

Trophy hunting in Namibia: providing sustainable livelihoods for communities, encouraging the protection of wildlife populations, and maintaining natural ecosystems

By Catherine Birch

Trophy hunting is always a polarising topic but opposition has been mounting over recent years. Cecil the Lion, the media (in particular the use of social media by animal rights activists), and celebrities have stirred public opinion, much of it negative. This has arguably contributed to the introduction of airline bans on transporting trophies, the hunting ban in neighbouring Botswana, and the EU debate on banning imports of trophies.

However, when trophy hunting is well-regulated and properly managed, it can deliver the triple benefits of providing sustainable livelihood opportunities for communities, encouraging the protection of wildlife populations, and maintaining natural ecosystems, thereby contributing to a number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This was explicitly recognised at the recent Conference of the Parties, where the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora acknowledged that “well-managed and sustainable trophy hunting [is] an important conservation tool which provides livelihoods, ... incentives for habitat conservation, ... and profits which can be invested for conservation purposes”ⁱ.

Trophy hunting is a niche part of the wider hunting management system, which also includes shoot and sell and own use. While trophy hunting is a high value activity in itself, there are also wider values associated with hunting in general, for recreational, management, commercial, environmental, and livelihood purposes.ⁱⁱ

Namibia is a case in point.

Encouraging the protection of wildlife populations

SDG 15 (*Life on land*) includes a target to “ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of... ecosystems and their services”. This is mirrored by Article 95(1) of Namibia’s constitution which requires “the maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity of Namibia and utilization of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future...”

In Namibia, hunting is well regulated and species-specific quotas are set annually, ensuring the sustainable use of wildlife. As wildlife populations increase, the sustainable number of animals that can be hunted also increases – this provides an economic incentive to protect and grow wildlife populations. Furthermore, as income and benefits from hunting are channelled back into conservation, a strong and sustainable hunting industry is also beneficial for the protection and restoration of biodiversity and habitat.

Private and communal rights over wildlife

In the 1970s, legislative changes gave freehold farmers economic rights over wildlife, allowing them to profit from hunting, as well as wildlife tourism, and sales of live game and game meat. In the 1990s, these rights were extended to rural communities under the Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programme.

When farmers and communities have rights over the wildlife on their land, they can derive value from the wildlife, and are therefore incentivised to protect it. If they can earn income from wildlife, e.g. from trophy hunting, farmers and communities tend to be more tolerant of the lions that prey on their livestock and the elephants that eat their crops. Wildlife populations, including elephant, lion, and black rhino, have recovered significantly over recent decades, on both private and communal land, and this is largely attributed to these policy changes. Namibia is now internationally renowned for its wildlife. Consequently, tourism, including hunting tourism, has boomed over the long run.

Trophy hunting can also discourage illegal killing and poaching in the same way. If a community is relying on a healthy wildlife population to earn income from trophy hunting, its members are less likely to poach and there is little tolerance for outsiders poaching on their land. Trophy hunting can thus contribute to the SDG 15 targets to “combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities” and “address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products”.

Funding for conservation

Hunting generates important financing and benefits for conservation activities in Namibia. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism sets quotas and issues permits for trophy hunting. Old males are usually targeted and when hunting flagship or protected species, such as black rhino, elephant, and lion, the individual animal is selected. These are often “problem” animals that have been aggressive towards people or destructive of property, or pose a risk to other wildlife.

The revenue from the sale of trophy hunting concessions goes to the Game Products Trust Fund (GPTF), along with revenue from the sustainable use and sale of other wildlife products, such as head levies on the live export of animals and their products and live auction of game/wildlife. The GPTF then invests the funds exclusively in wildlife conservation, community conservation, and rural development programmes aimed at harmonising the co-existence of people with wildlifeⁱⁱⁱ. Between 2012/13 and 2015/16, trophy hunting alone raised more than N\$39 million for the GPTF – 68% of the total N\$57 million raised^{iv}. This does not include the revenue that goes to the hunting operators and employees, land owners, etc. Over the same period, the GPTF allocated N\$70 million to conservation projects^v. The amount includes unused funds raised in previous years. These projects included anti-poaching and wildlife protection, mitigating human-wildlife conflict, and water supply infrastructure.

This revenue from trophy hunting is particularly important at a time when total funding for biodiversity conservation (both public and private) is falling. Namibia is now classified as an upper middle income country, which has resulted in a drop off in donations and official development assistance. Yet high inequality, public funding constraints, and competing priorities are eroding the public funding that is directed towards wildlife and biodiversity. Real biodiversity expenditure by government, donors, and the private sector is projected to decline by a cumulative 24% between 2014/15 and 2020/21^{vi}.

Providing sustainable livelihoods for communities

Rural communities primarily benefit from trophy hunting via:

- the jobs created, contributing to SDG 8 (*Decent work and economic growth*),
- the income generated, contributing to SDG 1 (*End poverty*), and
- the meat produced, contributing to SDG 2 (*Zero hunger*).

Community members are employed by hunting operations (e.g. as trackers), hunting lodges, or as game guards, to protect wildlife from illegal hunting and poaching. This increases household income and encourages people to remain in rural areas, rather than shifting to urban areas.

The Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations estimated that trophy hunting and meat from trophies generated N\$31.5 million for communal conservancies in 2014 – 36% of the total cash income and in-kind benefits for communal conservancies^{vii}. For some conservancies, such as Nyae Nyae and N̄a Jaqna, trophy hunting generates the majority of their income. Furthermore, trophy hunting can provide income resilience for both private and communal farmers, through diversification from cattle and small stock farming.

Finally, although the trophy hunter may take the head, horns, or other souvenirs from the animal, the meat is usually distributed to the community, providing an important source of protein and improving food security.

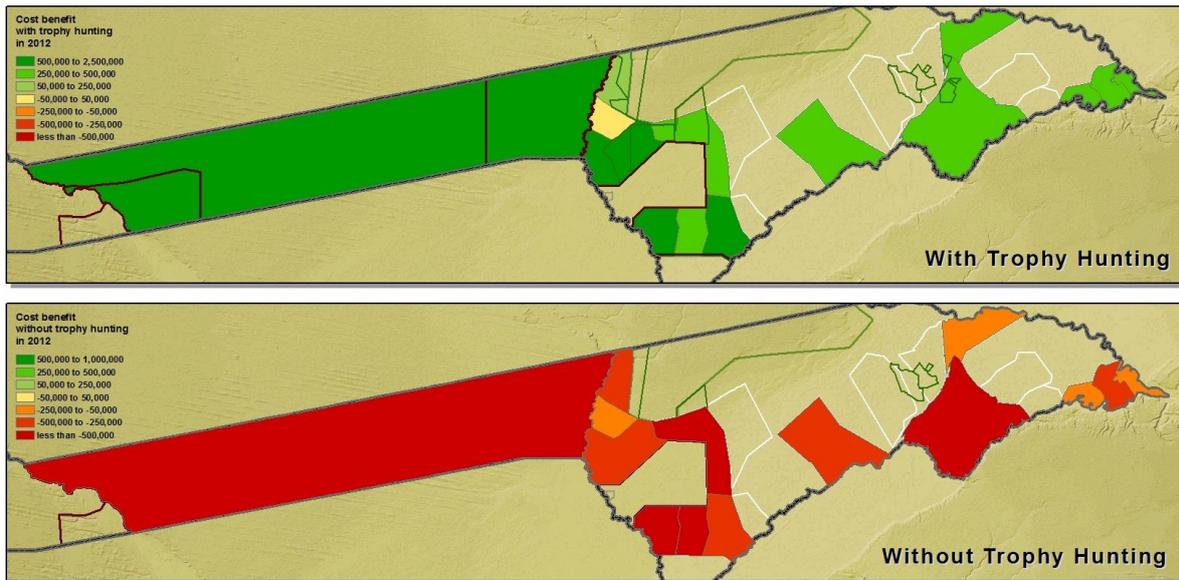
Protecting and maintaining natural ecosystems

More than 40% of Namibia's land area is now dedicated to conservation, sustainable resource management, and biodiversity objectives. This includes communal and freehold conservancies, state protected areas, tourism concessions, and community forests.

The area dedicated to communal and freehold conservancies exceeds 200,000km² – more than half of the total area dedicated to conservation. As mentioned above, these conservancies rely on funding from activities such as trophy hunting to continue their programmes of natural resource management, habitat conservation, and biodiversity protection, thereby contributing to SDG 15. Furthermore, activities such as trophy hunting offer an alternative to agriculture. Agriculture often involves land clearing or results in damaging rangeland management practices, which can be harmful to the ecosystems and landscapes. Trophy hunting, on the other hand, can be conducted in the natural ecosystem with little to no degradation.

Without trophy hunting, many of these conservancies, such as those in the Zambezi region, would not be financially viable (see Figure 1). This could see a shift back towards agriculture and less incentive to protect and restore habitats and ecosystems.

Figure 1: Cost benefit analysis of Zambezi conservancies with and without trophy hunting



Source: NACSO Natural Resources Working Group

The “rural realities of conservation”

In Namibia, hunting is an integral part of a successful conservation model, which benefits communities, wildlife, and natural ecosystems. The negative international perception of trophy hunting highlights the “gap... between the urban ideals and the rural realities of conservation”^{viii}.

The triple benefits of community livelihoods, wildlife conservation, and the maintenance of natural ecosystems could be put at risk by international pressure to restrict trophy hunting or the import of trophies, which would discourage hunting and/or reduce the willingness to pay for hunting in Namibia. This would result in lost income and jobs for some of the poorest communities in Namibia, reduce funding for conservation, have the perverse incentive of encouraging poaching and illegal killing of wildlife, and put at threat millions of hectares of communal and commercial conservancies.

Namibia should maintain its strong support for a sustainable, regulated hunting industry, including trophy hunting, and with this the free global movement of trophies, for the benefit of its communities and wildlife and for the achievement of its SDGs.



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ⁱ CITES, <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/WorkingDocs/E-CoP17-39-01.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Madsen, J., Bunnefeld, N., Nagy, S., Griffin, C., Defos du Rau, P., Mondain-Monval, J.Y., Hearn, R., Czajkowski, A., Grauer, A., Merkel, F.R., Williams, J.H., Alhainen, M., Guillemain, M., Middleton, A., Christensen, T.K. & Noe, O. 2015. Guidelines on Sustainable Harvest of Migratory Waterbirds. AEWA Conservation Guidelines No. 5, AEWA Technical Series No. 62. Bonn, Germany.

ⁱⁱⁱ GPTF, <http://www.gptf.org.na/>

^{iv} GPTF

^v GPTF

^{vi} Harper-Simmonds, L., Barnes, J., and Middleton, A. 2014. *Development of a Baseline of Biodiversity Expenditure in Namibia*. Namibia Nature Foundation, Windhoek.

^{vii} NACSO 2015, p63, http://www.nacso.org.na/sites/default/files/2014-15_SoCC-Report.pdf

^{viii} NACSO 2015, p7, http://www.nacso.org.na/sites/default/files/2014-15_SoCC-Report.pdf