Conservation and development 2.0: Intensifications and disjunctures in the politics of online 'do-good' platforms

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ABSTRACT

An increasing amount of interactive '2.0' crowdsourcing platforms raise awareness and funds for conservation and development projects worldwide. By enabling two-way online collaboration and communication, these 'conservation and development 2.0' platforms hoped to provide new impetus and popular legitimacy for conservation and development initiatives in the face of budget cuts and general criticism of the 'formal' aid sector after the financial crisis. This paper presents the case of the flagship 'elephant corridor' project on the Dutch pifworld.com platform to investigate whether and how the '2.0' element has changed conservation and development in line with these expectations. The paper describes and analyses online and offline dynamics of the project and shows that while online excitement about the project remained high, the concomitant conservation and development promises and imaginations ill related to offline local realities. This rather 'traditional' conservation and development disjuncture, however, needs to be understood against the system peculiarities of the politics of online 'do-good' 2.0 platforms. The paper concludes that as these peculiarities are significantly intensifying and changing conservation and development dynamics, they do not elude familiar (1.0) disjunctures and might even obscure these further from sight.

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1. Introduction

Conservation and development dynamics, interventions and politics have rapidly become entangled with the rise of online 'web 2.0' technologies. These 'co-creative' technologies have enabled a transformation from mere ('1.0') consumption of online information to two-way or '2.0' communication over the web, whereby information is simultaneously produced, consumed and circulated or 'shared' (Barassi and Treré, 2012). Following these trends, we see a parallel rise of 'conservation and development 2.0': online platforms or organizations that make use of 2.0 technologies to raise funds and awareness for conservation and development projects, issues and interventions. By enabling two-way online collaboration and communication, 'conservation and development 2.0' platforms hoped to provide new impetus and popular legitimacy for conservation and development initiatives during and after the financial crisis of 2007–2008, in the face of budget cuts and a more general decrease in (popular) legitimacy for

(formal) aid sectors in many donor countries (see Bergeijk et al., 2011).[1] Moreover, new online media were also believed to democratize conservation and development by allowing everyone to become part of discussions and change processes, and so radically transform relations among and between aid givers and recipients. In this way, 'conservation and development 2.0' would also challenge much political ecology and development studies literature that has shown that policy and practice, or rhetoric and reality in conservation and development habitually sit at odds with each other and that these are often given in by stark aid hierarchies between givers and recipients (see Quarles van Ufford, 1988; Lewis et al., 2003; Mosse, 2004, 2005; Li, 2007; Benjaminsen and Svarstad, 2010; DeMotts and Hoon, 2012; Milne and Adams, 2012; Büscher, 2013; Fletcher, 2013; Kepe, 2014).

The question that I want to address in this article is whether and how the '2.0' element has been able to change more 'traditional' conservation and development initiatives and dynamics in the ways hoped for by its proponents. I will do so by presenting the case of the 'elephant corridor project' on the Dutch Pifworld platform, which

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[1] In the paper, conservation and development are both seen as part of the broader 'aid sector' or, more in tune with the language of online platforms, ways of 'doing good'.

entailed the crowdsourcing of €430,000 for the establishment of an elephant conservation and migration corridor from Chobe National Park in Botswana via the Caprivi Strip in Namibia to the Kafue flats in Zambia.[2] The elephant corridor project and the broader Pifworld platform are part of the 'conservation and development 2.0' trend as they enable two-way communication and aim to establish co-creative 'communities' that actively pursue conservation and development objectives. While giving their support to the project on the Pifworld website, online givers – called 'players' – could leave comments behind, chat with and support other players and further share and like comments or other things happening on the site. This enabled players to co-construct ideas and imaginations of elephants and conservation landscapes in southern Africa and so construct natures that were partly but not entirely of their own making (see also Luke, 2001). The elephant corridor project was therefore also a 'nature 2.0' initiative as defined in the introduction to this special issue: a new online form and manifestation of what political ecologists refer to as 'second nature': "a nature that is *humanly* produced (through conceptualization as well as activity) and that therefore partakes, but without being entirely, of the human" (Biersack, 2006: 14; cf. Büscher, 2016).

The analysis of the 'elephant corridor' case, however, shows that while online excitement about the project remained high, the conservation and development promises and imaginations ill related to offline local realities. Moreover, the article shows that the contradictions around the elephant corridor project had little to no influence on how the Pifworld platform and various 'players' continued to jubilantly portray the project online. These, of course, are rather 'traditional' conservation and development disjunctures and hierarchies, in line with the above-mentioned literature and especially Mosse's (2004: 663) conclusion that contradictions and tensions in 'the field' often do not influence policies, practices and discourses in donor contexts.

It would, however, be wrong to conclude from this that nothing has changed when it comes to conservation and development 2.0. These rather familiar disjunctures, I argue, should be understood against the system peculiarities of online 'do-good' 2.0 platforms. Crucial, therefore, is to start the paper by introducing and theorizing the system peculiarities of online 'do-good' platforms within broader contexts of conservation and development. This is the aim of the next two sections. After subsequently presenting the elephant corridor case, the paper will conclude by emphasizing two points: first, that while the 2.0 'system peculiarities' are significantly intensifying and changing conservation and development dynamics this does not mean that they elude more 'traditional' (1.0) disjunctures; and second, that the intensifications brought by the politics of online conservation and development 2.0 platforms might obscure these disjunctures further from sight.

2. Online 'do-good' 2.0 platforms

Around 2008–2009, many online 2.0 platforms and initiatives oriented towards developmental or environmental causes emerged and started competing with established nongovernmental organizations.[3] In this section, I focus on several prominent platforms orig-

inally listed on the 'Online Pioneers for Good' site, which sought to connect and promote "online front runners in creating a better world".[4] While very diverse, what united these platforms was their innovative use of new interactive web 2.0 tools to pursue development cooperation, environmental conservation or general social giving objectives. Moreover, many of them marketed themselves as being different from 'traditional' non-2.0 conservation and development organizations. The 1% Club, for example, refers to this trend as 'international cooperation 2.0'. Organized around the idea that if we all spend 1% of our money, time and energy to doing good things the world would be a better place, one of its directors argues:

> "Through the website you can choose yourself which projects you want to support, so you know exactly where your 1% is going. The website combines Web 2.0 elements with the rise of people and organisations who want to contribute to development cooperation, and is therefore really in itself a form of International Cooperation 2.0".[5]

In an interview, the director of another platform, Wiser Earth, also reflected on the difference the 2.0 dimension makes:

> "The importance of technology is that if you are in Africa, or in slums, you can still be connected. There they use it as well and get in touch with other likeminded people and share best practices and so further their cause much faster. This is all to prevent double work – there is now an amazing wealth of info that is community driven, and everything is open source".[6]

And as a final example, a staff member of the Givengain platform, which promotes itself as a 'social movement connecting activists and causes',[7] describes what changed when conservation and development "went into the '2.0 mindset":

> "What I also see is an incessant (positive) need for the global community to connect, and the more we are connected, the better we can solve our problems – the more we can get to the right information to make the right decisions. Our platform is not yet used in the optimal way by all users, but you need access, tools, time, and understanding to make that happen, just like all tools. So that is exciting – I think we are living in an interesting stage in a development as human beings, thanks to these online tools now available".[8]

In sum, these new 2.0 platforms believed (and some still do) that they could radically change conservation and development dynamics by using co-creative, interactive web 2.0 technologies to facilitate global connection and communities and so democratize and more efficiently solve conservation and development issues. This feeling was also very strong at the start of the main case-study platform for this paper, the Pifworld platform. Like the other organizations, Pifworld is an online platform that enables online citizen or 'netizens' to 'do good' through interactive online media tools. It was founded around 2007–2008 by a former investment banker who was tired of investing in "all the things wrong for the world, coal, oil, etc." and so he "quit his job, found investors, and started pifworld".[9] In the beginning, the idea behind Pifworld revolved around 'playing it forward' (PIF), which was explained as follows:

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[2] Since 2010 I have followed Pifworld and the elephant corridor project online, regularly making print screens, and taking down notes as to the development of the website and the project. My methodology came close to, but was no 'netnography', but rather a multi-sited ethnography that included both online and offline components. Hence, I also did interviews with people behind the organization and went to the site of the elephant corridor between Botswana and Zambia four times to conduct local interviews and do participatory observation. In the reference to websites online, I have noted the original dates when I downloaded printscreens so as to show the development of the project and the Pifworld website over time. Some of these links, therefore, are no longer active.

[3] See http://www.socialbrite.org/cause-organizations/ for a good overview, accessed 24 January 2015. See also Igoe, 2013.

[4] www.onlinepioneers.org, accessed 12 December 2012. This website has long been shut down, but evidence of its existence can still found online, for example on https://smallchangefund.org/blog/post/small-change-fund-featured-on-online-pioneers-for-good/, accessed 20 January 2016. The online pioneers website was the entry-point for much of this research and why I contacted the organizations presented in this section.

[5] http://www.1procentclub.nl/about, accessed: 17 August 2012.

[6] Interview director Wiser Earth, 4 April 2013, San Francisco, USA.

[7] https://www.givengain.com/, accessed 21 January 2016.

[8] Interview Givengain staff member, 20 December 2013, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

[9] Interview Pifworld executive, 6 June 2012, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

"Playing it forward is doing good in a simple way. Join Pifworld and invite three friends to do the same. It's power in numbers. If your friends also invite three friends and these friends invite three others we will reach the number of ten million people in no time. Together we could do almost everything, imagine the power of that!"[10]

'Doing good' involved many different things and never seemed easier: "Pifworld offers all kinds of projects: enable kids to go to school, free child slaves, protect endangered animals or even build a massive wildlife park".[11] One could pursue these things playfully online, and, according to the platform, 'feel good' afterwards. In the process, the platform received much attention in the media, and more and more players started crowdsourcing for more and more projects (though by far not the ten million that Pifworld believed would be reached 'in no time'). But Pifworld was never just about money. The platform, according to its founders, was "a tool to change the world - your way":

"Everyone has so much to give. And so much more than only money. With Pifworld you can change the world - your way. You want to do something in a way you feel adds real value. You want to do it in a personal way. But you also want share it with your friends. You want to have impact, but in an easy way. We give you these tools. On Pifworld you will find all kind of projects and charities you can donate to. But it is very well possible that your value is in something completely different than money. So we created different roles so that everyone can take part".[12]

While this basic idea has remained, the platform changed drastically over time. In the early days, the organization referred to itself as the 'online charity platform for the new giving' and, like the other platforms above, there seemed to be an atmosphere of being different, innovative, and having found a new method to do something for good causes and succeed where established conservation and development organizations had failed.[13] Anno 2015, this was no longer the case. Pifworld now referred to itself as the 'global network for a better world' and dropped the 'do good, feel good' slogan. The idea of being new and having found a key to success where others had failed had disappeared. There seemed to be more of a 'realistic' stance of what the organization can add to other, existing and sometimes long established conservation and development initiatives and organizations. Under the heading 'Change the world your way' it now stated:

"We can see current times – with real global challenges – as a barrier we cannot overcome. But at the same time the Internet enables us all to take part. How to create a better world if you are on your own? PIF World enables you to do good in a powerful and easy way – together with others."[14]

It seemed that Pifworld was now simply occupying a niche rather than trying to be revolutionary, something that appears to be the case for some of the other platforms, like the 1% Club, as well.[15] Within a period of six to eight years, the big promise of the 2.0 platforms largely dissipated, and even led to the demise of some platforms, including Wiser Earth and the overarching 'Online Pioneers for Good' website. Yet, and while the seeming exceptionalism of conservation and development 2.0 has risen and faded rather quickly, this does not mean that nothing has changed. To talk about online 2.0 platforms is in many ways different from 'conservation and development 1.0' organized predominantly around instrumentally choreographed and (formally) planned interventions, backed up by a professional development apparatus. Pifworld and related 'platforms for good' function quite differently. International cooperation 2.0, as the 1% Club states, is about co-creation and two-way communication between all actors through the Internet. In principle, everyone can start up a local initiative anywhere in the world and seek money for it, and Givengain, Pifworld, 1% Club and other platforms are explicit in encouraging people to do so. This remains the edge that 2.0 platforms believe they have over many established and/or 'traditional' aid organizations and what makes them worthy of people's time, money and attention. How then should we theorize the peculiarities of 2.0 do-good platforms, and how does that relate to the rise and fall of its proclaimed exceptionalism and promise?

3. Theorizing the peculiarities of 2.0 'do-good' platforms

In this section I explore and theorize the peculiarities of 2.0 'do-good' platforms and argue that behind these is an intensification of familiar development and conservation dynamics as well as several newer ones (see Nealon, 2008). I will elaborate on what I believe are among the most important of these and illustrate them by referring to some of the platforms mentioned above.

A first intensification is that online platforms, by in principle allowing everyone to fund *and* start conservation and development projects, radically increase the number of good causes, which (further) erodes "the basis for adjudicating between competing and multiplying narratives" (Andrejevic, 2013: 117). Whereas with pre-2.0 development cooperation it was often difficult to gauge the politics of the 'noble causes' one wanted to support, this becomes even harder on 2.0 platforms. All causes are presented as equally 'good' and the focus is on what 'you' want to support (Büscher and Igoe, 2013). Givengain, for example, boasts on its website that '119,432 donors, 3832 Cause campaigns and 9539 Activist projects' have been brought together through the platform to do 'extraordinary things'.[16] When one subsequently browses through the 1000s of campaigns and projects, it is very hard, if not impossible, to say which ones are better than others or will, for example, leave what type of impact. In this same vein, Pifworld's answer to the 'Frequently Asked Question' "Does Pifworld screen nonprofits or projects before they launch?" is illustrative: "Pifworld screens nonprofits, although we do not investigate a nonprofit's ability to complete their projects. Supporters ultimately decide the validity and worthiness of a nonprofit by whether or not they decide to support it".[17] 1% Club, finally, does a 'suitability test' but they also make it clear that project initiators and supporters are ultimately responsible for the running of and decision to support projects. This resembles a development marketplace: if online players, initiators or supporters buy (into) projects, validity, suitability and worthiness are assumed (cf. Farrell, 2015).

A second, related intensification concerns how 2.0 platforms enable people to co-create (narratives around the) the people and natures they want to conserve or develop. But important hereby is that "as users shifted from consuming mediated images to creating them, they gained a self-conscious, practice-based awareness about their constructed character" (Andrejevic, 2013:

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[10] http://www.pifworld.com/#/aboutpifworld, accessed 11 May 2010. Like any web 2.0 application, one could customize ones own prosumption of 'doing good'. For example, one is encouraged to "Pimp your Profile by uploading your photo and giving your motivation to play it forward".

[11] http://www.pifworld.com/#/aboutpifworld, accessed 11 May 2010.

[12] http://www.pifworld.com/aboutpifworld. Last viewed: 09 October 2012.

[13] Interview Pifworld executive, 6 June 2012, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

[14] https://www.pifworld.com/en/about/individual, accessed 24 January 2015.

[15] This is reflected, inter alia, in their business models, which are variations on the 'freemium' model whereby core services are free and additional services can be purchased or supported by businesses or investors See https://www.pifworld.com/en/faq, and https://www.onepercentclub.com/en/#!/pages/partners, accessed 17 June 2015.

[16] https://www.givengain.com/, accessed 23 January 2016.

[17] https://www.pifworld.com/en/faq, accessed 15 April 2015.

13). This, one might argue, is a good thing: it might lead netizens to not accept conservation and development projects at face value but to influence these, and even to start their own initiatives. All 2.0 platforms highly encourage this. The 1% Club, for example, states: "We enable you to raise funds and kick-start your initiative via your own network. We take care of administration and make sure you can effectively share your campaign with your network".[18] Yet this seeming politicization of doing good is, at the same time, a depoliticisation in that the focus is now even more on local, individual projects in the 'development marketplace' and even less on cooperative action (cf. Prudham, 2009).

Third, the co-creative aspect of online 2.0 platforms risks intensifying and encouraging an understanding of the public and the common as the sum of individual interests, 'likes' and expressions of support. This is not new and builds on a longer political trend already captured by Hannah Arendt in the 1950s and subsequently taken further through the neoliberal turn:

"public life takes on the deceptive aspect of a total of private interests as though these interests could create a new quality through sheer addition. All the so-called liberal concepts of politics (…) – such as unlimited competition regulated by a secret balance which comes mysteriously from the sum total of competing activities, the pursuit of "enlightened self-interest" as an adequate political virtue, unlimited progress inherent in the mere succession of events – have this in common: they simply add up private lives and personal behavior patterns and present the sum as laws of history, or economics, or politics" (Arendt, 1968: 145).

Online platforms for good have taken these dynamics several gradations further through their focus on what I call – inspired by Goldman and Papson (2011: 38) – the 'generic online you', which I conceptualize as the technologically mediated abstraction of a subject-object. I use the term 'subject-object' to indicate the tension between the importance attached to agency in target individuals and how technological mediation through web 2.0 technologies renders this agency a generic abstraction as part of a pool of objects (or 'you's') seeking to 'do-good'. In turn, it is the sum of these object-subjects that online platforms see as a broader 'public' or 'social' force for good. This, I argue, is how one should read Pifworld's more recent rendition of 'PIF' as 'pay it forward':

"In the movie, Pay It Forward, a young boy discovers a system to do good for others. After doing a good deed, the recipient must then perform a good deed for someone else. In this way, good deeds multiply endlessly and can have enormous potential to change the world. From the movie came the idea for a platform that provides the tools for people to connect and make a positive impact. PIF World has taken this concept and brought it online. On the PIF World platform individuals, nonprofits and companies team up to bring about social change."[19]

The fourth and last intensification here mentioned is perhaps the one that truly sets conservation and development 2.0 apart from its more traditional incarnations, namely the specific ways in which the above elements are 'technologically mediated'. The ecosystem of web 2.0 platforms is, crucially, built on digital technologies such as algorithms. One could even speak of the 'algorithmization' of conservation and development as individual online philanthropic and altruistic engagements are guided, influenced and informed by and through algorithms or similar online technologies. Basically, algorithms are procedural and calculative decision mechanisms or sets of rules that sort data and process these

according to particular modes of reasoning. Depending on these modes of reasoning, algorithms may provide different answers to the same question asked by different people. Similarly, different platforms based on different algorithms or other calculative software may incorporate different ideas about ideal natures to be conserved and what to suggest to online 'players' based, amongst others, on their browsing history (enabled by so-called 'cookies'). It is in this way that I refer to the 'technologically mediated' part of the 'technologically mediated abstraction of a subject-object' that sets the politics of 'platforms for good' apart from more traditional conservation and development politics.

These four elements – and arguably others not mentioned here – are crucial elements in a broader online 'politics of platforms' (Gillespie, 2010). A platform is like an online intersection, and the more actors, products, financial transactions and good intentions pass through, the more this can be turned into material and immaterial wealth and capital, and the more important a platform becomes. The 'politics of platforms', then, signifies the struggle of tapping into online ephemeral value circulation, for tapping into 21st century online incarnations of capital (see Büscher, 2014). And 'ephemeral' should be taken quite literally here: online 'traffic' can be redirected at any point in time and the use of a platform is never guaranteed, even for the most popular ones like Facebook or Twitter. It means that successful platforms – those that continue to attract attention, capital, and so forth – must continuously be reinvented, cleaned and updated (van Dijck, 2013). 2.0 platforms are therefore highly liquid forms of engagement, and their use for purposes of doing social or environmental good is equally liquid (cf. Bauman, 2000). As a consequence, the characteristics of new media within the contemporary capitalist context forces builders of platforms to focus, first and foremost, on the platform – often regardless of good intentions and objectives.

It is here, then, that 2.0 platforms loose their exceptionalism versus older forms of conservation and development. As we will see in the following section, the same disjuncture that Mosse criticized '1.0' development so effectively for – namely that policy and practice or rhetoric and reality are actually inverted – also haunts conservation and development 2.0 projects like the elephant corridor. We will see that while an online community was supposed to help conserve elephants and support local development in southern Africa, material elephants, their living environments and social effects started receding into the background and gave way to 'nature 2.0': a very particular conceptualization of the lives and plight of '100,000 elephants' that ill related to offline realities but significantly enhanced the popularity of the Pifworld platform.

4. The Elephant corridor project

"Elephants go!". Cheers for elephants are plenty on the elephant corridor project on www.pifworld.com around May 2010. One player congratulates her friend for becoming a player also and writes: "those elephants are very happy with your donation, thanks!!". Another player uses the 'support' function to show his appreciation for someone who just donated €10 and comments: "This update on Pifworld rocks! Thumbs up for making it happen! Now let's make that corridor happen too!". At the top of the page (Fig. 1), right below a picture of the globe with the Pifworld slogan 'do good feel good', we see a status bar indicating that so far €9190 has been donated, 3% of the overall target of €430,000. It seems that 'making the corridor happen' might take some time still (see Fig. 2).

In July 2012, the project got a break: the target counter jumped to 92% thanks to a €370,000 donation from the MAVA Foundation. One player – a director of the Peace Parks Foundation, the organization behind the elephant corridor project – responded to this
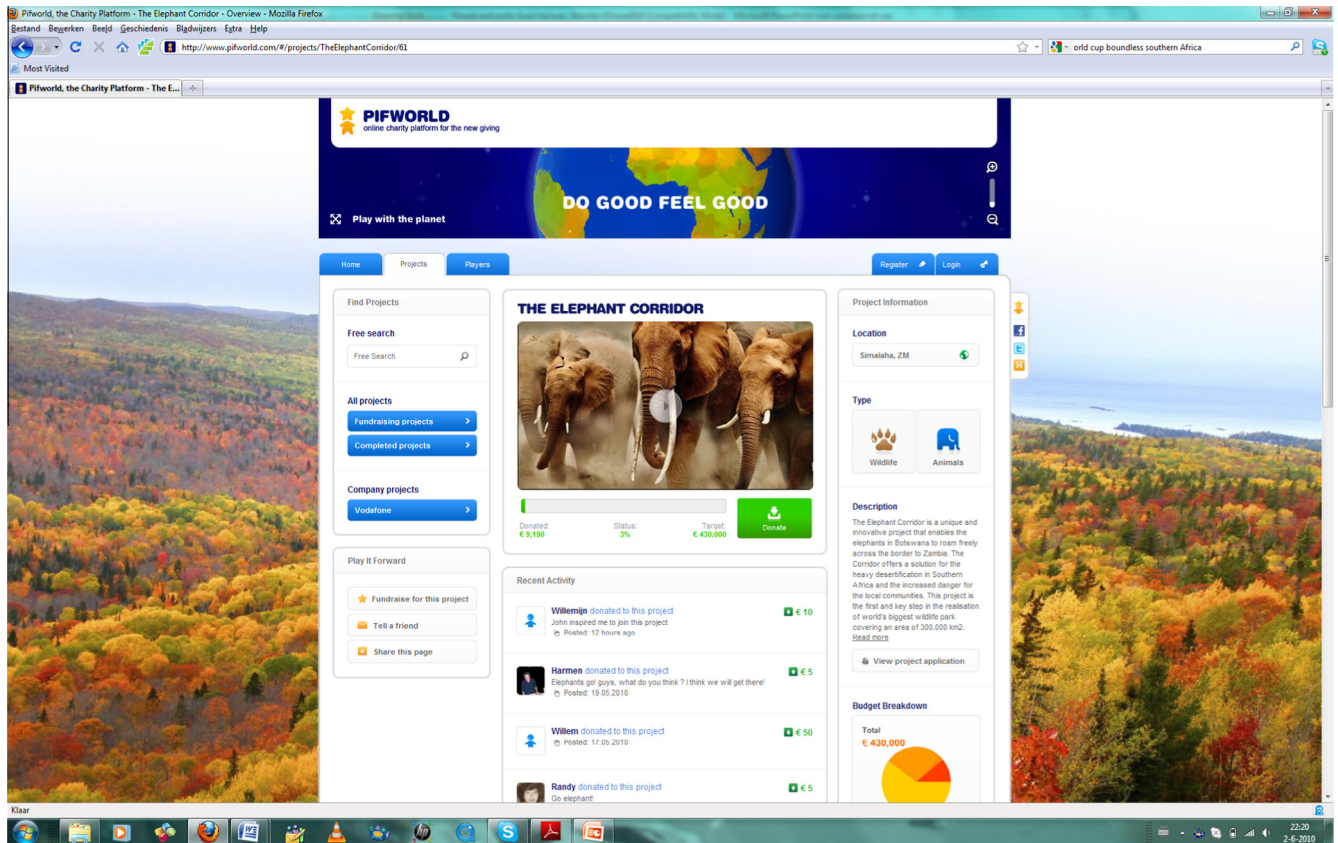

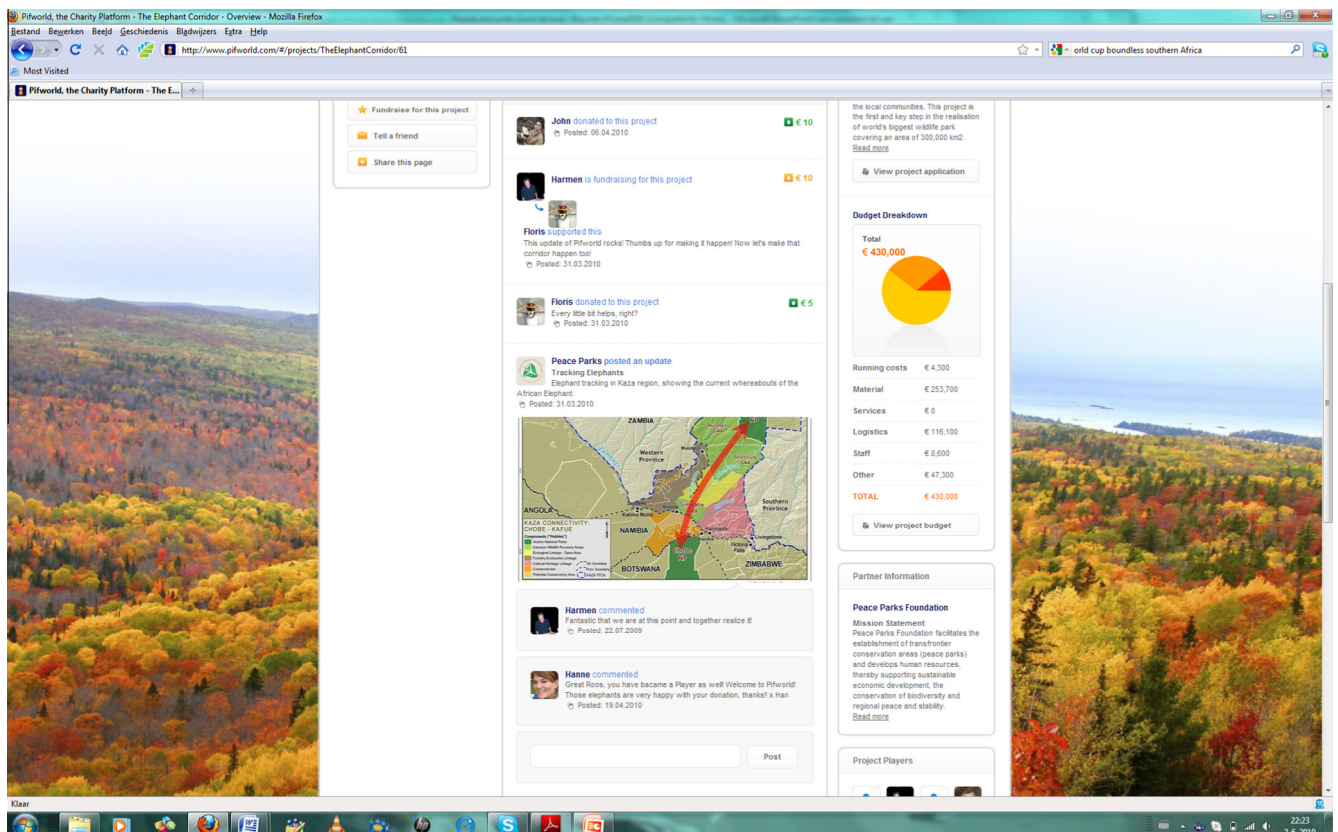**Fig. 1.** Screenshot of Pifworld.com elephant corridor project, August 2010. *Source:* pifworld.com.

Fig. 2. Screenshot of Pifworld.com elephant corridor project, August 2010. *Source:* pifworld.com.

donation by encouraging others to 'go the last mile': "We are almost there. Pifworld players lets go for the last mile. 100% after summer? lets go for it!". Other players, too, were excited and exclaimed: "let's get to the 100%!"; "Almost there, let's make the Elephant Corridor a reality!". But 'after the summer' of 2012 was too ambitious. It ultimately took until December 2013 before the counter would rise to €422,730 and the project was considered funded.

The elephant corridor was one of most important and visible early projects on the Pifworld platform. This was not because it was necessarily more important to save elephants than to help poor children or mothers with HIV, but because of the people and organizations behind the initiative and the way it was embedded in broader conservation and development dynamics in southern Africa. First, the elephant corridor was considered critical for the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) between Namibia, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. This TFCA is the largest of such conservation areas in the region and according to the official KAZA website "expected to span an area of approximately 287,132 km^2, almost the size of Italy (300,979 km^2) and include no fewer than thirty-six (36) formally proclaimed national parks, game reserves, forest reserves, game/wildlife management areas as well as intervening conservation and tourism concessions set aside for consumptive and non-consumptive uses of natural resources".[20] This meant that Pifworld was able to describe the elephant corridor project as the 'first and key step' in building "the largest wildlife park in the world". According to the Pifworld site:

"Let's build the largest wildlife park in the world starting with the Elephant Corridor to give room to 100,000 Elephants. So far, the project is crowd-funded by more than 500 supporters, 33 teams and 20 companies from all over the world. This is huge! What makes The Elephant Corridor so special? It is a unique and innovative project that enables the elephants in Botswana to roam freely across the border to Zambia. This project is the first and key step in the realisation of world's biggest wildlife park covering an area of 300,000 km^2".[21]

A second argument why this project was 'so special' is that it enabled Pifworld to link itself to Nelson Mandela, one of the co-founders of the Peace Parks Foundation. "Pifworld realizes Nelson Mandela's dream", was one of the earlier news headlines in relation to the project.[22] "Nelson Mandela Dreams of Elephant Corridors", was the title of a blogpost soon after the project came online in 2010.[23] The picture in Fig. 3 was circulated often. Being able to tie oneself to Mandela's legacy and name recognition is obviously good for publicity.

A third reason was that famous billionaire Richard Branson threw his weight behind the project. According to the website, when introducing the video that Branson taped in support for the project: "Sir Richard Branson is an ambassador of the Elephant Corridor campaign right here on Pifworld. In this video he tells you why and invites you to join him in realizing one of Mandela's dreams: Building an Elephant Corridor with people worldwide!"[24] Needless to say, this was again good for publicity: "Sir Richard Branson twitters for Dutch chari-entrepreneur", read a headline.[25]

Fig. 3. Nelson Mandela and the elephant corridor project. *Source:* pifworld.com.

The main reason that these links could be made was because the elephant corridor was a project by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), who were also the recipient of the money crowdfunded on Pifworld. PPF is a well-resourced environmental NGO, dedicated to supporting the establishment of TFCAs in southern Africa and backed by some of the wealthiest individuals and companies in South Africa and globally, including Branson.[26] The foundation was the brainchild of Anton Rupert, one of the wealthiest men in South Africa during this lifetime, and co-founded in 1997 on his invitation by Nelson Mandela and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands (Ramutsindela, 2007). Guided by the slogan 'the global solution', the PPF has been an influential player in environmental policy discussions in the southern African region and an astute marketer and fundraiser for peace parks (Büscher, 2013). The Netherlands has always been an important country for the PPF, as it gets consistent support from the Dutch Postcode lottery and Dutch actors. The link to Pifworld and its largely Dutch audience – due to it being based in Amsterdam and very much embedded in Dutch youth, corporate and NGO networks – therefore seemed apposite.

Since 2010, the PPF has been rather active on the Pifworld platform, providing general information about their activities and urging players to donate to the elephant corridor.[27] Fig. 4, which was posted on 31 March 2010 by the PFF,[28] shows what the corridor should look like. It draws a straight arrow from Chobe national park in Botswana via the Namibian Caprivi strip to the Kafue National Park in Zambia. From the map, therefore, it might appear as though the corridor is a straightforward project that would soon enable "100,000 elephants running to freedom" in order to "boost ecotourism in southern Zambia", according to the director of the PPF The Netherlands who was also active on the site, on 27 November 2012.[29]

Like the PPF and Branson, many players were very enthusiastic about the project, and they used the '2.0' co-creative functions on

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[20] http://www.kavangozambezi.org/about-us, accessed 25 January 2015.

[21] https://www.pifworld.com/en/projects/TheElephantCorridor/61#/about, accessed 25 January 2015.

[22] http://www.dutchcowboys.nl/online/19891, accessed 24 January 2015.

[23] http://www.gafawildlife.org/2010/06/30/nelson-mandela-dreams-of-elephant-corridors/, accessed 25 January 2015.

[24] https://www.pifworld.com/en/projects/TheElephantCorridor/61/blog/1106, accessed 25 January 2015.

[25] http://925.nl/archief/2010/06/17/richard-branson-twittert-voor-nederlandse-chari-entrepreneur/, accessed 25 January 2015.

[26] http://www.peaceparks.org/story.php?pid=1&mid=2, accessed 25 January 2015.

[27] And others, such as the 'specialised training for rhino guardians' project. See: https://www.pifworld.com/nl/projects/Specialisedtrainingforrhinoguardians/1795, accessed 25 January 2016. For an overview of their activities, see: https://www.pifworld.com/nl/nonprofits/PeaceParksFoundation/183, accessed 25 January 2016.

[28] http://www.pifworld.com/#/players/peace/854, accessed 11 May 2010.

[29] https://www.pifworld.com/en/people/loudon/155#recentActivity, accessed 25 January 2015. Note that the number of '100,000 elephants' is completely fictitious, as population estimates are notoriously difficult to make (Songhurst et al., 2015). Based on recent data, however, it is certain that elephant populations in northern Botswana are very large and that this leads to widespread 'human-elephant conflict' (Songhurst et al., 2015: 596; Gupta, 2013). Also interesting is that this PPF director, in a Dutch TV show, asserts without any hesitation (or evidence), that the corridor project will create '1 million jobs in tourism' and that local people in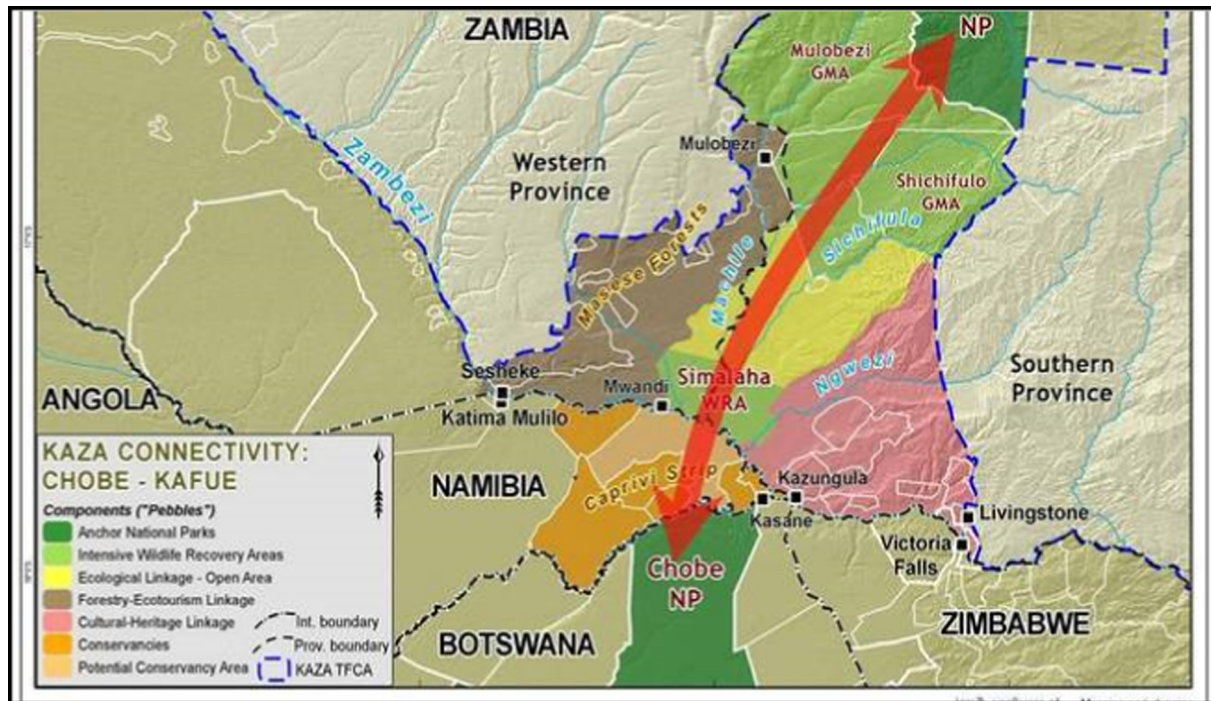 southern Zambia would 'love to see more elephants'. See: http://www.rtlxl.nl/#!/zzzz/ed1a66b5-cd5e-4d49-a9dc-7bdff6c5d540, accessed 25 August 2015.

Fig. 4. PPF Map 'KAZA connectivity'. *Source:* www.pifworld.com.

the platform to express their support and share the message. It seemed, then, especially after the major gift from the MAVA Foundation was received,[30] that in mid-2012 the corridor was set to happen and that we could see '100,000 elephants running to freedom' very soon thereafter. However, at the time of writing (April 2015) there is no elephant corridor, and there are no 'elephants running to freedom' to southern Zambia. The online imaginations and ideas of this innovative, flagship conservation and development 2.0 project ill related to the offline dynamics on the ground in the KAZA TFCA. What happened?

5. Familiar disjunctures in the Elephant corridor

Like with the pifworld and other platforms more generally, over time the rhetoric around the elephant corridor project became less jubilant. Indeed, a more careful reading of the website showed that the elephant corridor was not really a corridor project at all. Rather, it was meant to support the 'Simalaha Community Conservancy' in southern Zambia, a project without any international component, solely focused on this one conservancy. Pifworld was open about this and from 22 October 2012, when the Conservancy was officially launched, it occasionally published progress reports made by the implementing NGO, the Peace Parks Foundation. This, however, was always done with reference to the bigger goal that the elephant corridor project was supposed to lead to. So, during the opening ceremony,

> "Senior chief Inyambo Yeta said that the Conservancy would be an important area in KAZA TFCA to re-establish wildlife populations and their migration routes to the benefit of the local communities. He also reminded all of the Conservancy's significance to the KAZA TFCA, as it will ultimately link Chobe National Park in Botswana to Kafue National Park in Zambia".[31]

A year later, on 6 October 2013, the 'first wildlife translocation' was a fact, and though the website – based on data from the Peace Parks Foundation – makes it seem as though elephants were being released (Fig. 5), in reality, it were only impala, wildebeest and zebra. Again, the news item stressed that this was the first step in a bigger project, and more generally Pifworld maintained the rhetoric about 'building the largest wildlife park in the world' and 'giving room to 100,000 elephants'. After all, this is what KAZA more generally is based on and it is clear that "the vision of a megapark for elephants allowing congested herds in Botswana and Zimbabwe to disperse to habitat in Zambia and Angola provides a compelling conservation narrative" (Metcalfe and Kepe, 2008: 103–104).

Field research, including interviews with key government, NGO and local park management officials in Botswana, Namibia and Zambia between 2012 and 2015, however, made clear that a corridor such as depicted in Fig. 4 does not exist and, more importantly, will not exist in the foreseeable future. My first interviews in Gaborone in January 2013 and in Kasane, north Botswana, in July 2013, immediately pointed this out. A senior civil servant at the ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism of Botswana responsible for communication about TFCAs, including KAZA, said she knew nothing about an elephant corridor project.[32] More dramatic was my interview with a senior official of a NGO active in the region. This informant immediately starting questioning me, as she thought I was involved with the elephant corridor project. For the first 45 minutes of our meeting, the informant made it clear she was very angry about how unrealistic this project was and how it nearly got them into a fight with the Botswana government. In her words:

> "Yes, someone at Department of Wildlife two years ago asked me whether this was our thing, and they were furious that someone else was fundraising for this and they didn't know anything about it. And nobody had contacted them, and so they

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[30] It is interesting that this large donation was needed in order to get the project, which testifies to a point made by other papers in this special issue that crowdsourcing is not all that easy.

[31] https://www.pifworld.com/en/projects/TheElephantCorridor/61/blog/2050, accessed 30 January 2013.

[32] Interview senior civil servant, Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism of Botswana, 22 January 2013, Gaborone, Botswana.
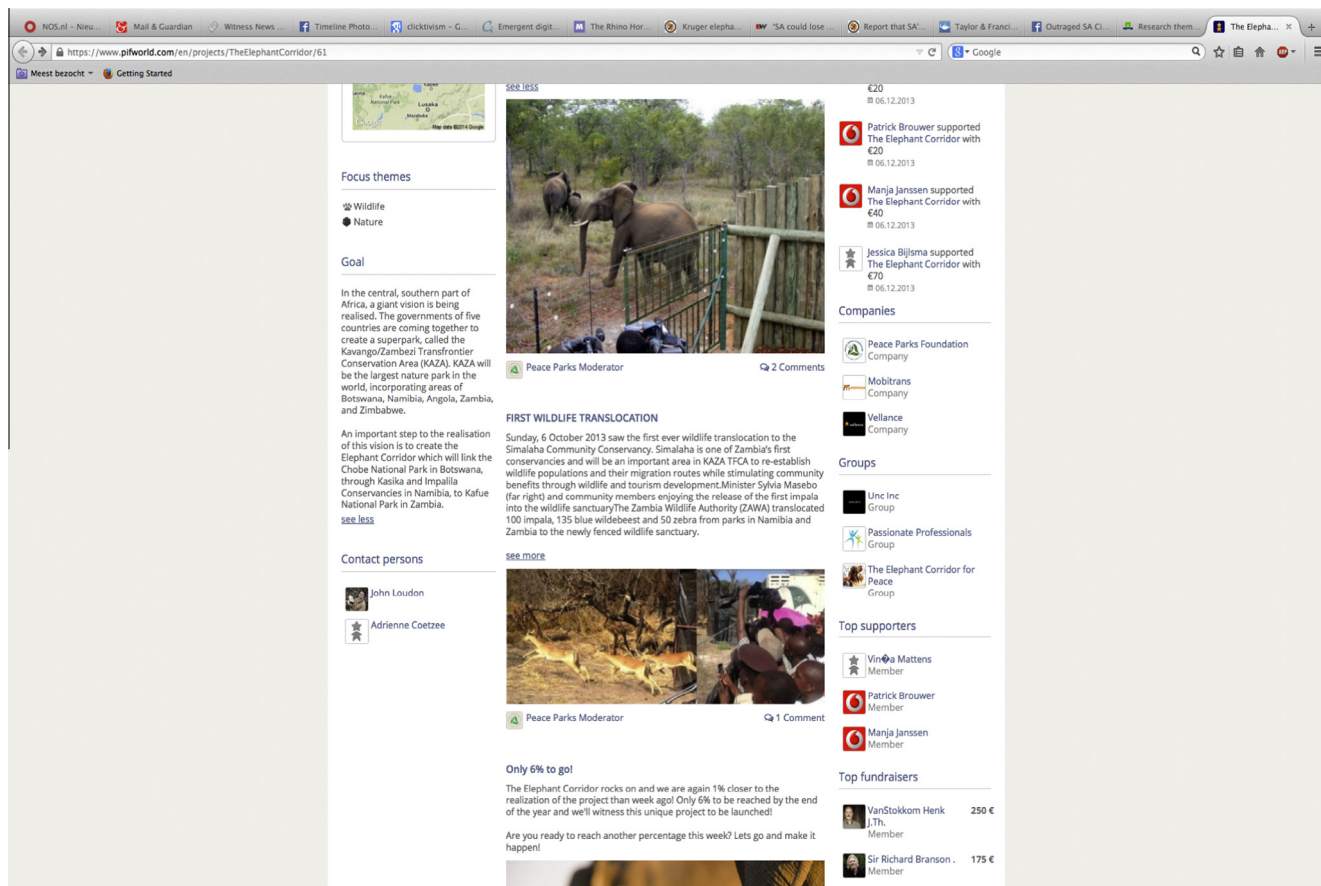
Fig. 5. Screenshot of pifworld.org blog about 'first wildlife translocations', accessed 28 May 2014.

inquired with us. And then I checked it out I was floored because it didn't exist – I was absolutely appalled. So I mentioned this to the KAZA office several times, but then they say the Peace Parks Foundation wants it. But I feel money needs to go to where it is needed most and hence they need to be advised where they can best put their money – not in this type of elephant corridor".[33]

While this interviewee was most explicit, others confirmed that no plans for an elephant corridor like the one on pifworld existed or were soon going to be made. Several KAZA secretariat staff officers did say that there were plans for an elephant corridor, but further west, through Bwabwata National Park and into a different part of Zambia.[34] On the ground, then, none of the people I spoke to were aware of or supported the idea of an elephant corridor as proposed on the pifworld platform. In fact, they pointed towards the opposite: that much of the lands that were supposed to be part of the corridor are highly contested lands where many local people already suffer quite heavily from human-elephant conflicts (cf. Gupta, 2013; Songhurst et al., 2015). This point, to be sure, was also regularly mentioned on pifworld, although the depth of the problem was arguably not adequately conveyed. As argued by DeMotts and Hoon (2012: 848), for many actors involved in KAZA, including the Botswana government "there is no consideration of what it is like to live with the anxiety and pressure of" wildlife damage and "*possible* wildlife damage". The Botswana state believes elephant damages can be compensated but "compensation reasserts state control and ownership, masking inequalities in the name of a greater national good that hides costs of living with wildlife".

If these issues are serious and contested in Botswana, they are even more so in Zambia. Whereas in Botswana the state heavily intervenes on behalf of conservation, this is much less so in Zambia, and hence there seems to be a much more contested politics between governmental, private and communal players regarding land for conservation and alternative uses in southern Zambia, with the situation often changing rapidly as (funding) situations change for different actors.[35] Moreover, wildlife corridors are nothing new in Zambia. In a review about earlier corridor experiences, Metcalfe and Kepe (2008: 114) caution that:

"Zambian landscape-level planning could undermine the KAZA TFCA objectives of biodiversity conservation and improved local livelihoods because its land policy encourages investment in communal land without ensuring good conservation or equitable returns for land access. Sectoral and state-dominated natural resource tenure policy is exacerbating the social–ecological scale mismatch produced by land policy. Inefficient community–public sector governance undermines the prospects for an equitable community–private sector relationship".

The 'scale mismatches' that Metcalfe and Kepe talk about, interestingly, are especially problematic in "the case in Inyambo and Sekute, where social and ecological issues cannot be adequately addressed because tenure is divided and land and natural resources are managed by governance systems that do not effectively combine public, community, and private interests" (Metcalfe and Kepe, 2008: 110). Inyambo and Sekute are the two chiefdoms where the Simalaha Community Conservancy is being

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[33] Interview director local NGO, 24 July 2013, Kasane, Botswana.
[34] Interview three staff officers KAZA secretariat, 23 July 2013, Kasane, Botswana.

[35] Interviews and informal communication, local community trusts and conservation agencies, southern Zambia, February 2015.
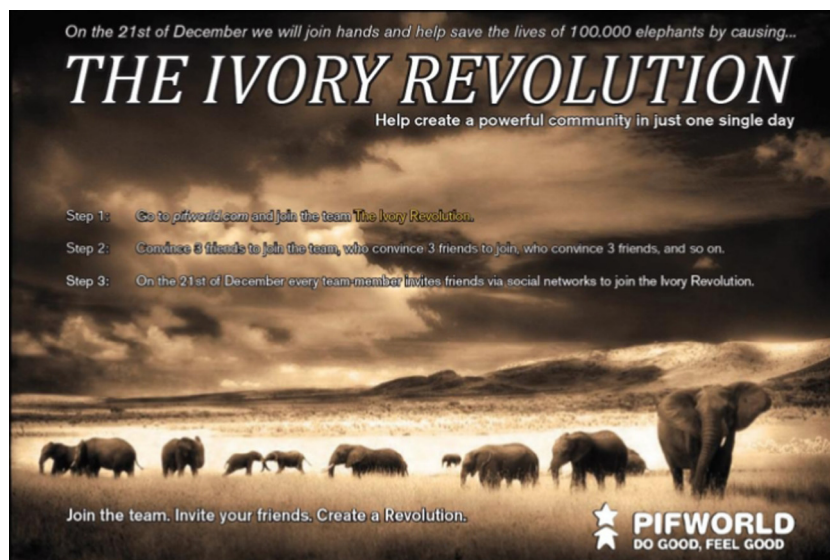
Fig. 6. The ivory revolution banner on pifworld. *Source:* www.pifworld.com.

implemented, supported by the elephant corridor project. In interviews and meetings in southern Zambia in February 2015, these sentiments were broadly supported, but also clear was that some community members benefit from the intervention by receiving support for 'conservation agriculture'. Overall, however, the different interests involved in conservation in southern Zambia, as well as the role of the state, continues to be fragile and difficult, and hence whether this will lead to a land-tenure system conducive to massive elephant migration through a corridor in the near future remains doubtful.[36] Conservation corridors, as Goldman (2009: 352), based on her research in Tanzania, also concludes, most often do not reflect or result in "the functional and structural complexities of connectivity".

Finally, in Namibia, similar problems around land tenure and elephant-human conflicts occur, with most residents not very keen to have (more) elephants on their doorstep.[37] But other tensions also seem to brew under the surface in the Namibian Caprivi, as noted by Ms. Lieneke Eloff de Visser (LdV)[38] in conversation with a researcher from the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF). This researcher is complaining about the Peace Parks Foundation and their support for the Simalaha Community Conservancy on the Zambian side of the border, which he argues works *against* the corridor:

> "NNF Researcher: Across here *(points across the river to Zambia)*, chief *(? Name unclear)* is on their board, and Peace Parks have provided him with a big game reserve there. Which is huge, all fenced off, and they are putting in game. But it is actually the wildlife corridor that KAZA is promoting! So it fenced off the corridor. We are trying to get the corridor between Kafue and Chobe reestablished, and Peace Parks puts a fence across! Completely fenced off. If you drive from here to Livingstone via Mwandi, there is this long, long game fence the whole way. LdV: What is the purpose?
> NNF Researcher: It is a private deal, they are keeping the chief happy by giving him his game reserve. You can see why they

would do it, fences protect the wildlife from poachers, but it negates everything KAZA is trying to do".[39]

The reason for the fence, I was later told, is to protect the wildlife introduced into Simalaha and encourage them to breed, after which they will be released and the fences taken down. Yet whether this will have the desired effect in terms of more constructive human-wildlife relations remains to be seen. As members of the Sekute Community Development Trust indicated, if there would be no more support from the outside, chances are high that all gains would soon dissipate (a dynamic highly familiar to development interventions more generally, see Quarles van Ufford and Kumar Giri, 2003). All this evidence shows that elephants are not 'running to freedom' in Zambia just yet. Often it is the opposite: due to poaching pressures, many elephants run to the relative safety in Botswana and – to slightly lesser degree – Namibia, where shoot-to-kill anti-poaching policies have been introduced (Botswana[40]) or are considered (Namibia).

Clearly, the online 'nature 2.0' space of the elephant corridor on pifworld.com and the 'on-the-ground' realities in Botswana, Namibia and Zambia are worlds apart. This begs the question whether pifworld did not know that there were serious issues with the elephant corridor, and that the rhetoric around a corridor could well have been scrapped around late 2012, early 2013. In fact the opposite happened: it stayed online, and players were encouraging each other to remain devoted to the project. A dedicated pifworld group was even set up for the 'ivory revolution', which described itself as follows: "By joining the Ivory Revolution you can help realise Nelson Mandela's dream: creating the biggest nature park on the planet. The first step is creating a an *(sic)* Elephant Corridor than can help save the lives of 100,000 elephants" (Fig. 6). Set up in December 2010, this group remained active until 2013, and neither

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[36] Interviews and informal communication, local community trusts and conservation agencies, southern Zambia, February 2015.

[37] Interview regional coordinator Ministry of Environment and Tourism, 12 March 2014, Katima Mulilo, Namibia.

[38] Dutch/South African researcher with longstanding research experience in the Namibian Caprivi.

[39] Researcher at Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) in an informal interview with Ms. Lieneke Eloff de Visser on 13 April 2014 at Katima Mulilo. I am grateful to Lieneke Eloff de Visser for allowing me to reproduce part of her interview here.

[40] At the World Parks Congress in Sydney in November 2014 the Botswana Environment Minister proudly defended this policy by stating: "I have been criticized for saying this but will say it again: God will judge the poachers. It is up to us to arrange the meeting". Observation at the World Parks Congress, 10–21 November, 2014. Clearly, these types of violent rhetoric and related violent practices do not sit well with the idea that through the elephant corridor project pifworld players are contributing to a 'peace park' (see Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016).

here, nor any other elephant corridor related group or site on Pifworld ever mentioned any contradictions in the project.

This was not inevitable: a Pifworld executive in an interview in 2012 mentioned that if people wanted to, they can put local reports online and provide alternative accounts of on-the-ground realities; indeed he encouraged me to do so.[41] The fact that no alternative voices or messages were recorded is interesting, but does not necessarily mean that players think that everything is perfect with the project. It does indicate that there is a large disconnect between online rhetoric and discourses and offline discourses and practices in southern Africa and that these online discourses can be sustained for a long time despite new possibilities opened up by social media to broadcast counter-voices. How can we explain this disjuncture? For an answer, I argue that we need to connect the case to the above theorization around the system peculiarities of the politics of online 'do-good' 2.0 platforms.

6. Discussion and conclusion

At first sight and in line with much conservation and development literature, the elephant corridor seems a rather straightforward case, one where rhetoric and reality are radically at odds with each other. This is an important conclusion: despite significantly intensifying and changing conservation and development dynamics, online 2.0 'do-good' platforms do not elude familiar (1.0) disjunctures. In this case, it means that the €422,730 that was crowdfunded went to a project that is not likely to lead to a major elephant migration corridor in the near future, if at all.

It would, however, be wrong to leave it at that. As mentioned, conservation and development 2.0 is in several respects rather different from 'non-2.0' conservation and development, and these differences – theorized above – need to be brought into the discussion to do full justice to the elephant corridor case and to the alleged exceptionalism and promise of conservation and development 2.0 more broadly. After all, Givengain, Pifworld, 1% Club and other platforms still believe that the Internet enables 'all of us to take part', and so – despite the somewhat muted earlier enthusiasm – they still buy into the idea of what Goldman and Papson refer to as "the liberating force of network technologies" where "old hierarchies seem to vanish – race, age, gender, class, education, nationality" (2011: 176). Yet, the way that 'all of us' take part in online new media, and hence constitute new digitally mediated forms of the *public* and the *common*, is as the sum of *individual* interests, 'likes' and expressions of support. In other words, 'doing good' on 2.0 platforms becomes synonymous with individual projects, supported by 'generic you's' with little to no *obvious* connection to (and perhaps concern for) broader ideas about the public sphere or the common.[42]

Yet, this peculiar characteristic of 2.0 platforms is difficult to see, as the new types of doing good online tend to become a cacophony of discursive expressions, from texts to symbols, likes, 'shares', retweet's and ultimately the aggregate numbers that show how popular something is (how often it is viewed, commented on, supported, retweeted, etc.). Through this actual or potential intensity, it is hard to see or understand the broader politics of platforms that highly influences individual acts of online giving and their effects. Yet one major characteristic of these platforms, as indicated above, is that they are built on digital technologies such as algorithms. Hence, through the 'algorithmization' of conservation and development, individual online philanthropic and altruistic engagements are guided, influenced and informed by and through algorithms or similar online technologies. This technological mediation may render 'do-gooding' increasingly accidental in that ones support for a particular good cause is increasingly likely to be based not (only) on personal preferences and a calculated politics of support but also on the liquid vagaries of the politics of platforms. 'Subject-objects' may think they are getting involved in something that they are passionate about, but the increasing 'ease' and fleetingness in which this happens – actively facilitated in this way by platforms for good – makes that the incentive or possibility to make sure this is actually the case becomes less or harder. In other words, the distance between online enthusiasm for 'doing good' and offline material dynamics are not just 'accidentally' stark (due to bad planning, the limits of technocratic intervention, local politics or whatever else), but *are allowed to be stark* by the system peculiarities of the online 2.0 do-good platforms.

The case of the elephant corridor illustrates this well, as both the online 'players' providing aid as well as the recipients of this aid, most notably the elephants, recede into the background. Does this mean that they do not matter? The answer is, obviously, 'no'. Online players do matter, but increasingly so as 'technologically mediated abstractions of a subject-object'. This term was coined to highlight the tension between the importance attached to agency in donor individuals ('players' on Pifworld) and how technological mediation through web 2.0 technologies like algorithms renders this agency a generic abstraction as part of a pool of objects (or 'you's') seeking to 'do-good'. A similar point can be made about the elephants. While material elephants and their real-world, offline behavior and impacts give way to online 'nature 2.0' conceptualizations (or fantasies) about '100,000 elephants running to freedom', it does not mean that material elephants are not important. Following Barua's (2014: 560) 'more-than-human' assessment of global elephant geographies it is clear that "the creature is a conduit for connectivity: spatially by enabling landscape linkages via elephant corridors, and socially by knitting together diverse and far-flung epistemic communities to enroll financial resources and political potential for those who speak in its name". In short, players (donors) and elephants (recipients) matter, but in such a way that it becomes increasingly harder to see the disjunctures and hierarchies between them.

Thus I come to the second part of the conclusion of this article, namely that the peculiarities of online 2.0 do-good platforms might obscure familiar disjunctures further from sight. This is not only related to the above argument that it becomes harder to see the disjunctures and hierarchies but also to whether there is any real incentive to try to see and understand these. If in the online conservation and development marketplace the validity, suitability and worthiness of projects is simply assumed because players, initiators or supporters buy (into) them, what incentive is there to look for familiar (or new) conservation and development disjunctures? After all, the point about Pifworld and many other do-good platforms seems to be to "do good" and subsequently "feel good" about it. Why, then, would online players and the platforms that depend on them want to potentially risk letting uncomfortable or familiar disjunctures and hierarchies get in the way of this?

Acknowledgements

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[41] Interview Pifworld executive, 6 June 2012, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. I did consider putting some of my early findings online, but ultimately decided against it, as I did not want to influence dynamics but rather observe the unfolding of dynamics without my interference.

[42] Hence, I am not saying that players do not have these connections, but rather that these are not obvious or clear within the format and system peculiarities of 2.0 platforms.

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