



Economic & ecological benefits of hunting in Namibia

In Namibia, hunting is a vital part of conservation and contributes to the economic sustainability of mixed farming operations, private game farms, and more importantly, communal conservancies. **Gerhard Uys** spoke to **Tanja Dahl**, CEO of the Namibia Professional Hunting Association.

Why is hunting a good conservation strategy for Namibia?

Hunting in Namibia is well regulated, conservation- and sustainability-based, and enshrined in the Constitution. We adhere to the laws, but also to ethical hunting principles, as we diligently follow the rules of fair chase and truly believe in them.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism in Namibia [MET] supports hunting. Minister Pohamba Penomwenyo Shifeta is outspoken about the benefits for communal conservancies.

Why were the communal conservancies established?

Local inhabitants were driven from their land into barren

'reserves' by the South African government, which applied apartheid principles to make way for South African farmers. In the northern Kunene region, Namibians and their livestock were forced to compete with wildlife for land.

The first community conservation efforts in Namibia began here. The idea was to place wildlife in the hands of the very people, the local communities, accused of poaching by the government.

How do they work?

In communal conservancies, rural residents on communal land have the same rights to wildlife as private farmers, enabling them to diversify their income

ABOVE: Official statistics from the Namibian government show that hunting on commercial farms generates in excess of N\$351 million [R351 million] per year.
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streams by operating tourism and trophy hunting businesses.

A communal conservancy has fixed boundaries agreed to by its founding members and neighbouring communities. It is usually split into zones, integrating traditional resource use with new income sources: tourism, the sustainable use of wildlife (including trophy hunting, fishing and fishery protection areas), and exclusive wildlife conservation areas. Communal conservancies are registered by the MET and adhere to ministry regulations.

Conservancies have constitutions, elected management committees, game management plans, and plans for the distribution of benefits.

In remote regions, where income possibilities are often meagre, but natural resources abundant, the programme brings jobs and additional income, and incentives for practical nature conservation in addition to subsistence agriculture.

From a conservation viewpoint, it lends financial value to wildlife and leads to tolerance for wild animals. This enables mixed operations, game farms and livestock enterprises to thrive without conflict.

How large are hunting concessions?

Commercial farms in Namibia are, on average, 5 000ha in size, with game and hunting farms even larger [many hunting farms in South Africa are smaller than 1 500ha].

Namibia has 82 communal conservancies that range from about 50 000ha to 900 000ha, with 44% of Namibia under some type of conservation measure.

Why did Namibia not ban trophy hunting or exports when other countries did?

In Namibia, one of our biggest 'exports' is tourism. We do not have many other resources, as it is a dry country and need to rely on consumptive tourism. Our government understands this.

Hunting not only adds significantly to our GDP, it protects wildlife. Much of Namibia is under some form of conservation. Government hunting concessions are another form of securing income from remote areas.

How is hunting regulated on the conservancies and how have the communal conservancies performed?

All hunting is based on game counts and the management plan, and has to be approved by the MET via strict quotas. Twenty-six of the established



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conservancies are financially self-sufficient, while others earn income that is used to support conservancy operations. Based on statistics from 82 registered communal conservancies in Namibia, conservancies generate more than N\$70 million [R70 million] every

year in direct benefit to rural communities. Approximately 300 000 people, which is almost 13% of the country's population, live in conservancies. A total of 2 000 permanent jobs and 3 500 temporary jobs have been created.

What is the macroeconomic effect of sustainable hunting?

Although no definitive value is attached to trophy hunting, tourism accounts for about 3% of Namibia's GDP.

About 27% of all employment in Namibia is directly created by the travel and tourism industry, a substantial figure when one takes Africa's high unemployment rates into account. In 2015, the World Bank listed Namibia as having an unemployment rate of 28% of the total population. However, a large portion of these 'unemployed' people are in fact beneficiaries of the Namibian communal conservancy programmes.

What are the benefits of trophy hunting for communal conservancies and commercial game farms in Namibia?

A World Wide Fund for Nature study into communal conservancies between 1998 and 2013 entitled, 'The complementary benefits of tourism and hunting to communal conservancies in Namibia', looked at a total of 77 communal conservancies. It showed that across all conservancies, benefits from

hunting and tourism have grown at roughly the same rate, although conservancies typically start generating benefits from hunting within three years of formation, as opposed to after six years for tourism ventures.

The study showed that the main benefits from hunting are income for conservancy management and meat for the community at large, while the majority of tourism benefits are salaried jobs at lodges.

A simulated ban on trophy hunting significantly reduced the number of conservancies that were able to cover their operating costs, whereas eliminating income from tourism did not have as severe an effect. However, as there is only a small number of trophy hunters in Namibia, they in effect place a low burden on the environment.

If trophy hunting was banned in these conservancies, poaching would become rife and the natural habitat of species would be overrun by cattle and sheep, once again causing conflict between humans and wildlife, and consequently the wholesale slaughter of wildlife in these areas.

According to government studies, hunting on commercial farms in Namibia generates in excess of N\$351 million [R351 million] per annum, and commercial agriculture as a whole provides employment for 27,4% of the population.

According to Minister Shifeta, should a ban be placed on trophy hunting, commercial farmers in Namibia would lose the bulk of their foreign earnings; 50% of jobs on mixed livestock and hunting farms would be lost; and at least 3 500 jobs on exclusive hunting farms would disappear. This would increase unemployment in a country with an already high rate of unemployment. It is clear, then, that Namibia's approach to conservation is working.

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