

# The Effects of Elephant Management on Rural Livelihoods and Conservation Attitudes around Chobe National Park, Botswana

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The overall goal of this study is to investigate the impact of the evolution, operation, and uses of Chobe National Park generally, and elephant management more specifically, on both rural development and biodiversity conservation. The focus is examining the influence of these conservation strategies on rural livelihoods and socio-political systems, and subsequently on conservation attitudes and behavior. Particular attention is paid to elephants, which though a significant resource of the park, pose a 'big issue' emanating from the high growth of their population to levels that are detrimental to the environment and conflicting with human uses within and beyond the park. The question therefore arises: how to manage 130,000 elephants (doubling every thirteen years), which support a large tourism industry but cause substantial on-farm conflict? In broader terms: does Chobe National Park foster improvement in rural livelihoods, equitable distribution of the local-national trade-offs and conservation attitudes and practices?

The study will advance the understanding of the effects of parks on the environment in its totality and enable decision makers to develop more balanced conservation measures and effectively address the prevalent resource use issues. The study will also inform some of the contested issues which center on the elephant-habitat-human interface. Overall, the study

will not only benefit Botswana but all the elephant range states, the savanna environments, and the world at large. As the study hinges on the frameworks of integrated environmental management and sustainable rural livelihoods it will give insights about more holistic approaches in order to promote sustainability within and beyond park boundaries.



The study area is Chobe National Park and its broader hinterland (northern Botswana). The preliminary work I undertook in summer 2008 was exploratory and focused on establishing collaboration and rapport with local communities, and undertaking in-depth interviews on the evolution and designation processes of the park, as well on getting the historical perspective of the relationship between natural resources, livelihoods and conservation attitudes/practices. Preliminary findings show that the years leading to the designation of the park witnessed a lot of unusual activities and changes in the broader landscape (ecology, political economy, and socio-cultural spheres). Overhunting was rampant, including the killing of elephants for ivory trade by white hunters. Also, the colonial state started to exert control over natural resources through the introduction of taxes, hunting decrees and the designation of some areas as crown-land. This initiated the phasing-off of the traditional (utilitarian/people-based) resource governance and tenure systems. These changes are noted to have led to a lot of population displacements and relocations to various places within and outside of the Chobe District.



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