

# Poacher to Leader

Zambian Induna leads awareness about wildlife crime



Traditional meetings still take place under a tree in Simfumwe village, where the Induna – a local headman – listens to concerns and gives advice

“I began poaching in 1968,” says Paul Sipangule. Born in 1953 in western Zambia in a small village called Simfumwe, Sipangule is now an Induna – local chief – and a strong supporter of conservation and an opponent of wildlife crime.

Sipangule spent much of his childhood watching his father hunt in Sioma Ngwezi National Park and the surrounding area, and as soon as he was old enough he followed in his father’s footsteps. “That was my way of life for about 15 years,” he says. His main weapon was a Greener shotgun, used to kill Tsesebe, Wildebeest, Buffalo, Roan and occasionally Eland.

As a young man he hunted mainly for meat, just for himself and his family. He married at 19 and now has 14 children. When he shot more than he needed, he traded the meat for necessities. He was a skilled hunter, but it was a skill that led to trouble.

On several occasions he was arrested and would spend a few days in jail. In those days poaching for bush meat was not seen as seriously as it is today, especially because of the wildlife crime syndicates now killing for profit. Sipangule would come out and carry on poaching.





Proudly posing in front of a WWF patrol vehicle the local leader explains how he was converted to the conservation cause.

He got tired of always being behind bars, even if it was for short periods, and stopped going out to poach, although for several years he still supported other members of his community in their illegal activities. But he started to wonder why the government and private sector would spend so much time, money and energy coming to protect wildlife in what is now the Silowana Complex.

The conservation complex includes the Sioma Ngwezi National Park and a Game Management Area twice the size of the park within which farmers live together with wildlife. It includes the Kwando and Zambezi rivers, and is part of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area: KAZA. The area is protected by Zambia's Wildlife Police and, crucially, by Village Game Scouts who know the area and people intimately.



Village scouts patrol Sioma Ngwezi National Park with  
Zambian Wildlife Police – deterrence is a key weapon against poaching

The Induna's turning point was when he was invited to Livingstone, next to the Victoria Falls, to attend a meeting. For the first time he saw the many tourists who had come to see elephants and many other wildlife species. He was amazed how small antelopes such as impalas would come close to people. It was then he realized that he had treated wildlife in the worst possible way, without ever appreciating it or benefiting from its value.



The Victoria Falls from the Zambia side

When he went back to his village he was a man transformed, and as a local leader he has the opportunity and, as he sees it, the duty to sensitize his community about the value of wildlife. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife, WWF and other conservation related organizations are working together in the Silwana Complex with financial support from USAID. Combatting Wildlife Crime Project aims include awareness raising in villages about the value of wildlife through tourism, and the loss to communities caused by wildlife crime. The local leadership of Indunas like Paul Sipangule is essential.



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