to keeping these efforts alive.”

This situation highlights the vital link between UK foreign aid policies, environmental conservation, and the protection of human rights overseas. Cutting funding not only threatens wildlife but also undermines the rights and livelihoods of some of the world’s most vulnerable communities.