

**BRIEFING** | MAY 2024

# Human-wildlife conflict in protected areas of Uganda

## Understanding the impact on communities

**Uganda's wildlife resource base is rich and diverse, providing crucial ecological services and serving as an important draw for tourism. The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) has implemented numerous conservation and development programs aimed at protecting the country's wildlife resources and gaining the support of communities and other stakeholders. However, human-wildlife conflicts remain a major challenge, especially crop destruction, property damage, attacks on people and deaths.**

In June and July 2023, Saferworld commissioned research on the impacts of wildlife on communities neighbouring four protected areas in Uganda, to better understand these dynamics and provide recommendations to inform affected communities and relevant authorities. The study was conducted in Nakapiripirit district around Pian-Upe Wildlife Reserve, Karenga district around Kidepo Valley National Park, Nwoya district and Buliisa district around Murchison Falls National Park, and in Kasese district around Queen Elizabeth National Park. Interviews were conducted with households, community leaders and staff interacting with wildlife. Data was collected from 24 focus group discussions (with separate groups for youth, women and men), 21 key informant interviews, and a household survey reaching 387 community members (57 per cent women and 43 per cent men). The aim of the research was to assess the scale of human-wildlife conflict, understand the perceptions and attitudes of communities towards wildlife conservation, document key drivers of human-wildlife tension, and provide policy recommendations for peaceful co-existence in and around conservation areas.

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Our findings point to a relatively high level of support for wildlife conservation at community level in theory; but in practice, the challenges and grievances resulting from the impact of wildlife on communities are creating significant tension. This can be reduced by establishing structures at the community level for engagement with wildlife authorities on human-wildlife issues, increasing revenue sharing and compensation, continuing conservation education, and investing in additional fencing and adaptation approaches.

## The impact of wildlife on communities

The findings from the household survey showed that crop raiding (animals eating or trampling crops) and animals killing humans were the most common impacts of wildlife on communities around the four protected areas. Other reported challenges include animals causing fear and anxiety, destroying property, causing injuries, and spreading diseases to humans.

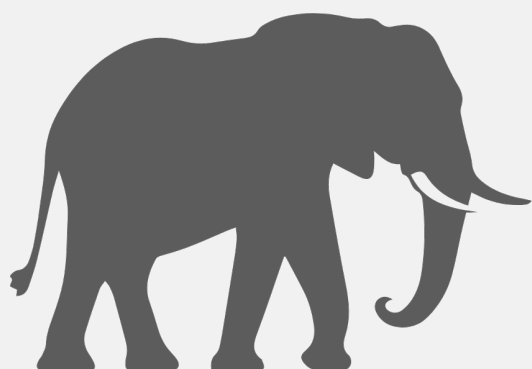
Crop raiding and destruction have immense impacts on people living in these areas, with respondents attributing it to the absence of boundary fences separating communities from nearby wildlife. The study found that people living near Queen Elizabeth National Park were particularly affected, with 25 per cent of households reporting having experienced it. This is followed by Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve (20 per cent), Murchison Falls National Park (18 per cent) and Kidepo Valley National Park (nine per cent). Respondents also reported several knock-on impacts of crop raiding, including children dropping out of school due to a loss of income for school fees, feelings of hopelessness, displacement, family violence, and conflict between the UWA and communities.

Immediately after a human-wildlife incident, people responded by reporting the incident to UWA and community leaders. Household members reported spending nights guarding their gardens from elephants while others trapped and killed animals in response.

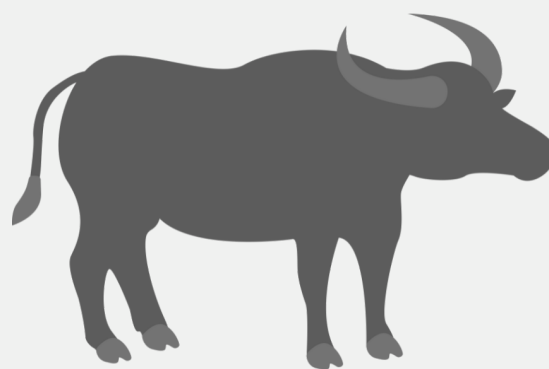
As one leader in Nwoya district explained, “the loss of crops leaves some households with no option but to kill wild animals for food and selling to look after their families”. Respondents also reported that they expect cases of gender-based violence to increase as women leave the relative safety of their homes to protect their gardens at night.

There were also other gendered impacts of human-wildlife conflict, particularly for women, who are largely responsible for unpaid care work in the household and rely heavily on natural resources. More women (43 per cent) than men (31 per cent) endured impacts related to food shortages; nine per cent of women and six per cent of men reported grieving for lost family members; and four per cent of women respondents and two per cent of men linked their lack of livelihoods to human-wildlife conflict.

In the longer term, communities adopted coping strategies by diversifying income generating activities, such as bee-keeping or brick-making (reported by 25 per cent of households), changing choices of crops or animals (25 per cent), taking additional jobs (18 per cent), or participating in a savings group (13 per cent). Other responses included accessing humanitarian assistance, strategies like bee-keeping to deter animals, seeking access to human-wildlife related information, relocating and guarding crops.



**Elephant** – *destroying crops, killing*



**Buffalo** – *destroying crops, killing*



# Community perceptions and attitudes towards wildlife conservation

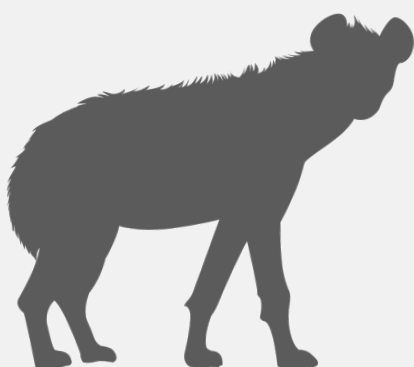
The human-wildlife problem created perceptions of mistrust and resentment towards what were seen as inadequate community conservation programmes and approaches. From focus group discussions and interviews, respondents strongly recommended fencing off the protected areas and wanted UWA rangers to prevent wild animals from crossing into communities to destroy crops. Respondents perceived the law as unfair, noting that, while they take responsibility for what happens to their cows grazing in park lands (who are sometimes killed and eaten), their perception was that no one takes responsibility for the destruction (and death) caused by wild animals venturing outside the park, and claimed that no compensation is offered. Communities expect the UWA to respond by chasing wild animals back into the park before they destroy crops, giving food relief immediately to affected farmers, providing scarecrows to communities, sharing revenue, and paying for some burial expenses when a wild animal kills a person. However, respondents did recognise that their expectations might not meet with reality – and that there may not be enough wildlife staff to meet these demands.

Despite the impacts of wildlife on communities, more respondents agreed with positive statements about wildlife conservation than those who disagreed or were indifferent, saying “it is important to protect plants and trees in the park”; “it is important to protect wild animal species in the park”; “people who poach should be punished”; “it is good parkland/game reserve is protected”; “the park was created for the betterment

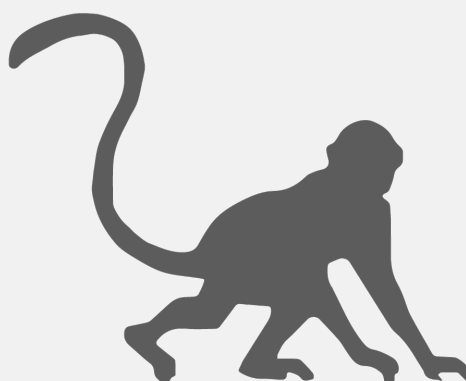
of the community”. However, most disagreed with the perception that “I am happy that my village borders or is in the park”, except in Queen Elizabeth National Park, where community programming on wildlife conservation has been running longer than in the other protected areas covered in this study.

Respondents also recognised benefits of the parks, including wildlife studies (40 per cent), tourism (36 per cent) and park revenues (16 per cent). Other benefits of the parks included creating a market for local products for tourists, beautiful scenery, and as a source of food and rainfall (as a result of the preservation of trees and water sources). Responses also indicated that people sometimes illegally accessed parks for grass collection and grazing, as well as poaching. These findings point to the need for adjacent communities to actively participate in the management of protected areas to ensure access to selected resources, as agreed with authorities.

We found a correlation between community support for wildlife protection and conservation education. Intensifying wildlife conservation education and awareness programmes, alongside longer-term strategies such as erecting and maintaining electric fencing and investing in programming to support income generation, could help to reduce human-wildlife tensions around protected areas. We did observe variations in perceptions of wildlife conservation across and within protected areas, pointing to the need to tailor conservation approaches to the local context in consultation with communities and local government structures.



**Hyenas** – killing people, livestock



**Monkeys** – destroying crops

# Relevant policy, legal and institutional frameworks and how these were implemented

The policy, legal and institutional framework set out in the UWA Act 2019 includes communities as one of the participants in the management of wildlife resources. It mandates a Community Wildlife Committee for each wildlife conservation area to manage community engagement on wildlife issues, including liaising with the UWA and supervising the use of grants by local government. However, the positions of Secretary and Chairperson of the committee are allocated to members of the UWA and district government respectively, meaning that community members do not have a safe space to discuss wildlife issues, particularly if they are related to authorities.

In our study, the Community Wildlife Committees did not come up as an avenue that respondents used to engage on wildlife issues, indicating that they had either not yet been established, or were not considered effective. Establishing these more consistently and restricting the membership of the committees exclusively to community members, with technical support from the UWA and local government as needed, could create a more conducive environment for community engagement and promote accountability on wildlife issues.

Revenue sharing and compensation were two issues raised that, while covered by legislation, saw challenges with implementation. The Uganda Wildlife Act 2019 mandates the UWA to pay 20 per cent of park entry fees collected from a wildlife protected area to the local government as a conditional grant. However, the focus group discussions revealed that communities did not think that the benefits of revenue sharing met with their needs or expectations, pointing to the need for greater community consultation on how these grants are used.

In terms of compensation for damaged crops or deaths, the study indicated that the Uganda Wildlife (Compensation Scheme) regulations 2022 No. 64 were yet to deliver compensation, due to the long bureaucratic procedures involved. The policy also provides for the formation of compensation committees at the local level for quick assessments and response to cases where compensation might be needed. However, communities in the research areas reported that these committees did not exist. Respondents also raised concerns that crop destruction by animals like baboons or monkeys was not included in compensation schemes, as it was difficult to prove that they came from the parks.

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## Drivers of human-wildlife tension

There was a sense from the interviews and focus group discussions that communities felt current structures favoured wildlife over human lives in the study area. This sense of grievance contributes to a lack of peaceful co-existence between the parks and local communities.

Tensions between communities and wildlife conservation authorities differed across the study areas. For example, poaching by residents was the most important driver of tension in Pian Upe, where communities traditionally hunt for game meat, followed by bush burning and crop raiding. In Kidepo Valley, a more agricultural area, crop raiding and concerns around compensation were more

important drivers of tension. Around Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth National Park, crop raiding, poaching, and UWA conduct (and reluctance to grant compensation) were common concerns.

While residents (notably in Queen Elizabeth National Park) highlighted the benefits of the parks, particularly tourist revenue, the overall sense from this study is that these tensions need to be addressed through more effective strategies for community engagement, education and compensation to encourage peaceful human-wildlife co-existence.

# Recommendations for addressing human-wildlife conflict in protected areas

This study pointed to several recommendations for policymakers, local authorities, wildlife authorities and communities to address the drivers of human-wildlife conflict in protected areas, including:

## 1. Establishing effective structures for community engagement on wildlife issues

- Policymakers can work together to amend the UWA policy 2020 to establish Community Wildlife Committees, made up exclusively of community members, so that communities have a safe space to organise and more effectively engage with authorities on wildlife issues.
- Local authorities can work with Community Wildlife Committees, to consult communities on development projects arising from park revenues, to tailor them to community needs and avoid projects that are perceived to provide limited benefit to local communities.

## 2. Improving revenue sharing and compensation

- Policymakers can update revenue sharing guidelines to increase the percentage going to communities and adjusting benefit-sharing ratios between community development projects and household livelihood projects, to better meet the needs and expectations of communities living near the parks. Community members can establish compensation committees to serve as a liaison point for engagement on appropriate compensation with wildlife authorities in the wake of human-wildlife incidents.
- Wildlife authorities can work with policymakers to reduce the bureaucracy involved in providing compensation to victims of loss and damage caused by wild animals, thereby reducing tensions over the lack of compensation in the wake of human-wildlife incidents.

## 3. Promoting conservation education

- Communities and local leaders can engage with wildlife authorities and other organisations working on conservation education to increase awareness of wildlife conservation, with the aim of preventing poaching and reducing tension with wildlife.

## 4. Border demarcation, fencing and adaptation

- Wildlife authorities can clearly demarcate the borders of the parks and build electric fencing to reduce confusion within communities over land and prevent animals from leaving the park to raid crops.
- Wildlife authorities and local government can work together with communities to develop livelihoods programming and other adaptation approaches to help people better manage living in close proximity to the parks.



## About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent, not-for-profit international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives in countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East. We work in solidarity with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity.

Cover photo: Elephants in Amuru, Uganda.

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