

5. Conclusion

Human-wildlife conflict is a significant problem in Africa. The conflict has important consequences for local populations in terms of food security, safety and well-being, for the micro and macro economy, and also for wildlife conservation.

Considering the current human population growth rate, the increasing demand for natural resources and the growing pressure for access to land, it is clear that the human-wildlife conflict will not be eradicated in the near future. On the contrary, it will continue to grow as African economies continue to be driven by the production of resources for supply to more industrialized nations (Friedman, 2007). This is particularly true in African countries where subsistence agriculture will continue to play a dominant role in supporting the continent's burgeoning populations. But it is also true for countries that have developed a modern agricultural sector, such as Zimbabwe and South Africa, and where recent government policies have favoured a switch from modern commercial agricultural practices to a return to subsistence agriculture.

A series of measures are available to prevent or mitigate human-wildlife conflict. Well-designed human-wildlife conflict management plans which integrate different techniques and are adapted to the nature of the problem can be successful. Potential solutions can be selected based on their effectiveness, cost and human and social acceptability.

The most sensible approach in addressing human-wildlife conflict is to implement a combination of short-term mitigation tools alongside long-term preventive strategies. In this way immediate problems are addressed while the rapid development of innovative approaches is fostered to address future issues and eradicate the problem in the long term. When low environmental impact strategies and traditional low-cost deterrents are not successful, some invasive approaches, such as regulated harvesting, wildlife translocation or human relocation may need to be implemented. Of the various strategies available, settlement of rights, benefit sharing, CBNRM, insurance programmes and land-use planning seem to be the most sustainable.

Conflict alleviation is a two-sided equation. Both wildlife and people are in conflict. The goal is thus to enable coexistence and sharing of resources at some level. This is best achieved by addressing both sides of the equation and finding a balance between conservation priorities and the needs of people who live alongside wildlife. Increasing tolerance levels of local communities for wildlife and adapting the human landscape are essential goals, but will always be the most difficult.

It is of paramount importance that an international forum be set up to promote information sharing on human-wildlife conflict issues (Box 35) and that a Web-based portal be developed to provide conflict databases, remediation technologies, good management practices, and innovative solutions and their outcomes. The portal

BOX 35

Human-wildlife conflict collaboration

The international forum Human-Wildlife Conflict Collaboration (HWCC) was established following a recommendation of the IUCN World Parks Congress in 2003. HWCC acts as a global network to share information and expertise in addressing human-wildlife conflict. Initiated by IUCN's Strategic Direction on Governance, Communities, Equity, and Livelihood Rights in Relation to Protected Areas (TILCEPA), it was formally launched in November 2006. The Wildlife Society is committed to hosting the HWCC office and serving as fiscal agent. HWCC is a global partnership supporting greater collaboration on human-wildlife conflict across disciplines, sites and policy areas. Its mission is to prevent and mitigate human-wildlife conflict through a global network and partnership that facilitates collaborative learning, innovation, scientific analysis and the development and improvement of best practices and policies. It seeks to promote the adoption of best practices for human-wildlife conflict management through conservation, development and planning professionals and institutions.

should also provide educational material, information on high-risk areas and links to other relevant and useful Web sites such as those of the IUCN and WWF. It would provide valuable support to different partners dealing with the problem, granting access to information, recommendations and effective management principles.

The overview presented in this publication suggests the key question to be addressed: is cohabitation between humans and wildlife still possible in a twenty-first century ruled by economic profit and globalization? This raises the following underlying questions.

- Should poor rural communities in the developing world be expected to bear the burden of conflict with wildlife when other options are available? For example, should rural populations have to put up with living alongside crocodiles?
- Given that most African countries do not have the resources to manage their protected areas effectively, is it reasonable to expect them also to manage wildlife living in inhabited areas?
- Can wildlife become a useful profitable resource for poor rural communities, rather than a liability?
- With the growing animal rights lobby opposed to wildlife utilization and its success in preventing the use of this resource in a few countries, is it now time to lobby responsible donors to direct greater resources towards planning and managing wildlife as an asset to rural communities?

Reducing conflict between wildlife and people is certainly a key means of responding to these questions; it is likely to improve both food security, by reducing the impact of wildlife on crops and livestock, and biodiversity conservation, by modifying the negative attitudes of many communities towards wildlife.