

Conflict between humans and wildlife in Tanzania is being poorly managed—and climate change is making things worse

August 4 2023, by Evodius Waziri Rutta



Elephants are being forced into confrontations with humans. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Human-wildlife conflicts are a challenge for authorities in African

countries where people live near protected areas. Programs for communities to participate in wildlife tourism and share its benefits have been put forward as one solution.

Those benefits are substantial in Tanzania. Wildlife tourism is a major source of foreign revenue for the country. In 2021, the tourism sector [generated](#) US\$2.6 billion, or 5.7% of gross domestic product (GDP).

The country's [2022 Wildlife Conservation Act](#) offers financial and material compensation for any eligible person negatively affected by human-wildlife conflict incidents. Between [2012 and 2019](#), more than 1,000 human-wildlife mortality cases were reported nationwide, with [rural residents](#) forming the large majority of the victims.

As a sustainability scholar with a research interest in farming and the environment, I set out to understand the experiences of people who'd been victims of human-wildlife conflict in Tanzania. In my [study](#), I spoke with people in the villages of Kiduhi and Mbamba. These two villages share borders with the [Mikumi National Park](#), the fourth-biggest national park in Tanzania.

I asked them about what drives human-wildlife conflict, in their view, when and how they experienced it, how it affected their livelihood or well-being, and what could be done to prevent it in the future.

Incidents of human-wildlife conflict had become common in the two villages, but I found that the victims' experiences were underreported. I also found that the conflict was driven by habitat losses that pushed wild animals from the park to seek food and water outside. Changing [weather patterns](#) also played a role in tensions between [wild animals](#) from the park and residents of Kiduhi and Mbamba. Other [research](#) has linked changing patterns like this to [climate change](#).

Water scarcity and loss of grassland

Villagers in Kiduhi and Mbamba believed that a decrease in rainfall and long periods of drought were what drove elephants, hyenas and lions to seek food outside the park. This claim from residents was echoed by wildlife experts from Mikumi National Park.

They said the lack of rainfall led to a loss of vegetation inside Mikumi, forcing large animals like elephants to forage further afield. Potential prey for lions, such as deer and wildebeest, also moved far away in search of food and water. As a result, lions and hyenas from the park targeted cattle and goats in neighboring villages.

In Kiduhi, a predominantly Maasai community that keeps livestock, hyena attacks and killings of goats had become frequent, endangering the lives of residents. Some reported risking their lives by patrolling at night to protect their cattle and chase away hyenas that were reported to be frequently seen in the area.

One victim in Kiduhi told me: "In February 2021, a lion attacked my boma and killed 11 goats but ended up eating just one goat. Though the attack happened at midnight, the lion didn't leave immediately; it stayed until early morning. I reported the incident to wildlife authorities, who came and freed the lion. But, to date, I have not been compensated for my loss."

Crop losses

The research also found that elephants raiding neighboring villages' farms was the major cause of human-elephant conflict around the park. Victims from Mbamba reported that clashes between them and elephants happened almost every day from May to August, the peak harvest

season.

Since most Mbamba residents are subsistence farmers, the damage that elephants cause to their farms has a devastating impact on livelihoods. Women expressed concerns about household food shortages because most of the food they produced was damaged by elephants from the park. One woman farmer said, "For me, it happens almost every year; they raid and eat all the crops, especially maize and rice. I have now accepted that when I grow maize, I also grow for elephants because they come every season."

Poor response

In Kiduhi, most Maasai men and women interviewed in this study felt the local government and park officials had not shown concern about the livestock losses they experienced from hyena and lion attacks. Despite their quest for compensation, they had received nothing but daily promises of resolution.

In Mbamba, some villagers said they didn't bother to report losses because no action would be taken.

What needs to be done about it

Across Africa, [financial compensation](#) for victims of human-wildlife conflicts is a popular management policy. Though some conservation experts have [questioned](#) its effectiveness, proponents of financial payments argue that ignoring victims' economic losses could make the situation worse.

[Studies](#) in Tarangire and Serengeti national parks in Tanzania revealed that inadequate compensation schemes and limited engagement of

neighboring communities were the primary cause of retaliation killings in both parks.

So, firstly, the government needs to improve its compensation scheme.

Secondly, local climate conditions in Tanzania need attention. Longer periods of drought and water scarcity are [expected](#) in the coming years. Human-wildlife conflict cases may escalate. Despite [known evidence](#) of the devastating impact of climate change on wildlife resources, the government of Tanzania has been very slow in responding to these risks.

One practical intervention would be investing in nature-based solutions like restoring degraded land and water sources within the [park](#) and its neighboring villages. This would reduce tensions over these resources.

Neglecting victims' welfare, and a lack of tangible benefits of wildlife tourism to communities adjacent to protected areas, could pose a serious threat to the survival of wildlife. Concrete measures to address this complex conservation challenge are critical for Tanzania, given the significant contribution of wildlife tourism to its economy.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Conflict between humans and wildlife in Tanzania is being poorly managed—and climate change is making things worse (2023, August 4) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-08-conflict-humans-wildlife-tanzania-poorly.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.