

A Review of Problem Elephant Policies and Management Options in Southern Africa

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Executive Summary

This review of problem elephant policies and management options in southern Africa focuses on elephants outside of formally protected areas where they come into contact with rural people, largely subsistence agriculturalists. Over half the southern African elephant range lies outside protected areas and supports about one third of the region's elephants. Conflict is evident wherever there is an human-elephant interface. The review identifies interested parties involved in problem elephant issues and examines policy and management options being implemented, nationally and locally to mitigate human-elephant conflict. The study relied primarily on the use of a questionnaire as a survey instrument. This was provided to over 40 respondents in 7 southern African countries where human-elephant conflict is known to occur. Respondents included all individual country government wildlife management authorities, NGOs, aid agencies and regional organisations involved in conservation and/or rural development, districts councils or equivalent structures and individuals. There was a 44% response to the questionnaire from respondents in six out of the seven countries approached.

Wildlife management authorities and conservation and/or rural development agencies and NGOs, especially those associated with Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programmes, are those most interested and involved in problem elephant issues. Government wildlife authorities provide the policy and legal framework for elephant conservation and management as well as undertaking field action. The involvement of NGOs and related agencies includes the provision of technical advice and assistance on management and monitoring of elephants in CBNRM programme areas, undertaking related research with which to inform policy formulation and management decisions and providing capacity and support for mitigating human-elephant conflict.

All six southern African countries have wildlife policies and supporting primary legislation (Acts and Regulations) which protect elephants fully. Zimbabwe, however, is the only country which has delegated authority and responsibility for wildlife management, including elephants, to the legally authorised land occupant. Although no country has a clearly defined policy for problem elephant, elephants can be destroyed in defence of human life and/or the loss of property outside of formally protected areas. Policies generally remain poorly developed, centralised and largely ineffective with procedures for dealing with problem elephants protracted, cumbersome and largely unworkable in practice.

There is a growing recognition of these shortcomings, however, and management authorities are seeking ways in which to be more proactive in dealing with problem elephant issues. Policies are likely to become more favourably disposed towards greater devolution of authority and responsibility in problem elephant management. This evolution is strongly linked to the growing strength of CBNRM programmes. Although there are no strong links yet between these programmes and a reduction in human-elephant conflict, they must be viewed as a powerful mechanism for addressing conflict and providing solutions.

The nature of the conflict centres mostly around the loss of food crops and grains where its perceived severity is consistently high in all countries reviewed. There are no clearly articulated objectives for

managing problem elephants other than the general desire to reduce or minimise the levels of conflict that occur. Of ten different options available for problem elephant management, all six countries have implemented with varying degrees of success, at least half or more of these options. In all countries traditional methods are applied by local communities and this is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. All wildlife management authorities in the region continue to rely on disturbance shooting followed by the destruction of elephant in extreme cases of conflict, in particular loss of human life. Overall electric fencing was considered the most successful management option, with shooting and the use of traditional methods to scare elephants away the next best options.

Those countries that have CBNRM programmes have explored problem animal management options most widely. Namibia and Zimbabwe are actively implementing some form of wildlife land use planning and zonation in a number of areas, with growing interest in Botswana, Mozambique and Zambia along the same lines. The long term importance of such planning is recognised by most countries, especially where there are still options to do so. The safari hunting of problem elephants occurs in Namibia and Zimbabwe and both Mozambique and Zambia wish to pursue this option in the future. Sport hunting accords problem elephants a very high commercial value which, provided it is returned to affected communities, offers a very strong local incentive for investment in conservation.

Clearly, no one management option will successfully deal with all problem elephants and conflict situations. Conflict can only be reduced or minimised but probably never eliminated if elephants and humans are to co-exist. Problem elephant management strategies need to incorporate, from the range of possible options available, those best suited to the prevailing site specific conditions. To date, most problem elephant management has been applied in a very *ad hoc* manner. Only in Zimbabwe has there been a more critical and analytical view taken, based on a level of monitoring and evaluation not apparent elsewhere.

Because there are no clear or specific management policies or plans for problem elephant management, wildlife management authorities either do not budget (finance, manpower, time) or do so very inadequately, for problem elephant issues. Only in Botswana does DWNP maintain a Problem Animal Control Unit. In Zimbabwe RDCs allocate resources to problem animal management because firstly, CAMPFIRE has brought problem elephant issues to the fore, and secondly, RDCs have the legal authority to do so, even though such resource allocation may be highly variable across these districts. Donor agencies, NGOs and their technical specialists have provided direct and indirect support to dealing with problem elephant issues particularly where there are CBNRM programmes and projects in place. Training is provided for game scouts, guards and rangers in wildlife departments by their respective Governments, but usually limited to control shooting. In CBNRM programmes, donor and NGO support for training and capacity building is more embracing, covering a range of resource management issues.

Monitoring of problem elephant is largely limited to local reporting of incidents to the wildlife authorities for an appropriate action to be taken. Although incident records are intended for onward submission to a centralised database, for most countries, this does not appear to be happening in any consistent manner. Botswana maintains a national Problem Animal Reporting (PAR) system which forms the basis for compensation payments to affected farmers. Well researched and designed PAR systems are in place in Namibia and in CAMPFIRE districts in Zimbabwe, but their use is presently limited mostly to soliciting appropriate responses to incidents rather than contributing to systematic longer term monitoring and evaluation upon which to develop and implement management strategies and plans. Consequently, no formally developed or structured decision support systems (DSS) are in place for problem elephant management. The Zimbabwean PAR and Problem Animal Management (PAM) models, however, could serve as a useful starting point for such a DSS.

Specific research projects are outlined in the report. Research should be a part of developing a wider understanding of human-elephant conflict in individual countries and the region. Results should contribute to policy formulation at different levels as well improving the application of problem elephant management options. Two examples are: (i) an independent review of the implementation and efficacy of electric fencing projects in CAMPFIRE districts over the past 10 years and (ii) research work undertaken in the Sebungwe region in north west Zimbabwe on human-elephant interactions, presently being published in peer reviewed journals. Considerable benefit would result from an exchange of information on research initiatives being undertaken in the region and elsewhere. This could be very usefully achieved through the Human Elephant Conflict Task Force of the African Elephant Specialist Group.

The following improvements to understanding and managing problem elephants, common to most or all countries, emerged from the respondents and are incorporated as recommendations at the conclusion of the report:

- actively encourage wildlife as a primary form of land use, together with associated planning to accommodate needs of both people and elephants
- problem elephant policies should be an integrated part of a national elephant conservation and management policy
- provide a suite of problem elephant management options, the choice of one or more options being dependent on site (country, district, sub-district) specific circumstances, all of which contribute to mitigating human-elephant conflict but not necessarily eliminating it
- implement CBNRM programmes which ensure the return of benefits from natural resource management, including problem elephants, to locally affected communities
- devolve greater authority, responsibility and accountability for problem elephant management to those communities which reside with elephants
- provide relevant and appropriate training, education and awareness on problem elephant issues at all levels
- involve all stakeholders in the development of problem elephant management strategies and plans
- improve communication and coordination at all levels
- link and integrate policy, resource (elephant) management and science (research) and apply adaptive management principles
- develop and implement standardised protocol for information and data gathering, collection, storage and analysis
- coordinate funding approaches for technical assistance, support for research and other related problem elephant issues