



COMACO
Community Markets for Conservation



Conservation at a Tipping Point

We have never had to arrest a single poacher in our 18 years of operations as COMACO. Yet, to date over 2,600 guns have been surrendered voluntarily and 1,731 poachers have chosen alternative ways to support their families. With every poacher that surrenders his gun, a safer future for Zambia's wildlife becomes more possible.

Just as critical as having poachers' firearms surrendered, however, is the 1.54 million hectares of land that communities have put under local protection. Their motivation is to generate revenues from honey and carbon markets when deforestation reduces and forests recover. With fewer guns and more land restored, wildlife is slowly returning to their old feeding grounds. Numbers of wildlife sightings being reported are telling us an important story that conservation can work when the right combination of incentives, livelihood skills, local leadership, and markets work together.

It has taken COMACO years to understand these lessons and to find the finances and support to put them in place on a landscape scale that can impact an entire ecosystem. From where we are sitting today, we see conservation succeeding. Slowly it seems at times, but it is moving in the right direction.

COMACO is not shouldering these efforts alone. There is equal determination by our community leaders to promote conservation farming practices that can help reduce rural hunger and poverty. When small-scale farmers are able to reduce their dependency on expensive inputs or need to clear more land, conservation can follow as human needs are met. This is the root strategy of COMACO.

This newsletter highlights some of our conservation results and the efforts behind them as we continue to fight for Nature.

COMACO by the Numbers



1,731 transformed poachers



225,929 farmers



4,004 organically certified farmers



2,361 weapons surrendered



60 million trees to be planted in 2021



30,000 beehives hung



95,547 fuel efficient cook stoves constructed



43 Community Conservation Plans written

Chief Kambombo Seeing a Return of Wildlife

For the first time in 13 years, elephants have returned to Kambombo chiefdom after a long history of poaching.

His Royal Highness, Chief Kambombo, and those living in his chiefdom have taken significant measures to begin conserving their natural resources – establishing a Community Conservation Area and adopting conservation farming practices that are attracting better markets.

Of late, elephants are being seen on an almost weekly basis in different areas of the chiefdom, which borders Vwaza National Park in Malawi on the East and the Luangwa River on the West.

When asked what Chief Kambombo will do to continue protecting the wildlife in his area he responded with “I enjoy having the wildlife back. I am working hard to encourage all my subjects to surrender their guns and snares as a measure to protect the animals that have returned after such a long time. There should be no more poaching here.”

Elephants are not the only species being seen more commonly in Kambombo area. Buffalo, kudu bush buck, and eland are repopulating a landscape shared by the Kambombo community.



An Association of Transformed Poachers is Becoming a Reality



The Transformed Poachers Association of Zambia (TPAZ) has identified its main objectives as eliminating poaching and reducing rates of deforestation to protect wildlife habitat. To fulfill this role TPAZ chairperson, Smoke Phiri, and its other executive leaders have established 15 chapters representing 13 chiefdoms. The legal registration of the Association is now in its final stages. There is much work ahead to develop the chapters as the operational units for conservation as they engage transformed poachers in a range of activities as role models in the community.

Transformed poachers now have a higher calling. They want to bring wildlife back, a sharp contrast to their former life as poachers. With the livelihood skills they've learned and the improved markets COMACO is providing, this is becoming possible.

“Before our members would see wildlife only as meat. Now they see wildlife as something special in their lives. I am receiving calls more and more, as members call me to report wildlife sightings. I can hear the pride in their voices when they make these reports. For sure, we will help Zambia protect its wildlife,” said Smoke Phiri.

Nyalugwe Community Game Ranch

The community of Chief Nyalugwe is taking the practice of conservation a step further and turning their Community Conservation Area into a Community Game Ranch. It is a pilot initiative that we hope will pave the way for other communities to follow.

Nyalugwe community has designated over 40,000 hectares for restoration of wildlife where habitat remains largely intact. With guidance from COMACO and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife through a Legal Agreement, the community has formed a management committee of key community organizations supported by the Chief to build local commitment for the game ranch.

There are many land-use disturbances to be overcome if the game ranch is to succeed. The challenge is that many local residents do not believe wildlife will bring economic benefits. To convince community members otherwise and to end destructive practices will be a real test of local leaders. In the meantime, COMACO is assisting their efforts by helping to expand such market alternatives as honey, wild mushrooms, and carbon markets. It has also invested in a village chicken breeding facility to help more families have an alternative source of protein and income.



Chikomeni & Mwasemphangwe Chiefdoms Wake up to Elephants

"We were all excited and terrified at the same time. I had only heard stories of elephants. Soon after waking up, it was my first time ever to actually see them," says Morgan Phiri, from Chikomeni Chiefdom.

At 5:30 that morning, Morgan Phiri, with village neighbors Andrew Mloboka and Matthews Banda, and their children, headed to water their group garden. As they neared the garden, they witnessed a sight they have only ever heard stories of. There in the garden were five elephants. "It was great to see the elephants, and we are proud that our work has helped restore wildlife to our area. Now we need to learn how to live with wild animals and keep our crops safe," explained Andrew Mloboka

This is the first time since 1980 that Chikomeni chiefdom has had a report of elephants. It follows continued efforts by the residents to create conservation areas that link the two parks: Kasungu in Malawi, and Lukusuzi in Zambia. Not only has wildlife reappeared in Chikomeni, but the bordering chiefdom of Mwasemphangwe has had reports of wildlife sightings as well.

Eight elephants have been sighted almost on a weekly basis during much of August near Kalindi village in Mwasemphangwe chiefdom. Unlike the past, such incidences are occurring more frequently. Anticipating conflicts with crops, the local chapter of the Transformed Poachers Association has begun sensitization meetings to educate residents how to guard their crops and set up early warning strategies for association members to intervene with wildlife-friendly solutions. "We are happy that wildlife has returned after many years but we now see a key role for our transformed poahser to keep our crop safe," explains Gabriel Banda, Community Forest Management Group Secretary

Having played a critical role in helping wildlife recover, learning how to coexist with large and potentially destructive wild animals will be the next chapter communities will need to write. As COMACO, we see communities exchanging ideas and solutions as they accept the challenge of showing how wildlife conservation can work. One technique that is gaining support is chili blasting by transformed poachers. To learn more about chili blasting view this short video [here](#).

Gliricidia Agroforestry Campaign Launched - Integrating Agriculture with Conservation



This year, COMACO has set a target of planting 60 million Gliricidia trees as part of an expanding program where approximately 500 trees per quarter hectare of farmland are planted by each farmer. Last year COMACO farmers planted 45 million trees. This ambitious goal has excited all of us at COMACO. To support its success, we've created a documentary ([view here](#)) that explains the multiple benefits of going "green" with Gliricidia and sharing it with community leaders in all the communities where we work. Its focus is on the real lessons and benefits experienced by farmers themselves .

Deploying five mobile video-viewing units, our field teams are traveling to the different chiefdoms, presenting the video with follow-up discussions with chiefs and other local leaders on how to roll out the campaign with their leadership. COMACO is massing a public movement for sustainable, soil-improving approach to farming like never seen before in Zambia!

"We were in the dark without knowledge until you brought us this light. We are happy that we are being introduced to another level of trainings using video shows. This is more important because as farmers we believe in what we see. We have learnt a lot from these video shows how our friends are progressing when they farm with this tree and gain better yields and earn more profit," explained Judith Kaoma, the Principal Lead Farmer from Chalwemba Cooperative in Mpika.



Contributing to Conservation

COMACO can be your call to action to fight for nature. Help us reach more farmers and transform more poachers. We can make conservation happen. Your donations will make a difference no matter how small or large. We appreciate your help.

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