



Strengthening Community Resilience against Illegal Wildlife Trade

Partnership against Wildlife Crime in Africa and Asia

Context

Poaching and illegal wildlife trade (IWT) of key species such as elephant, rhino and pangolin continue to put biodiversity and protected areas in sub-Saharan Africa under immense pressure. The protection of endangered species constitutes a global challenge as poaching not only threatens biodiversity, but also local livelihoods and public safety. Wildlife crime thus jeopardizes the economic and social development as well as the security of affected countries.

The reasons for the ongoing poaching crisis are manifold, including economic instability, human population pressure, high profit margins and high demand. Local communities living adjacent to protected areas are at the frontline, being most vulnerable to biodiversity loss, human-wildlife conflicts (HWC) and the dangers of wildlife crime. At the same time, protecting vast areas against poaching requires great efforts from often underfunded wildlife authorities. Local communities in the buffer zones are therefore essential actors as they form the so-called First Line of Defense against poaching and IWT. Countermeasures can only be effective if they address the needs of local communities and grant them access to sustainable and economically viable livelihoods.

Our approach

The Partnership against Wildlife Crime aims at strengthening the resilience of protected areas against poaching by strengthening capacities within key institutions and supporting participation of local communities in the joint struggle against IWT.

To this end, the Partnership follows a four pillared approach:

- **Professionalizing (community-based) anti-poaching efforts**
- **Promoting human-wildlife coexistence**
- **Enhancing alternative livelihoods**
- **Expanding environmental education**

Professionalizing (community-based) anti-poaching efforts

The project strengthens the capacities of community-based anti-poaching units in protected areas of its focal implementation region in Africa comprising Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. Within the Selous-Niassa ecosystem, the Partnership supports the professionalization of village game scout units in five Wildlife Management Areas in southern Tanzania: in order to enhance ownership and create conservation-based income opportunities, the units are recruited in surrounding communities; the recruits receive standardized trainings as well as regular refresher courses, including a variety of topics such as sustainable conservation and human rights. A “train-the-trainer” approach further strengthens capacities and sustainability at the local level. Moreover, the number of female scouts is increasing. Recently, the first female scout has been promoted to become a trainer for her peers.

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Promoting human-wildlife coexistence

Local communities living around or inside protected areas are particularly vulnerable to HWC. In the focal region of the project HWC are mostly a consequence of small-scale farmers trying to protect their crops against raiding elephants and other animals. These conflicts not only threaten the livelihoods of local people but also decrease their support for conservation measures. Mitigating HWC and promoting coexistence is therefore key to protect wildlife and promote communal ownership for conservation measures.

The Partnership supports a number of non-harmful community-based approaches to protect crops from elephants such as different forms of deterrent fences (solar; draped with chili or other repelling materials), community patrols, elephant-proof grain stores, etc. Supported regions show a significant decrease in human-elephant conflicts, thus also contributing to food security.

Furthermore, the project is engaged in the scientific monitoring and analysis of HWC incidents, adaptive advancement of prevention techniques, as well as in the participatory development of communal livelihoods and coexistence strategies, as for instance through a conservation livelihoods handbook or block farming. Such participatory approaches are essential in successful community-based natural resource management.



Chili harvest © PAMS



Environmental Education
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Diversification of sustainable income opportunities

Additionally, the project supports the generation of alternative sustainable income opportunities. For instance, alternative farming practices that are more sustainable than the often-practiced shifting “slash and burn” cultivation are being promoted. Demonstration farms in Tanzania and Zambia experiment with environmentally friendly agricultural practices and the diversification of crops such as the cultivation of chili which can either be used for elephant-deterrent fences or sold as an income-diversifying cash crop on the market.

Furthermore, the Partnership supports Community Conservation Banks (COCOBA). COCOBA is a microfinance programme that allows its predominantly female members to access loans to establish conservation-friendly businesses, such as bee-keeping, chicken farming, and tree planting.

Expanding environmental education

“In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.” Baba Dioum

Complimentary to the aforementioned approaches, environmental education is crucial to strengthen communal ownership of conservation measures. Therefore, the Partnership supports a variety of participatory education programmes, especially in Tanzania and Zambia. In recent years, several thousand students, families and teachers have been reached through interactive lessons, field trips to protected areas and sporting events. Moreover, learning materials on conservation have been jointly developed with the Ministry of Education and integrated into the national curricula. In Tanzania, for instance, the Tembo Cup is a football competition that serves as a powerful platform for promoting conservation and coexistence. In Zambia, the project supports so-called Mini Change Project groups where adults learn about conservation-related issues as well as social challenges.

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