

Human-Wildlife Conflict in the Middle Sabi Communities of Chipinge, Zimbabwe: Exploring the Peace-Building Trajectory

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Abstract

Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) is a serious impediment to the success of conservation initiatives within and outside protected areas. It includes elements of human-human conflict (HHC) between different stakeholder groups with divergent wildlife management goals. This study analysed HWCs in communities in the Middle Sabi, which lies between Chipinge Safari Area and the Save Valley Conservancy (SVC). Data were collected in November 2023 through in-depth interviews with 12 purposively sampled key informants, published and unpublished secondary sources as well as the media. Our findings showed that, in the Middle Sabi, proximate conflicts between people and wildlife included livestock predation, crop damage, human injuries and death as well as property damage which sometimes evolved into conflicts between various stakeholders with diverse opinions and interests regarding wildlife management. The escalation of conflicts between people and wildlife was compounded by a lack of involvement of local communities in wildlife conservation, the absence of a clear compensation framework, negative perceptions of wildlife staff and a lack of an inclusive stakeholder engagement aimed at addressing the needs and opinions of stakeholders. A study such as this is important in that it widens knowledge on reducing HWCs so as to promote conservation efforts and increases our understanding of the consequences of the land reform program on parks and wildlife in Zimbabwe. This study proposes that the previously overlooked peace-building trajectory, which is a key component to reduce or transform conflict between hostile camps, be employed to address conflict over wildlife and ensure coexistence between people and wildlife. This can be achieved through stakeholder engagement which assists in addressing the needs and opinions of various stakeholders with divergent wildlife management goals.