



THE STATE OF

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION IN ZIMBABWE

A REVIEW OF THE CAMPFIRE PROGRAM

2019 - 2023



The State of Community Conservation in Zimbabwe – A Review of The CAMPFIRE Program, 2016-2023

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ACRONYMS

AFD	Agence Française de Développement (France)
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)
CAMPFIRE	Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources
CA	CAMPFIRE Association
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
HWC	Human-wildlife conflict
KAZA TFCA	Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area
MECW	Ministry of Environment, Climate and Wildlife
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
RDC	Rural District Council
WDA	Wildlife Dispersal Area
UNDP	United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
ZimParks	Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority
ZVBP	Zambezi Valley Biodiversity Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report showcases the transformative impact of the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) on Zimbabwe's development trajectory. By empowering local communities to manage and benefit from their natural resources, CAMPFIRE has generated significant economic gains, promoted inclusive growth, and supported sustainable development. With a focus on good governance, social justice, and conservation, the program has become a model for sustainable tourism and community-led development. This report highlights CAMPFIRE's achievements in aligning with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 goals, demonstrating the program's potential for replication and scaling up. Discover how CAMPFIRE is revolutionizing the way we think about conservation, tourism, and community development in Africa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms	2
Executive Summary	3
Foreword	5
Who We Are	6
A Common Vision	7
CAMPFIRE ASSOCIATION Website	8
The CBNRM Data Collection System	9
Managing our Environment through CBNRM	10
Natural Resource Management	11
Hunting Quota Utilisation	11
Conservancies and Safari Operators	13
Human- wildlife conflict	14
Combating wildlife crime	19
Governance and advocacy	22
Livelihoods and benefits	23
Transforming lives	24
National Development	28
Our Partners	31
Table 1: Species poached during 2019-2023	20
Table 2: CAMPFIRE areas and size of wildlife zones	32
Table 3: Hunting Concessions in CAMPFIRE Areas	33

I am honoured to introduce this report, which showcases the remarkable resilience and adaptability of the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) program in Zimbabwe. Despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of our esteemed colleague, Mr. Charles Jonga, CAMPFIRE has continued to empower local communities to manage and benefit from their natural resources.

This report highlights the program’s unwavering commitment to sustainable development, good governance, and community-led conservation. It demonstrates how CAMPFIRE has fostered a wildlife-based economy, generating tangible benefits for communities, and promoting a culture of transparency and accountability. The program’s success is a testament to the power of collaborative efforts between communities, government, and stakeholders.

As we move forward, we recognize the importance of addressing the pressing issues of wildlife crime, climate change, and drought. We are committed to working together with our communities, partners, and stakeholders to ensure the long-term sustainability of CAMPFIRE and the conservation of Zimbabwe’s natural resources. We acknowledge the critical role that CAMPFIRE plays in supporting the livelihoods of rural communities and promoting the country’s economic development.

I commend the CAMPFIRE team and its partners for their dedication and hard work in delivering this impressive report. May it serve as a testament to the power of community-led conservation and sustainable development in Zimbabwe, and inspire continued support and collaboration in the years to come.

Lungile Sibanda
Director, CAMPFIRE Association



Who We Are

Communities

Zimbabwe's vibrant communities are united by their shared vision of sustainable conservation and development. Empowered with Appropriate Authority status through the Rural District Councils (RDCs), they take ownership of their natural resources and manage them with pride. Communities are the backbone of Zimbabwe's conservation efforts, working tirelessly to balance human needs with environmental stewardship. With support from RDCs and legal recognition from the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Wildlife (MECW), they have established themselves as a force for positive change. In partnership with the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) Association (CA) (also referred to in this report as The Association), the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) Secretariat, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks), many communities in CAMPFIRE areas generate revenue, improve local livelihoods, and mitigate human-wildlife conflict. Through democratic decision-making and inclusive governance, it ensures that every voice is heard and every member benefits. Together, we are redefining the future of conservation and development in Zimbabwe.

CAMPFIRE Association and its partners

The Association's mission is to provide strategic representation, guidance and support to communities, empowering them to effectively conserve their natural resources and share in the benefits. The Association works with MECW, ZimParks, the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, and other stakeholders to deliver tailored support to communities. Partnerships enable the Association to provide:

- Projects that drive sustainable development
- Training and capacity building
- Expert advice and guidance
- Technical and logistical support

The Association advocates for sustainable development and promotes links between the tourism industry and local livelihoods, ensuring long-term benefits of conservation efforts for communities.



A Common Vision

Partnerships

The CA has fostered a strong and growing partnership with the MECW and ZimParks. These collaborative efforts have led to a harmonized approach to conservation and sustainable development through the community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) framework. It is essential for the partners to have a unified annual calendar by synchronizing key events such as strategic meetings, which will enable all parties to jointly tackle challenges and align their strategies for optimal impact.

Challenges

Despite best efforts, the program has faced significant challenges, including:

- Insufficient funding;
- Decline in hunting and tourism revenue due to COVID-19;
- Increased poaching, wildlife crime, and human-wildlife conflict in conservancies;
- Human-human conflict arising from land invasions and illegal settlements, with people encroaching on wildlife areas in search of grazing land.

These challenges have hindered our ability to implement activities on the ground; however, work is being done to address the above-mentioned issues and find sustainable solutions.

Learning and Sharing

Zimbabwe's community conservation program has been a model for success, and we have been privileged to share our experiences with neighbouring countries. Over the past five years, we have participated in exchange visits to Namibia and Mozambique, learning from their approaches and sharing our own best practices.

Growth and Development

Our communal conservation areas have expanded significantly, with more conservancies being gazetted, a testament to the program's growth and impact.

Future

As we mark 34 years since the program's inception, we recognize the need to adapt to changing circumstances. Climate change, technological advancements, and shifting livelihoods require us to diversify our approach. We must review our achievements, identify areas for improvement, and set a new trajectory for the program's future success.

CAMPFIRE Association Website

Communities

Our website marks a significant milestone in our journey to harness the power of technology. This digital platform enables us to share data, information, and stories faster and more efficiently, creating a valuable archive for Zimbabwe's community conservation program. The website features human interest stories and specialist articles that provide context and insights behind the data along with accessible information for conservation scientists, researchers, and conservationists worldwide, as well as access to our data and reports. This innovative platform enables seamless data collection, storage, and analysis, serving as a reliable repository for informed decision-making and policy development.

[CLICK TO VISIT WEBSITE](#)

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Campfire Association Zimbabwe website. At the top left is the logo, which features a stylized flame and the text 'CAMPFIRE Association'. To the right of the logo is the title 'Campfire Association Zimbabwe' and a search bar with the text 'Search'. Below the header is a navigation menu with the following items: HOME, ABOUT, NEWS SPOTLIGHT, PROJECTS, DOWNLOADS, GET INVOLVED, and CONTACT.

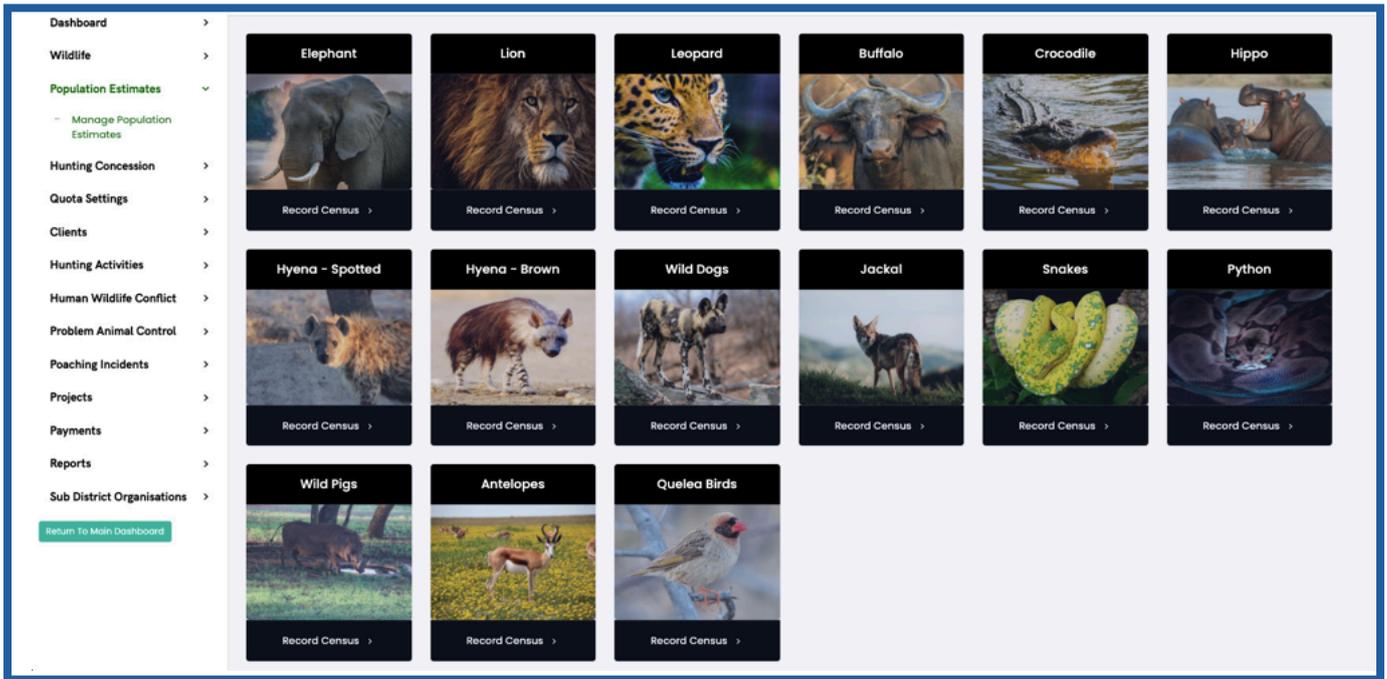
The main content area features a large banner image of a thatched-roof structure overlooking a valley. Below the image is the text: 'Community based tourism in Campfire areas' and 'Livelihoods transformed through Campfire eco-tourism projects'. A 'Read more' button is located in the bottom right corner of the banner.

On the right side of the page, there is a 'User login' section with a 'Log in/Register' link. Below this is a section titled 'Follow Campfire Association Zimbabwe on:' with links to 'This site (RSS)', 'Facebook', and 'YouTube'.

Below the banner, there is a section titled 'Vacancy: Regional Monitoring and Information Officer x 2'. The text below this title reads: 'Position: Regional Monitoring and Information Officer x 2 Reports to: National Monitoring and Information Officer Terms of Reference: Regional Monitoring and Information Officers Zimbabwe'. A 'Read more' link is provided.

Below the vacancy section, there is a small image of a person and a title: 'Sidinda CAMPFIRE Wildlife Conservancy has done it again'. Below the title is the text: 'A Beacon of Hope for Community-Based Conservation' and a 'Read more' link.

At the bottom of the page, there are two more links: 'Campfire developed data collection tools' and 'Hwange Man Narrates Trampling Ordeal'.



The Association, with support from Jamma International, Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and Resource Africa, has leveraged technology to develop a robust data collection system. This innovative platform ensures seamless data collection, storage and analysis, providing a reliable repository for informed decision-making and policy development. The system aggregates data from various sources, including population estimates, hunting concessions, hunting activities, (HWC), problem animal control, and poaching. This cutting-edge technology enables us to harness data-driven insights, fostering informed decision-making and effective conservation management.



CBNRM: the right balance

In Zimbabwe's rural communities, humans and wildlife coexist in a delicate balance. To mitigate the losses from crop raids and livestock predation by species like elephants and lions, communities must receive tangible benefits. These benefits come in the form of tourism revenue, craft sales, and conservation hunting proceeds. Through CBNRM, a crucial balance is struck between conserving natural resources for future generations and generating significant economic returns today. By empowering local communities to manage and benefit from their natural resources, a sustainable future for both people and wildlife is ensured.

The effect of climate change

Rural communities in Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE program are located in arid regions that face significant climatic challenges. Crop cultivation is often unviable, and climate change exacerbates the issue with increased droughts and floods, leading to food insecurity and loss of livelihood. To mitigate these impacts, economic diversification is crucial. Sustainable use of indigenous resources – including drought-resilient wildlife and naturally occurring plants – offers a viable solution. By leveraging these resources, communities can reduce their reliance on agriculture and build resilience to climate change, ensuring a more secure future.

A complementary land use

In Africa, wildlife faces a significant threat from habitat loss due to competing land uses. In Zimbabwe, large-scale agriculture and mining activities are encroaching on wildlife habitats, posing a significant risk to biodiversity. While these developments may benefit certain sectors of the economy, they often disadvantage rural communities. To mitigate this, sustainable natural resource use must be recognized as a viable and complementary land use by all sectors of the national economy. By acknowledging the true value of sustainable natural resource use, we can strike a balance between economic development and conservation, ensuring that the benefits of wildlife conservation are shared equitably among all stakeholders.

Wildlife as a driver of economic growth

Wildlife resources present a significant economic opportunity for conservancies, generating substantial returns through sustainable uses such as ecotourism, hunting, and wildlife-based enterprises. With many species capable of rapid population growth, effective conservation management can lead to swift recoveries in suitable habitats. By leveraging wildlife as a viable livelihood strategy, complemented by other natural resource uses, community conservation initiatives can contribute meaningfully to rural development and poverty reduction. As private sector engagement in community conservation continues to grow, new opportunities for sustainable development and biodiversity conservation will emerge, further enhancing the global impact of conservation efforts.

Emphasising equitable resource use

The CAMPFIRE program has successfully promoted equitable natural resource use, a concept that was previously non-existent in the region. Through joint-venture lodges and conservation hunting concessions, established under formal agreements, operators are obligated to share profits and prioritize the employment and training of local staff. In return, conservancies provide essential ecosystem and conservation services, such as habitat management and anti-poaching efforts, benefiting the private sector. This innovative approach has ensured sustainable natural resource use while fostering a mutually beneficial partnership between local communities and the private sector, showcasing effective collaborative conservation.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In rural Zimbabwe, communities rely heavily on subsistence farming and natural resources. Conservation efforts focus on facilitating wildlife recovery, protecting valuable species, and preserving intact habitats. However, the long-term impacts of climate change and short-term droughts such as the El Niño phenomenon over the past five years have significantly reduced wildlife populations in some districts. The COVID-19 pandemic has further caused a decline in benefits from wildlife (e.g., meat and financial gains) for local communities. Meanwhile, human population growth has led to encroachment on wildlife habitats, forcing predators to seek alternative prey and increasing livestock losses. This has weakened community support for a wildlife-based economy, which is a major concern. It is therefore crucial that additional efforts are dedicated to mitigating human-wildlife conflict and supporting conservation initiatives to restore the balance between human livelihoods and wildlife conservation.

Hunting Quota Utilisation

Zimbabwe's hunting quota system plays a crucial role in ensuring the conservation, management, and monitoring of wildlife populations. By allocating a limited number of hunting permits per district, per season, and per species, the quota system:

- Prevents overhunting and ensures sustainable offtake;
- Encourages selective hunting, targeting mature males, which enhances population genetics;
- Generates vital data on species populations, informing conservation efforts;
- Supports human-wildlife conflict mitigation and community engagement;
- Fosters collaboration between hunters, guides, and conservationists, promoting a culture of responsible wildlife management.

Through this robust quota system, Zimbabwe demonstrates its commitment to balancing wildlife conservation and sustainable tourism, ensuring the long-term health and prosperity of its iconic wildlife populations. For this report, data were collected on the number of animals hunted, which is compared with the allocated quota between 2019 and 2023 for elephants, lions, leopards, buffalo, crocodiles, and hippos. The COVID-19 pandemic, which halted global tourism for most of 2020 and 2021, reduced income from foreign hunting clients, negatively impacting the livelihoods of communities living with wildlife. The percentage of hunting quotas used in a year is influenced by the availability of clients, their preferences, and the quality of trophies.

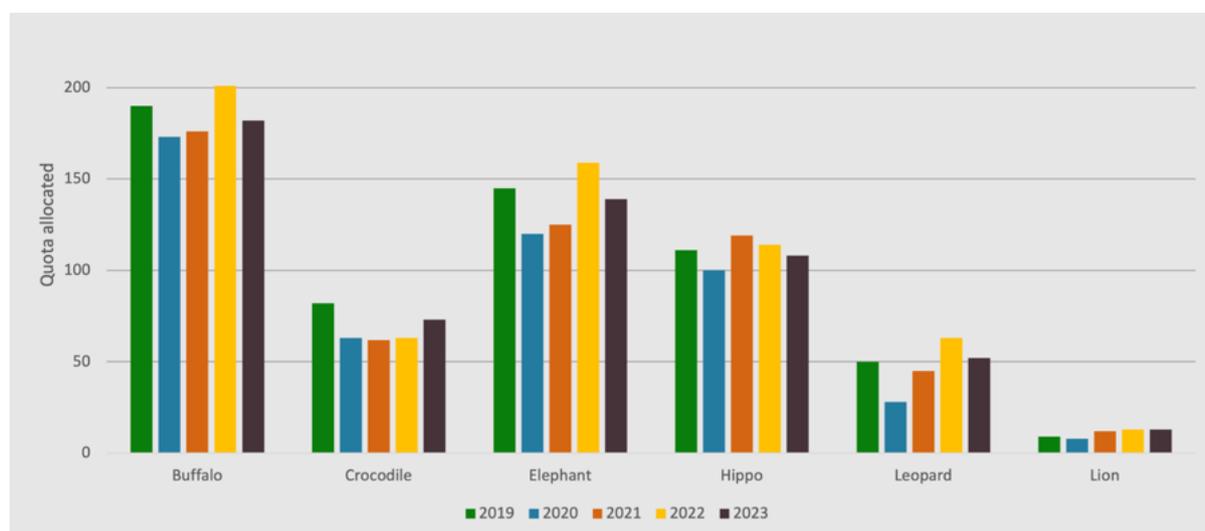


Figure 1. Hunting quotas allocated for six key species in the CAMPFIRE program during 2019-2023.

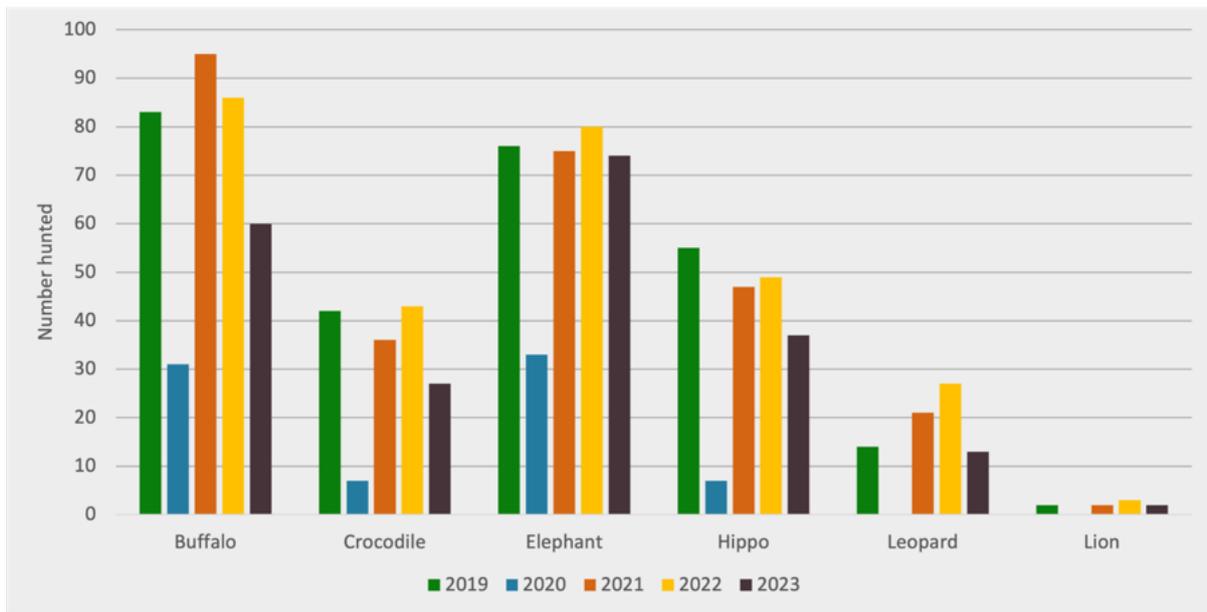


Figure 2. Number of animals successfully hunted for six key species in the CAMPFIRE program during 2019-2023.

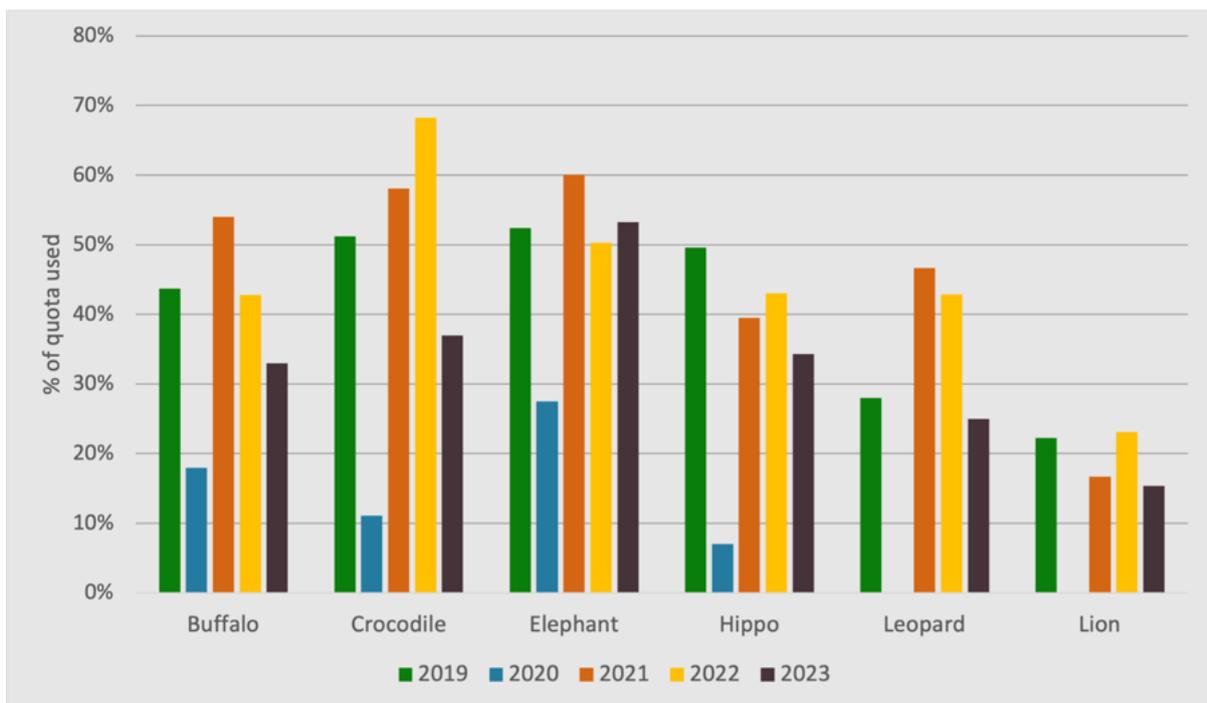


Figure 3. Percentage of the quota used for six key species in the CAMPFIRE program during 2019-2023.

Wildlife managers and ZimParks adjust harvest quotas based on population changes and specific management goals, such as controlling population size and demography or minimizing human-wildlife interactions. However, establishing quotas that effectively meet these goals can be challenging due to population fluctuations, droughts, and biases or variations in harvest efforts. Quotas are set based on population trends and trophy quality, with a decline in quality indicating over-harvesting, and vice versa.

Quota allocations remained fairly consistent for all species during 2019 to 2023, with only minor fluctuations. Hunting numbers plummeted in 2020 as a result of COVID-19. Excluding that year, hunting numbers were stable over time for elephant and lion, while they decreased in 2023, most likely due to the drought. Fewer lions and leopards are hunted compared to the other species, as these predators typically have lower population numbers than herbivores. CITES regulations limit hunting quotas for certain species, though the number hunted did not reach the quota set for any species during this reporting period. The level of demand from hunting clients for particular species further affects the number of successful hunts.

Conservancies and Safari Operators

Wildlife management under CAMPFIRE is most successful in buffer zones between national parks and areas where people live and farm. These buffer areas serve as communal Wildlife Dispersal Areas (WDAs), which are not legally gazetted, but are willingly maintained by the rural communities. CAMPFIRE areas thus provide a platform for thriving partnerships between conservancies, safari operators, and local communities to drive conservation and community development. CAMPFIRE areas include eight private conservancies, 17 community conservancies, and 43 hunting concessions.

Some conservancies are on privately owned pieces of land (owned by a private individual, company, or trust) that are dedicated to conservation and wildlife management. The primary objective of a privately-owned conservancy is to conserve and manage wildlife, habitats, and ecosystems. Many privately owned conservancies in Zimbabwe generate income through wildlife-based tourism, such as safari operations and ecotourism. These conservancies often engage with neighbouring communities and may provide benefits such as employment, training, and revenue sharing. Privately-owned conservancies in Zimbabwe are regulated by government laws and policies, ensuring that conservation and management practices meet national standards.

Community-owned conservancies in Zimbabwe are owned and managed by local communities, who make decisions about management and benefit from the resulting income. These conservancies are typically located on communal (state-owned) land, held in trust by the local authority and traditional leaders. They focus primarily on wildlife conservation and sustainable livelihoods, aiming to balance conservation efforts with the needs of local communities while promoting economic benefits.

Zimbabwe hosts vast hunting concession areas that are designated for commercial hunting, typically for trophy hunting. The concession is typically leased to a hunting operator or outfitter by the communities through the RDC, forming a partnership. Hunting concessions generate revenue for local communities, the government, and the concession holder. The safari operators carry out consumptive and non-consumptive tourism within the CAMPFIRE areas under a lease that is renewed per district. Over the five-year reporting period, communities have partnered with 18 safari operators who play a crucial role in conservation and community development. The fees and levies paid by safari operators incentivize conservation efforts by providing economic benefits to local communities.

Besides meeting their contractual obligations, safari operators contribute to the community as part of their corporate social responsibility. They have drilled and solarised boreholes, helped build schools and clinics, rehabilitated and maintained roads, amongst other projects. Safari operators employ community members as game scouts and safari guides who report wildlife sightings and behaviours, providing valuable data for conservation research and management. They also assist with habitat protection by promoting responsible tourism as a viable land use. Some safari operators support anti-poaching initiatives, providing resources and intelligence to help combat wildlife crime. Safari operators become important partners in conservation efforts, supporting the protection of wildlife and their habitats.



Figure 4. Boreholes solarised by Afro pride Safaris as part of their corporate social responsibility.

Human-wildlife conflict

The Parks and Wildlife Act provides the legal framework for managing HWC. The Act aims to strike a balance between wildlife conservation and human needs, while also promoting sustainable development and environmental protection. While eliminating all conflict may be unrealistic, concerted efforts can significantly reduce human-wildlife conflict, ensuring the long-term survival of wildlife and its contributions to rural development and the national economy.

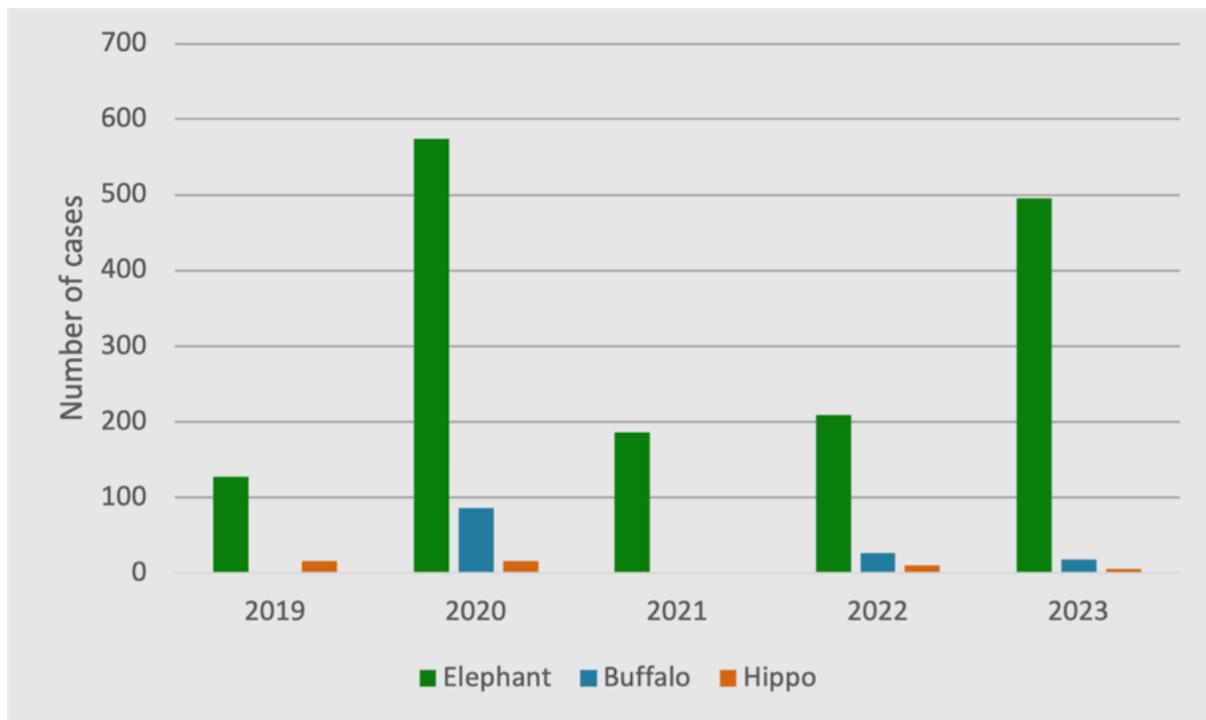


Figure 5: Crop damage cases reported for 2019 to 2023 for three species.

Crop damage caused by elephants, buffalo, and hippos peaked in 2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. The reduced levels of hunting and tourist presence that year may have contributed to the increase in crop damage. Elephant damage peaked again in 2023, after the pandemic. The year 2024 coincided with a severe drought (declared a national disaster), which forced wildlife to seek food outside national parks, while increased human encroachment on wildlife corridors exacerbated the situation.

Additional mitigation measures are needed to reduce crop damage, such as crop protection and wildlife-friendly farming practices. Preserving habitat and corridors for elephant and buffalo may also reduce crop damages. Such mitigation efforts require community awareness and on-going monitoring to assess crop damage trends and adjust accordingly. Each reporting district should monitor these trends locally to evaluate the projects being implemented in their areas and prioritise areas with high levels of HWC for future projects.



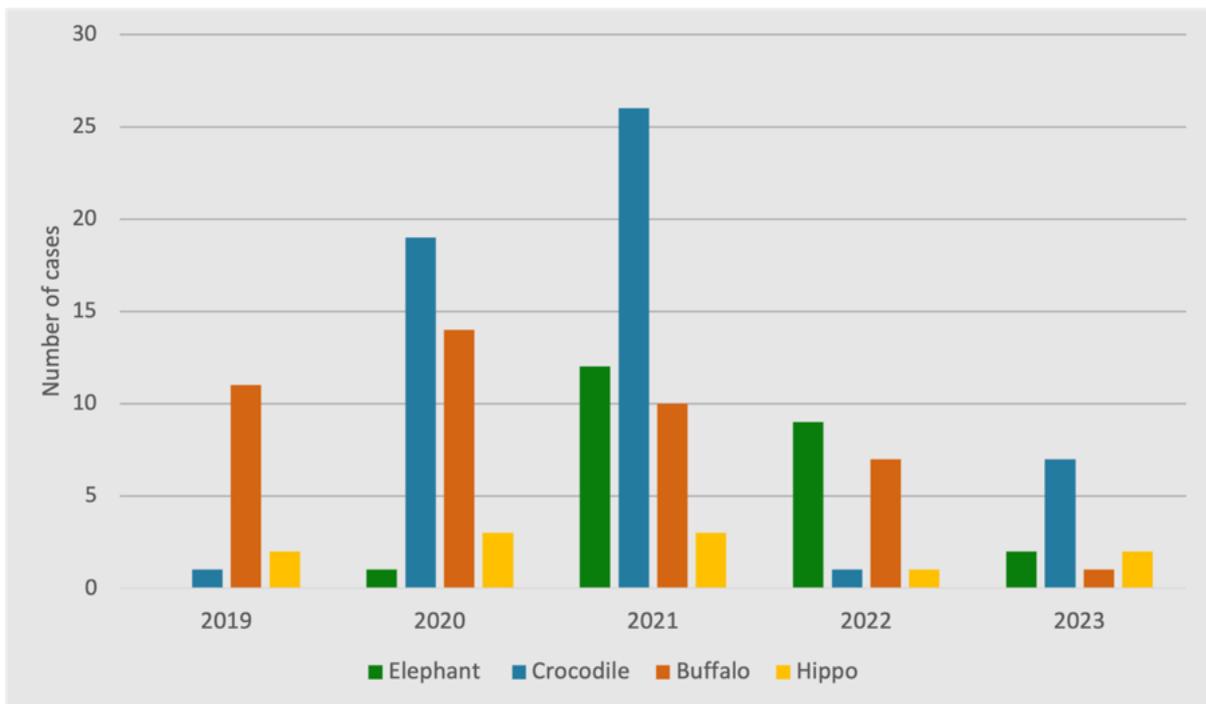


Figure 6. The number of human injury cases caused by wild animals in the CAMPFIRE program during 2019-2023.

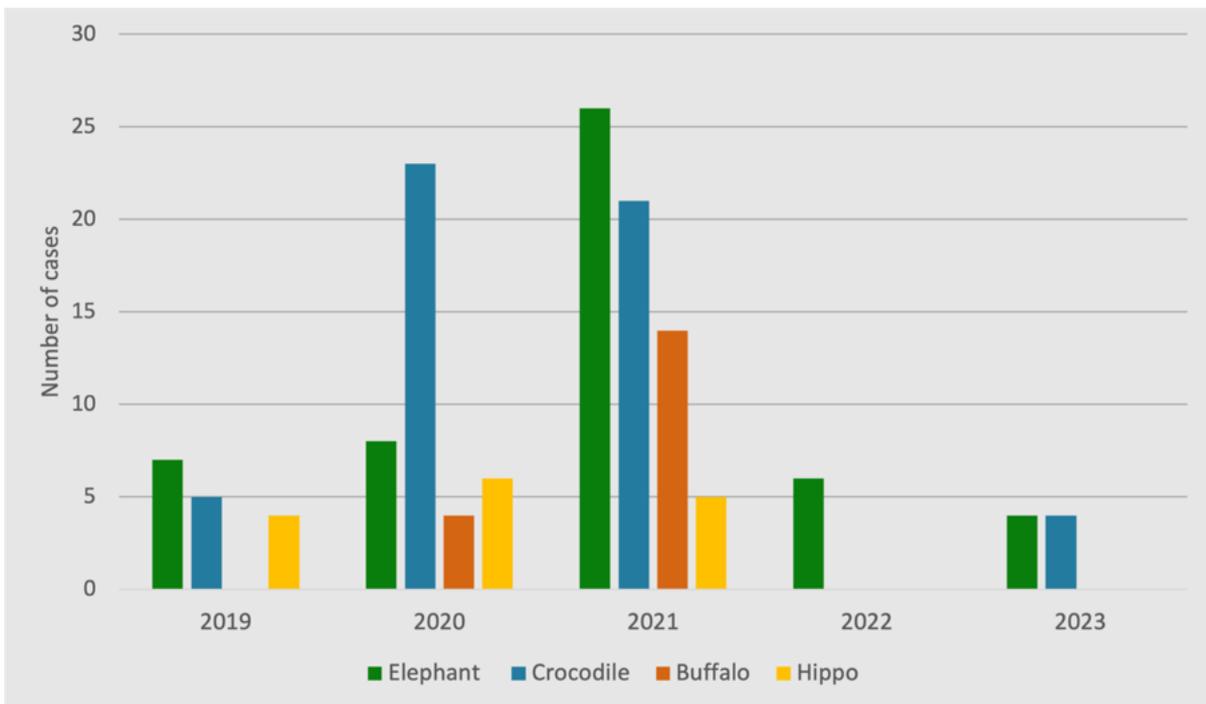


Figure 7. The number of human deaths caused by wild animals reported in the CAMPFIRE program during 2019-2023.

Human injuries and deaths spiked in the years 2020 and 2021, coinciding with the COVID pandemic. The pandemic wreaked havoc on livelihoods across Zimbabwe, resulting in severe food insecurity. People resorted to moving deeper into wildlife areas in search of sustenance through fishing and poaching, bringing them into closer contact with dangerous animals. These years were also marked by El Niño-induced drought, which caused wildlife to move into communal areas in search of food and water. Another possible factor for the spike in injuries and deaths was the lack of hunting during the pandemic.

As with crop damage, more habitat corridors are needed to reduce human deaths and injuries. Awareness of dangerous wildlife is crucial, ensuring that people avoid getting too close to dangerous animals and know how to respond if charged. The Association and its partners should provide training on wildlife handling and safety protocols to ensure relevant personnel can manage dangerous situations correctly.

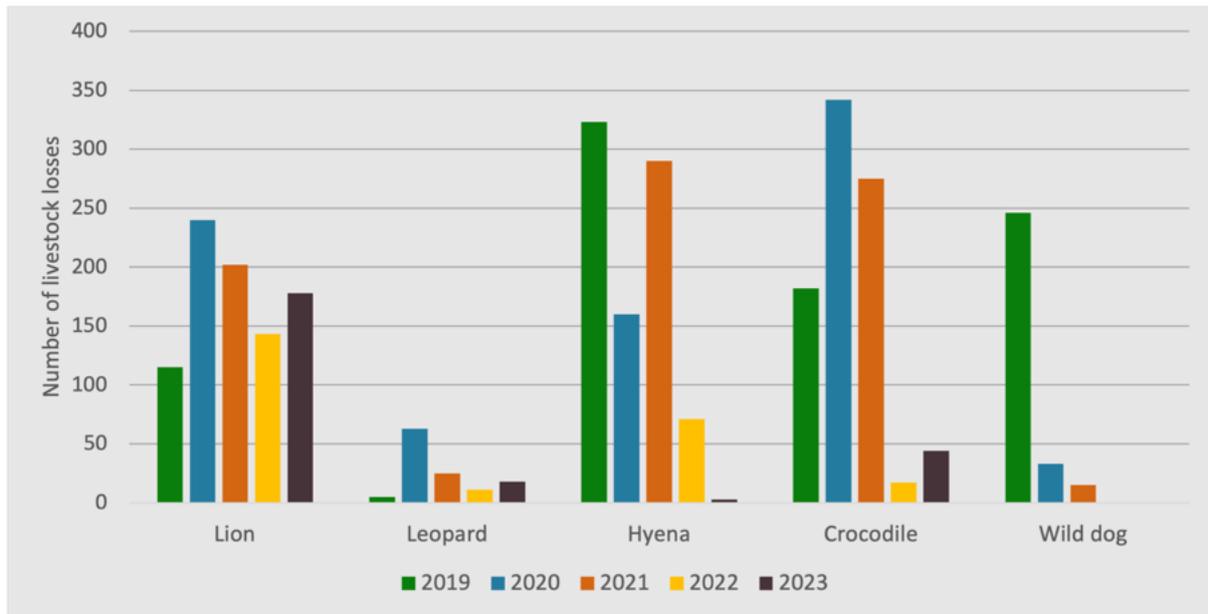


Figure 8. The number of livestock lost in the CAMPFIRE program during 2019-2023.

Lions, crocodiles, and hyenas were responsible for most livestock losses during the reporting period, although wild dogs caused significant losses in 2019. Hyena and crocodile attacks decreased in 2022-23, while lion attacks remained relatively stable. Crocodile attacks occur mostly at natural water bodies, while carnivore attacks often occur at night in livestock enclosures or during the day out in the field. Reduced livestock predation in 2022-23 could be attributed to the human-wildlife conflict mitigation measures outlined below (mobile bomas and boreholes). More livestock protection enclosures are needed to reduce lion and hyena attacks, while alternative water sources are needed to reduce crocodile attacks on livestock and humans.



Figure 9. Mobile boma built as part of a HWC mitigation project in Hwange

The Association has partnered with the KAZA TFCA Secretariat and UNDP in the mid-to-lower Zambezi region of Zimbabwe, which falls within the KAZA TFCA. As part of this project, mobile bomas capable of accommodating up to 100 cattle have been erected across the target area. These bomas have reduced livestock predation by 50% and improved crop yields by 50% through soil enrichment, since cattle manure builds up within the boma. Under the same project, chilli fences were installed in community fields to reduce elephant crop raiding.

In an effort to further reduce HWC in CAMPFIRE areas, projects providing water for both human and animal populations were implemented over a five-year period. A total of 25 boreholes were drilled under the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) project, the KAZA TFCA project, and the Zambezi Valley Biodiversity Project (ZVBP). Additionally, three weir dams were constructed, and the Maitengwe Dam was repaired.



Figure 10. Weir dam under construction



Figure 11. Maitengwe Earth Dam: Dry in November 2022 vs. Full capacity in January 2023.

Water augmentation is a high priority in supporting the wildlife-based economy and minimising conflicts between humans and wildlife over shared water resources in the KAZA TFCA. The repaired Maitengwe Dam supports various wildlife tourism income streams, such as hunting, photography, and fishing, by increasing game and fish numbers. Additionally, the dam enhances community livelihoods and helps reduce HWC by decreasing competition for water sources. A total of 7,694 households (15,959 males; 20,210 females) benefit from the dam. Below is a link to a short video clip showcasing the dam's current status and wildlife activity in the area.

[CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO](#)



Combating wildlife crime

Wildlife crime is a serious threat to conservation efforts, driven by organized international syndicates that recruit local community members to poach high-value species such as rhinos, elephants, pangolins, and large carnivore. These syndicates exploit local communities, bribe officials, and leverage sophisticated global networks to traffic wildlife products to the Far East. Wildlife crime severely impacts communities, causing revenue loss and reduced employment as iconic species disappear, making the land less viable for tourism and conservation hunting. Communities unfairly associated with poaching also suffer reputational damage. It is essential to combat wildlife crime through collaboration that supports conservation initiatives and protects local communities from exploitation.

The growing threat of wildlife crime has prompted a strong response from the Zimbabwean government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors, and communities. With support from UNDP, the Association has worked to reduce wildlife crime through the ***Strengthening Biodiversity and Ecosystems Management and Climate-Smart Landscapes*** project in Zimbabwe's mid-to-lower Zambezi region, known as the ZVBP. Under the project, rangers received monthly food rations, uniforms, combat boots, tents, raincoats, sleeping bags, and backpacks to enhance their patrol efforts. Additionally, three base camps were constructed.

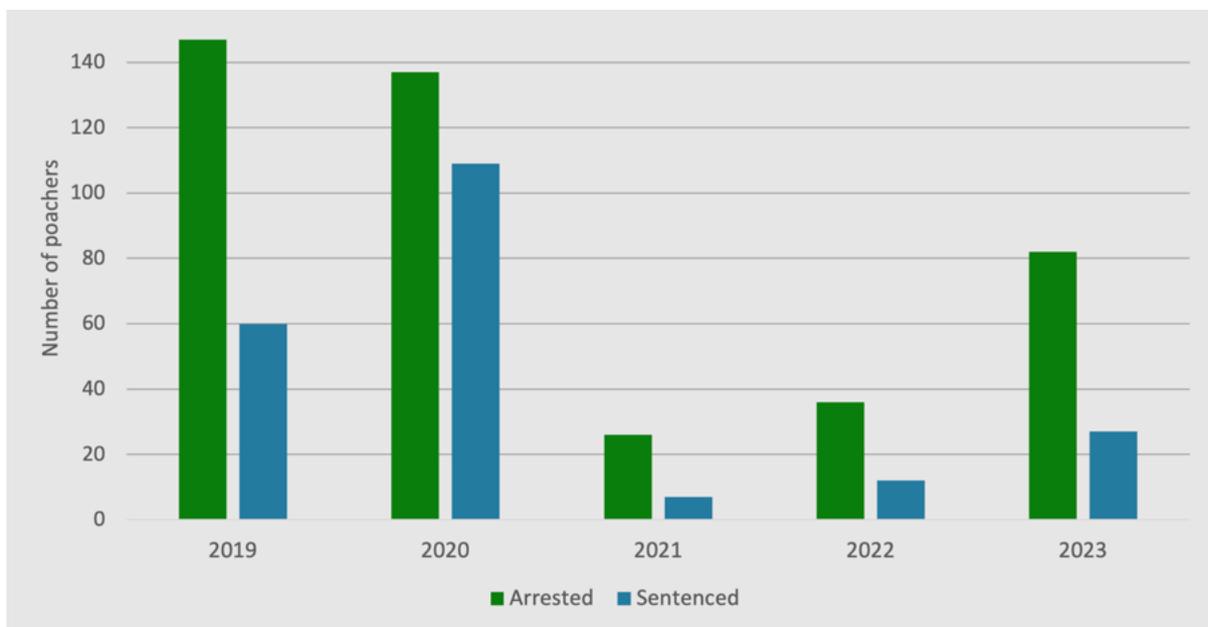


Figure 12. Number of poachers arrested and sentenced from 2019 to 2023.

Anti-poaching projects implemented over the past five years have had a mixed impact on wildlife crime in the CAMPFIRE districts. - The significant decrease in poachers arrested from 2019 to 2021 suggests that the initial anti-poaching efforts were successful in deterring poaching activity. However, the subsequent increase in poachers arrested from 2021 to 2023 suggests that poaching activity may have adapted to the increased patrols and enforcement efforts.

The sentencing follows a similar pattern: an initial increase from 2019 to 2020, a sharp decrease from 2020 to 2022, and a subsequent rise from 2022 to 2023. This suggests that the judicial system may have been initially effective in prosecuting poachers, but later experienced a decline in convictions, possibly due to lack of evidence, witness intimidation, or corruption, or other factors.

The fact that the anti-poaching efforts were not implemented across all districts may have contributed to the inconsistent trends in poachers arrested and sentenced. It highlights the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to combating wildlife crime, including increased support for game rangers, improved evidence gathering, and enhanced judicial capacity.

Overall, while the anti-poaching projects show promise, much work remains to effectively combat wildlife crime and protect the region's biodiversity.

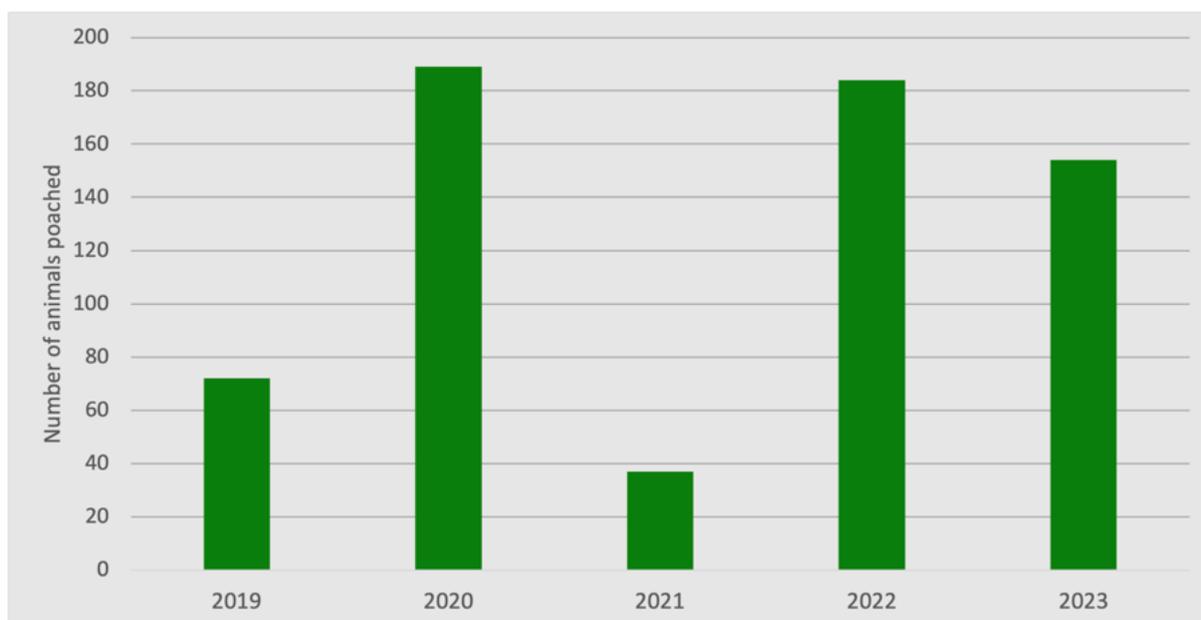


Figure 13. Number of animals poached (across all species) from 2019 to 2023.

Table 1. Species poached from 2019-2023

Species	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Buffalo	12	8	4	10	9	43
Bushbuck	5	2	0	0	0	7
Crocodile	0	0	0	1	0	1
Duiker	22	92	4	56	38	212
Eland	1	1	0	2	3	7
Elephant	2	1	2	1	9	15
Grysbok	1	1	1	0	3	6
Hippo	0	0	2	1	10	13
Impala	7	40	19	69	51	186
Klipspringer	1	1	0	2	0	4
Kudu	13	36	2	30	19	100
Pangolin	0	1	0	1	0	2
Sable	2	2	0	0	1	5
Warthogs	6	4	3	7	10	30
Zebra	0	0	0	4	1	5

Poaching spiked in 2020, most likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods and food security (Figure 13). The decline in poaching in 2021 may result from effective anti-poaching efforts, as many arrests were made and poachers convicted during 2020. The increase in poaching in 2022 may indicate adaptability by poachers or increased demand for wildlife products. The drought during the 2023-2024 rainy season was declared a national disaster in April 2024, resulting in no harvests collected from the fields. The subsequent widespread hunger led many people to resort to poaching for sustenance. Two pangolins were poached in 2020 and 2022, possibly for ritual purposes or sale on the international market. Two pangolins were poached in 2020 and 2022, possibly for ritual purposes or to sell on the international market. Species-specific trends highlight the need for targeted conservation efforts.



Figure 14. Poachers caught in the CAMPFIRE area with a warthog they poached in 2023.

“A warthog was poached last Saturday at Maitengwe by boys tending cattle. The boys were apprehended by rangers and handover over to the police. They appeared in court yesterday at the Plumtree Magistrates Court, and we are still awaiting the verdict”, said the Environment officer for Bulilima District.

“Another incident of poaching occurred in the Bambadzi area of Maitengwe, where seven men were found with both game and livestock meat. They were apprehended and handed over to the police. In response, the council has established a permanent base in the area to combat local poaching. The area is at the border of Hwange National Park, Tsholotsho, and Botswana. This year, 2023, food shortages have left many people hungry. When questioned, poachers cited increasing hunger as their reason for poaching. “Nothing was harvested from the fields,” said an Environment officer in the CAMPFIRE area.

GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY

The CAMPFIRE program has established a robust governance structure that empowers local communities to manage their natural resources effectively. Through the RDCs with Appropriate Authority status, communities manage wildlife resources and negotiate contracts with the private sector. The CAMPFIRE committees, composed of community representatives including women in leadership positions, ensure that community interests are represented and that funds are directed toward development projects. These committees are elected every three years, in accordance with the CAMPFIRE policy that governs the program. Currently, 43% of committee members are women, with women serving as chairpersons, secretaries, and treasurers. This decentralized approach has led to:

- Increased participation of women in decision-making;
- Improved community development and infrastructure;
- Enhanced conservation efforts;
- Empowerment of women in leadership roles.

The CAMPFIRE program's commitment to gender equality, community-led conservation, and sustainable wildlife management has established a model for rural development and natural resource management.



LIVELIHOODS AND BENEFITS

Wildlife is a national asset and a resource of global interest. CAMPFIRE covers approximately 50,000 km², covering about 12% of Zimbabwe. Each year, 120 wards with over 777,000 households benefit from the CAMPFIRE program. Communities receive 48-60% of CAMPFIRE's income for local projects, with the percentage varying by district. The remaining income is allocated to RDCs for activities such as field patrols, monitoring hunts, problem animal control, water and fire management, and district development. The CAMPFIRE Association receives 4% of the income to coordinate the program and represent its interests at all levels.

Community conservation efforts generate substantial benefits, including direct income from tourism and hunting, job creation and employment opportunities, distribution of game meat, diversified income streams, and enhanced community resilience against climate-related events like droughts and floods. By leveraging wildlife resources, local communities improve their livelihoods, adapt to climate change, and protect their natural heritage.

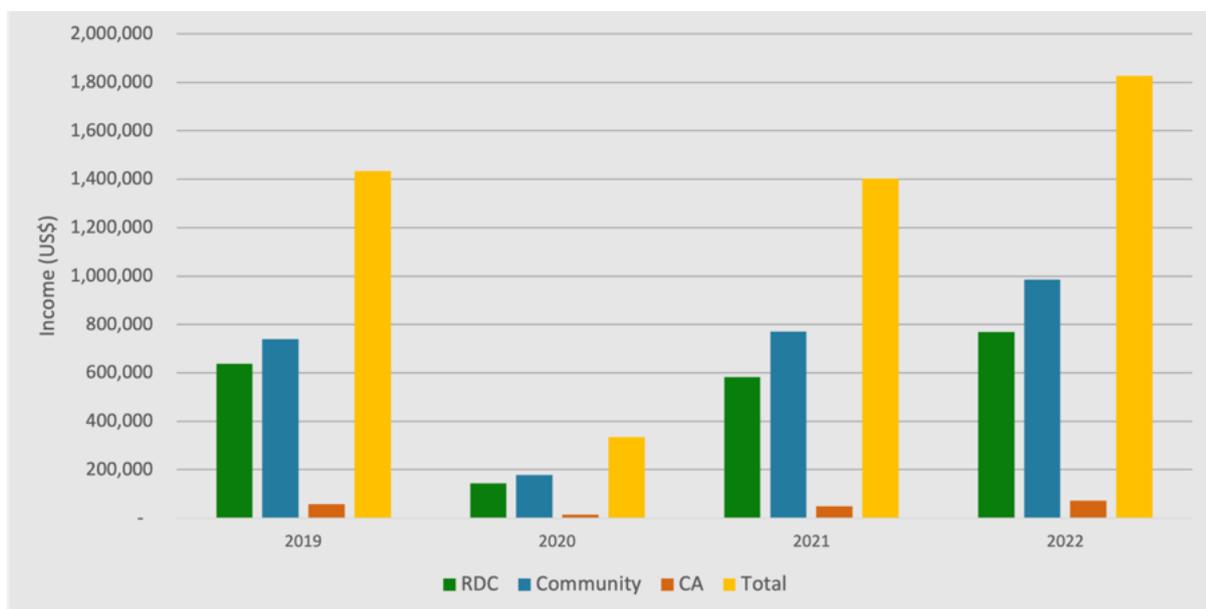


Figure 15. CAMPFIRE revenue (USD) for 2019–2022, distributed among RDCs, local communities, and the CA.

The total income accrued by CAMPFIRE from 2019 to 2022 was USD \$4,999,286.49. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a 77% reduction in income in 2020 when compared to 2019. However, income recovered quickly in the following years, with 2021 showing only a 2% decrease from 2019.

Over the past five years, communities have undertaken several development projects using the income received through CAMPFIRE. These projects included building schools and clinics, drilling and solarizing (or electrifying) boreholes, and managing roads and fireguards.

Transforming lives

Zimbabwe is still a developing country; therefore, the main aim of the CAMPFIRE program is to support the government by undertaking development projects in rural areas. The program supports rural development by utilizing the CAMPFIRE community's share of the revenue. These projects promote development at the community level in sectors such as education, health, food security, water and sanitation, and road and communication infrastructure.

Education

Education for communities living alongside with wildlife in remote areas has a profound impact on both human and wildlife well-being. By empowering local communities through education, individuals can improve their job prospects and reduce poverty. CAMPFIRE initiatives help them better understand and appreciate wildlife conservation, develop skills to coexist with wildlife, and reduce human-wildlife conflict. Additionally, education enhances livelihoods through sustainable wildlife-based tourism and enterprises, strengthens their role as custodians of wildlife and natural resources, builds resilience to climate change, fosters a sense of pride and ownership in wildlife conservation, and develops skills in wildlife monitoring and management. Communities in CAMPFIRE areas are being empowered through education, leading to a win-win situation for both humans and wildlife by promoting coexistence, conservation, and sustainable development.



Figure 16. Classroom block constructed using CAMPFIRE revenue.

Many classroom blocks, like the one in Figure 16, have been built and electrified using CAMPFIRE revenue, reducing the walking distance to schools for many rural communities.

Healthcare Access

Investing CAMPFIRE revenue in healthcare infrastructure and services has brought significant benefits for communities coexisting with wildlife. The construction of modern clinics, electrification of healthcare facilities, and improvements in water and sanitation have enhanced healthcare delivery. Additionally, maternity shelters have been built to improve access to prenatal care and reduce maternal and infant mortality rates. By bringing healthcare services closer to communities, these initiatives have encouraged better health-seeking behaviours. Notably, these efforts align with national goals to reduce mortality rates while balancing human well-being and wildlife conservation. By prioritizing healthcare access and outcomes, CAMPFIRE revenue is contributing to a future where both people and wildlife thrive in harmony.

Food Security

In CAMPFIRE areas, food security and wildlife conservation are closely linked. To address these interconnected challenges, the program takes a holistic approach that balances both human and wildlife needs. In these dry climatic regions, water scarcity is a major concern, making drought-resistant crops a priority for food security. The program promotes sustainable agriculture practices—such as agroforestry, permaculture, and regenerative agriculture—to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services while improving food security. Wildlife-friendly approaches, including conservation agriculture and wildlife corridors, benefit both farming and wildlife. Additionally, efficient water management and conservation strategies help meet the needs of both people and wildlife.

With funding from partner organizations, the program has established community gardens, drilled boreholes, trained farmers in conservation-compatible agriculture, and provided seeds and tillage services. Additionally, communities have received support for poultry farming and aquaculture, improving food security and livelihoods while reducing pressure on wildlife populations and supporting biodiversity. These efforts demonstrate the potential for sustainable and resilient solutions.



Figure 17. Ndutshwa Community Garden

Five community gardens have been established (Figure 17) to provide communities with fresh produce, including African kale, tomatoes, onions, garlic, chilli, and green mealies, among others. These gardens serve as a vital source of starch and vegetables, while surplus produce is sold to generate income for other needs. Thus, they play a crucial role in both nutrition and livelihoods.



Figure 18. Tillage services

The CA, alongside the KAZA TFCA Secretariat, aims to develop and promote ecologically sustainable, productive, and economically viable agricultural systems that improve smallholder farmers' food security and income. Communities received support for conservation-compatible agriculture and alternative technologies to sustain and improve productivity. Agritex provided agricultural technical services, including overseeing land and seedbed preparation. Instead of conventional ploughing, a disc harrow was used for minimal tillage, preserving soil cover by retaining crop residues to enhance organic matter and nutrients. Seeds and basic inputs were procured for at least two seasons. By providing tillage services, the program helped reduce the labour burdens, boosted agricultural productivity, and helped farmers increase their yields, ultimately improving livelihoods. This initiative demonstrates how the CAMPFIRE program actively supports both food security and wildlife conservation.

Electrification

Electrification serves as a catalyst for sustainable development, improving livelihoods, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities, while supporting conservation efforts. It has enabled community members to start businesses, such as cold drink vending and perishable goods sales, generating new income streams and improving economic well-being. The electrification of clinics has significantly improved health services by enabling the storage of life-saving medicines and vaccines that require refrigeration, leading to better health outcomes. This has led to better healthcare outcomes and improved access to quality medical care. In schools, electrification has created a more conducive learning environment, giving students access to digital tools and internet connectivity, thereby improving education quality and expanding opportunities. This has improved the quality of education and opened up new opportunities for students. Additionally, electrified shopping areas have revitalized markets, attracting more customers and creating new economic opportunities for traders and entrepreneurs.



NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

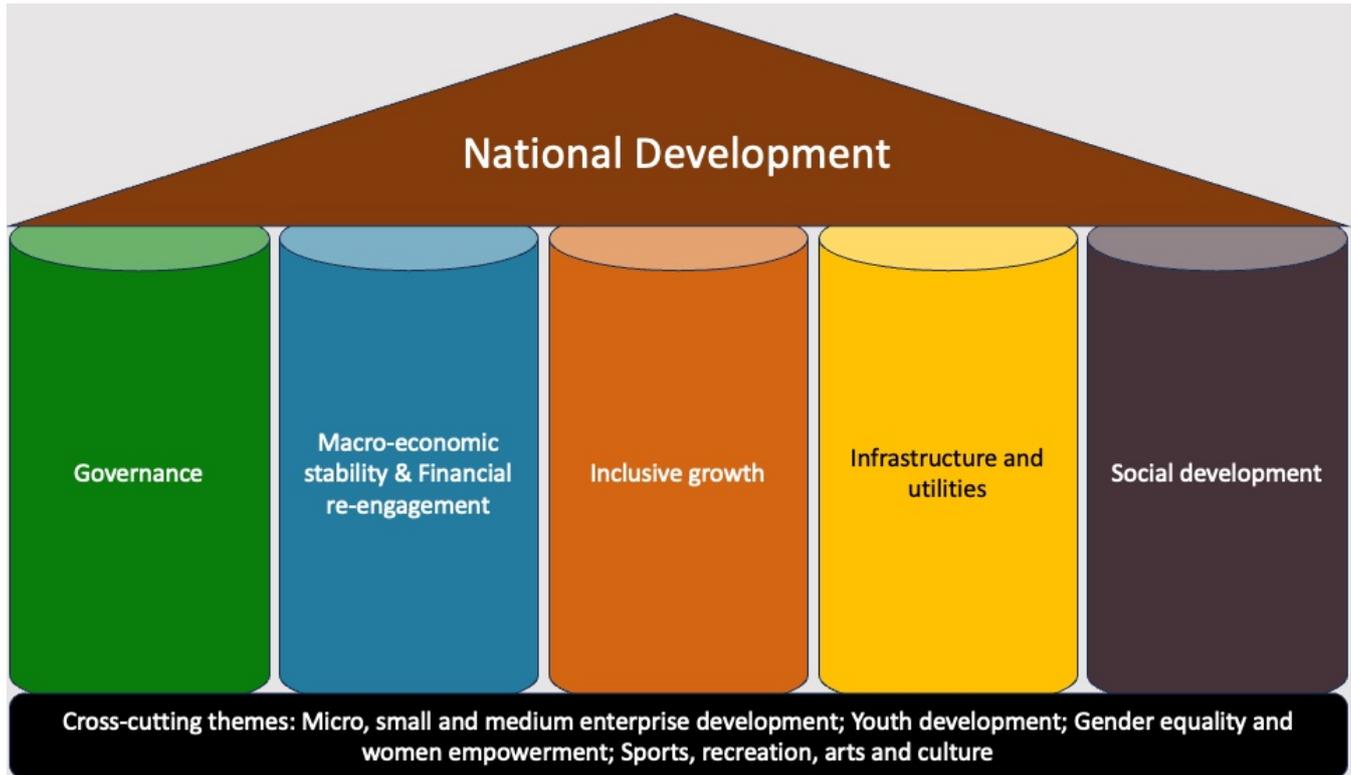


Figure 19. National Development – Vision 2030

Zimbabwe's *Vision 2030* focuses on five strategic pillars, as shown in Figure 19. CAMPFIRE's contributions to each of these pillars are detailed below.

Good Governance

- Empowering local communities to manage and benefit from natural resources through **decentralized decision-making** and governance..
- Encouraging active **community participation** in conservation and resource management to promote participatory governance.
- Ensuring **transparency and accountability** through equitable revenue sharing and inclusive decision-making processes.
- **Building local capacity** to strengthen governance and resource management skills among local communities.
- Promoting collaborative governance by fostering **partnerships** among communities, government, and stakeholders.

Macroeconomic Stability and Financial Re-engagement

- **Generating revenue** for local communities through sustainable tourism and wildlife management, supporting macro-economic stability.
- Attracting foreign tourists to boost Zimbabwe's economy through **foreign exchange earnings**.
- Creating **employment opportunities** in conservation, tourism, and related sectors, reducing unemployment and stimulating economic growth.
- Providing financial services and training to rural communities, helping **reduce poverty and inequality**.
- Promoting **economic diversification** by supporting tourism and conservation, reducing reliance on a single industry.

Inclusive Growth

- Empowering local communities to **make decisions** regarding the use of income from their natural resources.
- Generating **income and jobs**, reducing poverty and inequality in rural areas.
- Funding **community development** projects, such as schools, clinics, and infrastructure, thus improving living standards.
- Promoting **gender equality** by involving women in decision-making and economic opportunities.
- Providing **opportunities for youth** to engage in conservation and tourism, enhancing their skills and future prospects.
- Ensuring **fair benefit-sharing** practices among community members to promote equity and social justice.

Infrastructure and Utilities

- Funding **road development** to improve access to remote areas.
- Supporting **water supply infrastructure** to enhance clean water access for communities.
- Promoting **renewable energy sources**, such as solar power, for rural electrification.
- Investing in **tourism infrastructure**, including lodges, campsites, and recreational facilities.
- Funding the construction of **community facilities**, such as schools, clinics, and community centres.

Social Development

- Supporting **education infrastructure and resources** to improve access to quality education.
- Funding **healthcare facilities and services** to enhance health outcomes for communities.
- Supporting the preservation of **cultural heritage and traditional practices** to promote cultural diversity.
- Fostering social cohesion by encouraging **community unity and cooperation** in conservation and tourism efforts.



OUR PARTNERS

Infrastructure and Utilities

- Kavango–Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area Secretariat
- United Nations Development Program – Zambezi Valley Biodiversity Project
- Resource Africa
- Jamma International
- Agence Française de Développement (AFD)

Social Development

- Ministry of Environment, Climate and Wildlife (MECW)
- Ministry of Local Government and Public Works
- Rural District Councils



Table 2: CAMPFIRE areas and size of wildlife zones.

RDC	District size (ha)	No. of Wards	No. of CAMP-FIRE Wards	Size of CAMP-FIRE Wards (ha)	Hunted Area (ha) (Partly settled or grazing*)	No. of Hunting Concessions
Beitbridge	1,271,900	15	15	1,271,900	*310,300	3
Binga	1,333,800	25	21	993,000	185,000	3
Bubi	607,900	23	1	8,800	5,000	2
Bulilima	643,900	22	14	403,300	*203,484	3
Chipinge	522,000	30	2	40,800	114,000	1
Chiredzi	1,740,100	32	9	1,035,200	365,000	7
Gokwe North	726,800	36	16	252,300	*45,000	2
Hwange	2,697,400	20	18	402,100	*384,318	3
Mangwe	572,200	17	7	153,000	*70,300	3
Mbire	469,600	17	9	421,500	*185,100	2
Mudzi/ Rushinga/ UMP	915,900			100,900	*75,000	1
Nyaminyami	819,100	12	11	353,200	42,000	3
Tsholotsho	833,600	22	11	535,400	*410,000	2
Umguza	604,300	19	4	184,000	*36,678	1
TOTAL	16,893,900			7,317,900	2,732,280	43

Table 3: Hunting Concessions in CAMPFIRE Areas

DISTRICT	CONCESSION	AREA (ha)
BEITBRIDGE	Pingwe Project	32 600
	Beitbridge West	32 000
	Beitbridge East	246 300
BINGA	Manjolo West	543 000
	Lusulu	987 000
BUBI	Dromoland	15 000
	Bubi Area 1	15 000
BULILIMA	Norwood	9 500
	Maitengwe	140 000
	Dombodema	53 184
CHIPINGE	Mahenye	114 000
CHIREDDZI	Malipati Communal	40 200
	Safari Area	150 000
	Sengwe2	280 000
	Chitsa	120000
	Bangala	12 000
	Chibwedziva	180000
	Naivasha	240 000
	Sengwe1	265 000
GOKWE NORTH	Gokwe North Area 1	45 000
GOKWE SOUTH	Gokwe South Rural	No reserved area
HWANGE	Hwange Area 1	376 963
	Hwange Area 2	-
	Kamativi	8 318
MANGWE	Upper Marula Blocks	150 000
	Middle Marula Blocks	150 000
	Lower Shashe	200 000
MBIRE	Mbire East	52 600
	Mbire North	72 500
	Mbire South	42 100
	DSA	55 400
MUDZI/RUSHINGA/UMP	Nyatana Game Park	75 000

DISTRICT	CONCESSION	AREA (ha)
NYAMINYAMI	Omay Area 1	50 000
	Omay Area 2	50 000
	Gachegache Area 3	20 000
TSHOLOTSHO	Tsholotsho North	170 000
	Tsholotsho South	240 000
UMGUZA	Igusi	336 678



 www.campfirezimbabwe.org

