FAMILY

These Brave Females Are Part of an Anti-Poaching Team & Help Save Africa's Wildlife

By bestfolkmedicine · 16/10/2021 · 3 min read



When she was 17, Kelly Lyee Chigumbura was raped near her family home in Zimbabwe's Lower Zambezi Valley.

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After she realized she was pregnant with a child from her rapist, she left school and abandoned the dream of becoming a nurse. She says her goals shattered and she felt like she couldn't do anything more with her

life.

She had no job, no skills, and no prospects. The cultural norms among the Shona say that if a mom doesn't have sufficient resources to care for her kid, it should go to the parents of the dad.

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Against her wishes, the mom of the rapist took the baby. The little girl that Chigumbura named Yearn Cleopatra was now taken by the dad's family to be raised as theirs.

When Chigumbura came to visit her daughter, the grandma span stories to push her away like lying that the baby wasn't there. Chigumbura said it was misery.

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Chigumbura's Life Changes after She Meets One Australian

This misery continued for three years until the 20-year-old Chigumbura met an Australian named Damien Mander. He was looking for female recruits to become wildlife rangers.

The head of the village recommended Chigumbura. If selected, she would participate in patrolling and protecting the Phundundu Wildlife Park: a 115-square-mile former trophy hunting area that is a part of a bigger ecosystem and home to 11,000 elephants.

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Meet the Akashinga-All-Female Anti-Poaching Team

Chigumbura loved the idea and after a demanding three-day-long military-style try-out, she was invited to become a permanent member of the force.

She and the other 16 women were asked by Mander to come up with a name for their group and they agreed it should be *akashinga* or the *brave ones* in Shona.

Together with her colleagues, Chigumbura spends days protecting the most vulnerable citizens in her country-the wildlife.

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She says she feels accomplished when helping in the anti-poaching movement and she adds that she wants to spend her whole life doing this-protecting animals and arresting poachers.

Moreover, joining the team has given her autonomy and confidence and a chance to get back the custody of her daughter.

Her colleagues went through similar transformations.

According to a filmmaker who's documenting the project, Alistair Lyne, the shift is unbelievable. Before, they were ashamed in a way, but now, they have a spirit and are walking on air, Lyne emphasizes.

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Women in Africa Rarely Work as Rangers

According to Mander's knowledge, Phundundu is the first nature reserve in the world that's managed and protected entirely by women.

Although they rarely work as rangers in Africa, women he is confident that they could help better the communities and lead the way for a new way to carry out conservation efforts.

They're less violent, yet are expertly trained. Mander emphasized an African saying that when you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation.

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He hopes that by 2030 they'll see the Akashinga model expand and get adopted by others. Still, the project isn't critique-free.

People have questioned the sensibility of arming women and sending them to do patrols. Some even accused the project to be a media stunt.

Mander denies these claims and says they're nothing but sexism and cynicism and emphasizes that so far, Akashinga is working and providing results.

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Sources:

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