



## Poaching, wildlife conflict connected

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The connections between poaching and human-wildlife conflict in conservancies are a significant local conservation concern.

Meanwhile, poaching is compromising the ability of local communities to legally use natural resources to support local livelihoods, and reduces wildlife available for local economic development.

This is according to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Alka Bhatia.

She was speaking at a signing ceremony of the 'integrated approach to proactive management of human-wildlife conflict and wildlife crime in hotspot landscapes in Namibia' project.

She said conservancy residents experiencing human-wildlife conflict sometimes engage in retaliatory killing and poisoning of carcasses to remove damage-causing animals.

According to Bhatia, in Namibia it has been established that those species at the highest risk of illegal killing, through retaliation or poaching, also feature amongst those that pose the highest livelihood risk through human-wildlife conflict.

Efforts to reduce the risks from poaching thus necessitate, in part, reducing human-wildlife conflict impacts on human livelihoods and economic development, she added.

Covid impact

Bhatia said the viability of the entire conservation effort in Namibia has been challenged by the far-reaching and cascading impacts of global and national response measures to the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to her, travel restrictions and other disease-containment and mitigation measures, as well as health risks posed by the disease itself, have brought the ecotourism sector to a standstill and have affected the ability of wildlife management authorities to carry out core operations.

She said this has also caused major disruption to the country's flagship Community-Based Natural Resource Management programme, which is critical in providing protection to significant wildlife populations over large areas of the country through community conservancies.

"These rely heavily on tourism and conservation hunting to fund their conservation functions, provide jobs and support the broader socio-economic development of rural communities."

Besides those dependencies, there is also a huge economic impact on the tourism industry, which then makes Namibia particularly susceptible to wildlife crime, she said, highlighting the poaching of high-value species such as elephant, rhino and pangolin.

Incentivising conservation

The project aims to incentivise wildlife conservation through proactive management of human-wildlife conflicts and wildlife crimes while delivering wildlife-based benefits to rural communities in targeted hotspot landscapes.

It will address challenges of wildlife crime and human-wildlife conflict in communal conservancies and national parks across three hotspot landscapes in Namibia – north-central (incorporating the Etosha National Park), north-west (or Kunene) and north-east (incorporating the Bwabwata-Mudumu National Park complex and falling partially within the KAZA Transfrontier Conservation Area).

The implementation of the project will be carried out by the environment ministry and is being co-financed by the Global Environmental Facility.

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