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SCAPES LANDSCAPE PROFILE:

THE KAZUNGULA HEARTLAND

SEKUTE CHIEFDOM, KAZUNGULA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA, 2013: Exterior view of Machenje Fishing Lodge Chalets, Kazungula Landscape. Photo by Perrin Banks, AWF

THE KAZUNGULA HEARTLAND AT A GLANCE

- The Kazungula Heartland covers 9 million hectares, crossing parts of Zambia, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe.
- The project was implemented by the Africa Wildlife Foundation (AWF).
- The project trained 892 people in natural resource management and/or biodiversity conservation, and 821 people received economic benefits through direct employment or dividends.

THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

The Kazungula Heartland is one of the most important ecosystems in southern Africa. Home to the mighty Zambezi River and Victoria Falls, it holds 25 percent of Africa's elephants, some 150,000 in number, the largest population of its kind on earth. Endangered rhinos can also be found in the landscape, along with kudu and buffalo. Valuable wild timber such as Zambezi and African teak, red mahogany and African rosewood is also found throughout the landscape.

The Kazungula sprawls across nine million hectares in four countries — Zambia, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe — and includes a mix of land designations, from protected regions such as national parks, game areas and state forests to communal zones and private property. The region draws 350,000 tourists per year and has the potential to sustain more than 1 million visitors.

But there are pressures that weigh on the Kazungula as people and wildlife compete for limited resources. Habitat is being lost as community lands are subdivided for uses that are incompatible with wildlife conservation. Human-wildlife conflict has increased because of shifting agriculture and the blockage of wildlife corridors. The poaching of elephants and rhinoceros is a persistent problem and growing concern, as is illegal logging and unsustainable fishing practices. And because much of the land is under the domain of the state, communities often fail to reap the financial benefits than could occur in concert with sound wildlife conservation.

MWEZI, ZAMBIA, 2012: Meeting for local villagers to select Village Fisheries Management Committee (VFMC) meeting in Mwezi, Kazungula landscape. Photo by AWF

THE CHALLENGE

The Kazungula Heartland was one of nine transboundary landscape-scale efforts under USAID's Sustainable Conservation Approaches in Priority Ecosystems (SCAPES) project. SCAPES had four primary goals in Kazungula: secure tracts of land and put them under improved management; improve the conservation of key species; support the livelihoods of residents through conservation enterprises; and facilitate policy and transboundary dialogue and coordination.

In the Sekute Chiefdom in Zambia, the Africa Wildlife Foundation (AWF) helped create the Sekute Community Development Trust and then facilitated a partnership between the Trust and Taonga Safaris (Ltd) to construct the Machenje Fishing Lodge. In return, the Sekute community set aside more than 40,000 hectares of land for conservation. Similarly, in the Chobe Enclave in Botswana, AWF helped establish the Chobe Enclave Conservation Trust, brought 328,000 hectares of land under improved management, and built a high-end ecotourism facility (Ngoma Lodge) with a private partner.

In both communities, the project provided additional benefits, such as refurbishing a primary school and training and employing residents as wildlife scouts. With leveraged funding, dozens of community members were hired to construct the lodges, and most of the building materials were locally sourced. Managed by private entities, the lodges employ housekeepers, bartenders, waiters and fishing guides. Christen Likandu, a 26-year-old mother of two, is a housekeeper at the Machenje Fishing Lodge. "My job gives meaning to my life," she says. She and her husband can now afford three meals a day and send their first child to kindergarten to prepare for elementary school.

The project helped create protected corridors and crossing points that enabled the free movement of wildlife, particularly for elephants into southern Zambia, which has a lower density of elephants and where land conversion is a bigger concern. Because of these efforts, the rate of deforestation and habitat degradation in Sekute declined from 5 percent annually to 0.5 percent in the protected corridors during the SCAPES project. This was aided by the 1,100 patrols conducted by scouts, which resulted in dozens of arrests by local authorities for poaching and illegal fishing.

The Zambezi River is one of the dominant features of the Kazungula. It is the main drainage system for the region, and hundreds of thousands of people who live along its banks depend upon it. Many of them derive their livelihoods directly from the river through fishing.

Unfortunately, because jobs are scarce in the area, the need for wild-caught food has led to unsustainable fishing. Problems include overfishing, unsustainable methods, lack of fisheries management plans and inadequate extension staff and resources from government agencies to manage the resource.

To address the situation, AWF created 15 village fisheries management committees (as well as higher level committees), along the 150 kilometer Mambova-Sesheke stretch of the Zambezi. Project staff also worked with the Department of Fisheries in Zambia to create a Fisheries Management Plan through a highly participatory process that involved hundreds of stakeholders from Zambia and Namibia. The plan prescribes designated fishing zones, breeding zones, fishing periods, number of fishing licenses and gear allowed.

AWF also trained 149 fishers in small business management. Brian Nyambe, a 44-year-old fisherman, says "I now see fishing not only as a subsistence way of life but as a business." Webby Chilunda says "this is the first time that, as fishermen, we have been involved in a form of training…I have improved my fishing methods and I have also improved the way I manage my resources."

THE LESSONS

Community involvement is vital to ensure wildlife management and conservation goals. By giving community members a stake in shared outcomes, they have incentives to monitor wildlife and maintain protected corridors, and may agree to different "use zones" on their land. This, however, can be an arduous process that requires lengthy discussions and a solid community-based governance structure.

In the absence of legal provisions for registering community conservation areas, a registered land trust and title deeds are the best means of securing land for conservation. By partnering with external groups to manage ecotourism facilities, thus providing professional oversight and marketing skills, communities may avoid potential conflicts of interest and ensure sustainability of the enterprises.

SEKUTE CHIEFDOM, KAZUNGULA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA, 2012: High-level ministerial visit to Machenje Fishing Camp, Kazungula landscape. Photo by AWF Kazungula