A Community-First Approach to Address the Drivers of Wild Meat Consumption

USAID ZAMBIA LUANGWA LIVELIHOOD AND CONSERVATION ACTIVITY

Photo: Jeremy Boley/Unsplash

Activity Summary

The communities around Zambia's North Luangwa National Park face a range of challenges that drive poverty, including inadequate employment opportunities and limited access to infrastructure and markets. In response, community members may engage in land transformation activities that threaten wildlife, such as encroachment, timber extraction, charcoal production, unsustainable agricultural expansion, and land conversion to other uses.

Amidst these socio-economic concerns, the park's surrounding communities also face food insecurity. In the absence of legal means to obtain protein, community members may harvest wild meat to supplement their dietary needs. Unsustainable demand for wild meat or poor wildlife management practices, coupled with habitat loss, might accelerate biodiversity decline. Failing to address the drivers of poverty could potentially heighten demand for wild meat and increase habitat loss, ultimately leading to greater pressures on the biodiversity within and around North Luangwa National Park.

Activity Highlights

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS
Frankfurt Zoological Society, Oak Foundation, Wyss Foundation, Wildcat Foundation, CoMon Foundation, Bushcamp Company, Help for Threatened Wildlife Foundation, Conservation Capital, North Luangwa Safari Company, and Remote Africa Safaris

LOCATION
North Luangwa Ecosystem, Zambia

FUNDING AMOUNT
$10 million (estimated $3 million for wild meat programming)

PERFORMANCE PERIOD
January 2022–January 2027

STRATEGIC APPROACHES
• Promote conservation-compatible enterprise development and livelihoods
• Strengthen protected area management
• Regulate sustainable subsistence hunting

Approach and Implementation

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) launched the Zambia Luangwa Livelihood and Conservation Activity (LLCA) to enhance the resilience and health of natural resource-dependent ecological and human communities in the Luangwa Valley and North Luangwa National Park. This activity is part of USAID's Health, Ecosystems, and Agriculture for Resilient, Thriving Societies (HEARTH) family of public-private partnerships that leverage cross-sectoral efforts to improve the well-being of people and the planet. The activity takes an integrated approach to address the many drivers of poverty and biodiversity loss, bringing together community members, government agencies, private sector representatives, hunters, community resource boards (CRBs), community scouts, and wildlife police officers. These stakeholders work together to create conservation-compatible community enterprises and livelihoods; strengthen natural resource management and protection; and enhance human well-being as it relates to maternal and child health, food security and nutrition, and access to water and sanitation.

LLCA's theory of change shows that if investments are made to reduce the costs of living with wildlife and to manage, secure, and protect natural resources, then the direct and indirect threats posed by illegal or unsustainable natural resource extraction and land conversion will decrease. The LLCA works with CRBs to improve their capacity to make decisions that improve community land and natural resource management. In turn, improved land use will build social and economic opportunities and decrease the need for harvesting wild meat and illegal land conversion. To formalize local land governance, the activity works with CRBs to develop and implement village land-use plans that will improve communities' ability to implement sustainable natural resource regulations.

FIGURE 1: LLCA approaches highlighted on the Wild Meat Learning Group Theory of Change
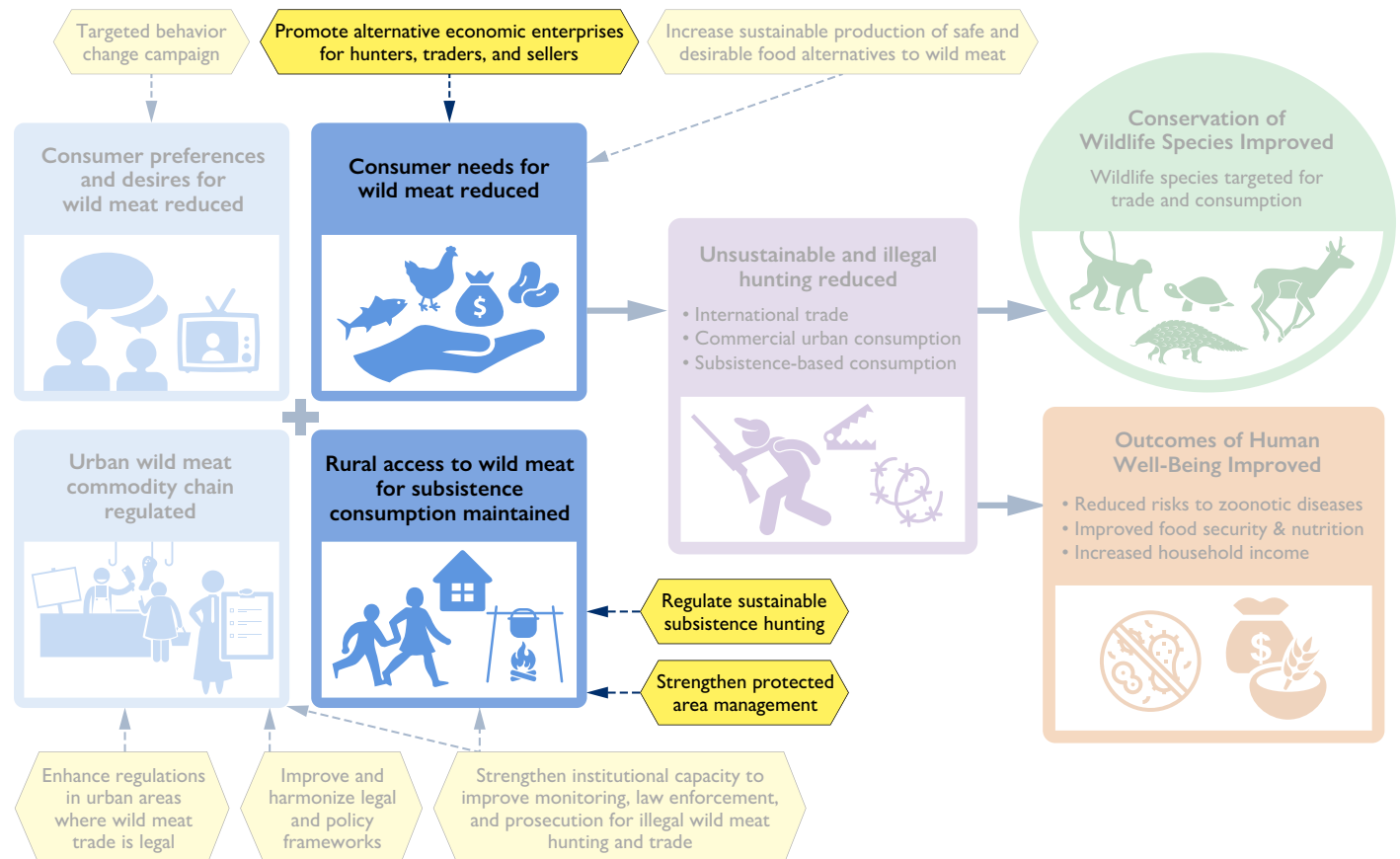
LLCA works alongside law enforcement to recruit, train, and mentor community scouts, thus increasing capacity to deter illegal hunting and illegal timber harvesting. This approach aims to amplify economic opportunities for communities and the number of scouts available to patrol.

Objectives and Indicators

LLCA has a robust Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Plan, with a series of performance indicators to monitor progress. The following indicators focus on the activity's approaches to reduce wild meat consumption by providing alternative income opportunities through conservation enterprises.

TABLE 1: Luangwa Livelihood and Conservation Goals, Objectives, and Indicators

Goals and Objectives	Relevant Indicators
Goal: Biodiversity in the Luangwa Valley is conserved through an integrated approach that addresses many of the indirect drivers and issues that lead communities to clear land or use natural resources unsustainably or illegally.	Improved individual or household food security. Percent of households experiencing moderate and severe food insecurity, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale.
	Number of hectares of biologically significant areas demonstrate improved biophysical conditions.
Objective 1: Promote conservation-compatible enterprise development and livelihoods.	Increased benefits from conservation enterprises. Average household income from environmental products.
	Number of people with improved economic benefits derived from sustainable natural resource management and/or biodiversity conservation.
	Populations of fish and mammal species being caught and hunted remain healthy.
Objective 2: Natural resource management integrated and strengthened.	Reduced rate of loss of natural ecosystems. Rate of land conversion in game management areas is reduced and habitat quality is maintained or improved.
	Number of hectares of biologically significant areas under improved natural resource management.

Lessons Learned

Learning Question: What management systems for land and protected areas can support sustainable subsistence hunting for local communities without contributing to commercial hunting?

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MECHANISMS ARE IMPORTANT FOR LONG-TERM CONSERVATION OF WILDLIFE AND PROTECTED AREAS

Community scouts and conservation officers have a crucial role in preventing illegal wild meat hunting in protected areas. Unsustainable and unethical hunting practices that disregard ecologically informed quota setting, proper hunting practices, and accurate reporting—whether in safari or residential contexts—can significantly affect wildlife populations and societal attitudes. However, when the Department of National Parks and Wildlife closed hunting concessions in three chiefdoms (Chikwa, Chifunda, and Nabwalya) in the Luangwa area, the CRB lost revenue to pay scouts' salaries or fund other development activities. This loss of income underscores the importance of exploring alternative funding methods to cover the costs of community scouts, as well as ensure the sustainable management of natural habitats where wildlife thrives.

To address gaps in enforcement, LLCA is working with CRBs and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife to establish agreements that enable wildlife quota setting, wildlife monitoring, continued patrolling by community scouts, and investment through livelihood projects as facilitated by community conservation officers. These discussions aim to improve hunting practices for both safari and resident hunters while exploring alternative funding mechanisms for the scouts and conservation management within the Game Management Areas, increasing deterrents for illegal hunting and fostering custodianship within community structures. Support from USAID will contribute to various activities, including wildlife monitoring, livelihood support, and the recruitment and training of community scouts in collaboration with the government and CRBs, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of this employment opportunity for community members.

Photo: Jeremy Boley/Unsplash

Lessons Learned

Learning Question: Where are the synergies between wild meat interventions and those focused on zoonotic disease, food security, and household income in USAID programming? What actions can USAID staff take to support mutually-reinforcing interventions?

A COMMUNITY-FIRST CUSTODIANSHIP APPROACH

Throughout activity design and implementation, LLCA prioritized active collaboration with CRBs, building on the experience of the activity's lead implementing partner. After more than 38 years of implementing activities in the area, Frankfurt Zoological Society understood the importance of effectively engaging with CRBs and Village Action Group committees to achieve success. One of LLCA's objectives is to enhance local natural resource governance and reduce the expenses associated with living alongside wildlife. To do this, the activity must address the drivers of illegal wild meat consumption by increasing income, fostering diversified socioeconomic resilience, and promoting an accountable custodianship of natural resources.

Working under the assumption that stronger governance and enhanced resource protection by CRBs and Village Action Group committees will lead to improved land use planning and increased adoption of climate-smart agriculture, the activity employs a multi-faceted approach to tackle the underlying factors that drive wild meat consumption. These strategies aim to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts that threaten human lives and the food security of households near the park. As food security improves and legal sources of sustainable protein—like responsible wildlife management—are supported, the communities will be less likely to supplement their diets by illegally hunting wild meat.

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