

## **From Poaching to Tourism: Giving a Zambian Meaning to Conservation**

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Few would argue that a strong national culture for conservation is one of the best ways a country can build a successful tourism industry. Ironically, throughout much of rural Zambia, conservation is not a word typically found in local vernacular. If it were, communities living around national parks might define conservation as the threat of arrest when going into the bush to look for meat. The presence of wildlife scouts and the heavy hand of the law have not doubt helped to perpetuate this perception, but is this the best way to build a culture for conservation, realizing that the threat of illegal hunting is very real in Zambia's wildlife estate?

Over the past several years Zambia Wildlife Authority, the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources and the Wildlife Conservation Society teamed up to examine this question by undertaking a pilot initiative called the "Poacher Transformation Program". The results have opened some important doors to Zambia's thinking about conservation, ways to reduce wildlife management costs and perhaps better ways to support tourism. Today, I would like to share with you what we have learned.

### A Poacher's Profile in Luangwa Valley

Isaac Chibanga, a one-time poacher living in Chikwa Game Management Area summed up his life as a poacher in the following way:

*I was a heavy drunkard and wasted most of my time apart from hunting and drinking beer. The little money I was realizing in poaching was going straight to beer. Food security was very bad at my home because I was wasting much of my time hunting and my behavior was very bad. I was unable to keep one wife for a long time because I was moving from one place to another in search of good elephant tasks. Prison life to me was a common habit and I stayed in and out of prison several times. Financial status was also bad, because I was killing a lot of animals but realizing less to support my family. This made me to hunt more frequently in order for me to have money to support my family.*

From a sample of 118 local hunters in Luangwa Valley known to poach, Mr. Chibanga's narrative is an accurate representation for most who depend on poaching for a livelihood. The statistics are as follows:

Average years hunting: 12	Median annual income derived from wildlife: \$160
Average education: grade 7	Average number of animals killed annually: 29
Percentage who hunted elephants: 22%	Percentage previously arrested: 32%
Percent with family: 100%	Alternative livelihood skills: few

Several important conclusions were drawn from this research:

- Income earned from wildlife was far below the legal value derived from safari hunting or from game viewing tourism and represented losses well into the \$100,000's for the Luangwa Valley as a whole.
- Most had few other options for making alternative income other than farming
- Those who hunted elephants started with smaller species and became attracted to elephants because of the potential for earning more money
- In dealing with ivory transactions, a number of the hunters explained how they were often cheated and never paid. Average amounts a poacher were given for an ivory tusk

was about K30,000, or about \$6, suggesting a naïve understanding of the true market value of wildlife.

### The Transformation Approach: rationale and methodology

Transforming a poacher to adopt an alternative livelihood is based on the premise that market alternatives exist and are favorable enough to sustain a hunter's willingness to give up illegal hunting and surrender his firearm, especially if it is an unregistered illegal firearm. This premise took into consideration that most local hunters have a basic level of education and that the annual income derived from the illegal sale of game meat averaged below \$200, a target the transformation would need to match with a set of skills other than hunting. It was proposed that with training in alternative livelihood skills and by providing the necessary inputs to enable hunters to practice these skills, and by offering sustained assistance to help place these hunters into markets that rewarded them for using these skills, income incentives might be sufficient to end poaching as a preferred livelihood in Luangwa Valley. It was further reasoned that because the approach offered a more humanitarian way to end illegal hunting as compared to law enforcement, that local leaders would cooperate to encourage their local hunters to participate in the transformation process.

The methodology adopted for the transformation approach consisted of the following steps:

1. Selection of important and influential hunters in a community by local leaders
2. Explanation of the program to selected hunters and upon agreement to participate an agreed effort by selected hunters to form a group 3 to 5 fellow-hunters to undertake the program together
3. Voluntary surrendering of illegal guns by each of the group members with the incentive of a 50kg bag of maize provided by World Food Program
4. Attendance at a 6-8 week course in alternative livelihood skills by 1-2 members in the groups, selection based on education levels, at a venue where district-level Government personnel, such as the commanding police officer, Council Secretary, Zambia Wildlife Authority Area Warden, and so forth could contribute to the training process.
5. Assistance in farm inputs for first year farming by all group members
6. Transfer of livelihood skills by those who attended the training to fellow-group members and verified by extension staff implementing the program
7. Assistance with alternative livelihood inputs and tools to practice new livelihood skills for each group
8. Sustained effort by NGO implementing partner to find market opportunities for newly acquired skills as well as sustained monitoring of participants to confirm compliance that participants in the program are no longer practicing illegal hunting of any kind.

Since 2001, a total of 118 have undertaken the above transformation program at a total cost of about \$950 per hunter. This cost included training, inputs and tools, follow-up monitoring to verify compliance and assistance with finding market opportunities.

### The Transformation Impact

Returning back to Isaac Chibanga to review his current status, he was trained in 2001. This is what he said about the transformation program in November 2004:

*Unlike before, I now have enough food to feed my family because I utilize most of my time in the field. This year I produced 6 x 50kg bags of maize and I now have a stable income flow throughout the year for my family.*

When asked to give the breakdown on his income earning for 2004, he provided the following:

Transects monitoring (NGO supported) =	K80,000
Beekeeping workshop (NGO supported) =	K240,000
Honey sales =	K56,000
Rice sales =	K270,000
G/nuts sales =	K300,000
Maize =	K28,000
Tools usage (carpentry) =	K610,000
Vegetable sales =	K216,000
TOTAL =	K1,800,000 (\$375)

Perhaps more revealing were the words of this wife,

*I really appreciate what this training has done to my family; truly speaking my husband was not good before training. I may call the hunters transformation training, a true behavior changing experience. My husband was not staying home for a week; he was spending most of his time in the bush hunting. When he comes back his major behavior was drinking beers. He was wasting a lot of money in beer drinking. Most of the time I was cultivating alone, this lead us to be hungry every year. After training my husband is a changed person, food security has improved tremendously and we are making lots of money for the household, not for beer as it used to be previously. My husband stopped drinking beer just after training and this time he is a good caring person.*

From a total of 118 who underwent the program, Isaac Chibanga is one of the 113 who succeeded in remaining faithful to the goals and objectives of the poacher transformation program. His story is not that different from many of his fellow hunters who have put down their guns. From the sample of those who have had at least two years in the program, average income earned from skills and opportunities provided through the hunter transformation program was \$154. This was comparable to pre-program earnings hunters made from the illegal sale of game meat. Achieving this level of success required sustained commitment to help promote the use of their new skills and to ensure market opportunities exist. A parallel program, called Community Markets for Conservation (COMACO) supported these efforts and details on this program will be presented at another presentation during this conference.

Perhaps more striking is the potential impact on wildlife numbers the poacher transformation program is now having in Luangwa Valley. Based on survey statistics of total animals killed annually by resident poachers in Luangwa Valley, total number of animals saved far exceeds 1000 animals annually from the 113 poachers who have now adopted an alternative livelihood to poaching. While not a replacement for law enforcement as a necessary deterrent to poach, the cost of transforming a poacher in Luangwa Valley is relatively low as compared to costs needed to support regular law enforcement patrols. Current total costs associated with requirements to send a single scout on one overnight patrol is about \$24 and the number of patrol man-days for a single month is approximately 3000 for the Luangwa Valley region, or about \$72,000. Total arrests in a year varied between 400 and 600 in most years, which equates to a single arrest cost of about \$1728 versus \$950 for transforming a poaching. Based on the results of the survey from this study, about 30% of those arrested will return to poaching as compared to only 4% who have failed the transformation process.

### Tourism Linkage with Transformed Hunters – the Bushcamp Model

An exciting add-on to the transformed hunter program is the opportunity to link tourism to these transformation efforts. Many of those who matriculate through the program remain keenly interested in their knowledge of animals and bush skills but now recognize that poaching is not the best way to use these skills. To address these interests, the program has begun an initiative to more directly link these transformed hunters to tourism-related employment by promoting their skills as valued assets to tourist lodges as guides, and for the safari hunting industry, as trackers and skimmers.

In 2004 the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources asked the proponents of the poacher transformation program to further these efforts. A suggestion put forward was to develop a community-based approach to tourism that would enable communities to own their own tourism enterprise and to employ their staff from the community, including their resident transformed hunters. Through the Ministry's credit facility for tourism, funds were provided to establish a network of three tourism bushcamps on community land along the Luangwa River bordering South and North Luangwa National Parks. The respective communities had a 65% share in the ownership of these bushcamps in partnership with a management company that provides logistical and marketing back-up services.

These bushcamps will open for business this year. Each camp supports two fully equipped chalets with bathing and toilet facilities under rustic barotse thatching and with an open window view of scenic Luangwa River landscapes. Their sighting was carefully chosen to provide serenity and privacy to visitors and far from the potential conflict of other land uses in the area, yet close enough to visit a local village to experience traditional Zambian culture. Marketing of these bush camps will begin in June this year and details are available at the website [www.itswild.org](http://www.itswild.org).

While still an untested model, it is hoped the bushcamp model will provide an important stimulus for continued commitment and belief among transformed poachers that their change in livelihoods has enabled both their community as well as themselves to prosper from the increased benefits from wildlife through tourism. In return, as community leaders see their bushcamps generate revenue for their community, they will hopefully appreciate how the change in livelihood made by their resident poachers contributed to this new revenue and will respond in kind by increasing opportunities of employment for these local hunters. As wildlife numbers increase from the effects of reduced poaching, increased opportunities of income from wildlife should continue to grow and skills that might be best met from local hunters to help support these opportunities will almost certainly support the on-going process of making poaching an experience best talked about around the camp fire to entertain tourists of history soon to be in the past. Perhaps then, conservation will take on a new meaning for Zambia.

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