

Fighting the fires in Zambia with the community

# Alternative livelihood and fire management



## Program

---

A resilient Zambezi river for people and nature

## Goal

---

This long-term programme underscores the local and global significance of the Upper Zambezi region. It focusses on three landscapes: the Kabompo catchment, Liuwa Plain National Park and the surrounding area, and the Barotse floodplain. The goal is to ensure that these landscapes are well managed, that threats are mitigated and that they remain intact and climate-resilient, providing services to residents. Key activities include state-of-the-art conservation, research and data collection, support for community livelihoods and sustainable livelihood practices, and the revival of good traditions in support of the conservation and wise use of natural resources.

## Partner

---



While the world's eyes are on Latin America, fires in Africa also continue to be a problem. They are a threat to people and wildlife for multiple reasons. They disturb the natural ecological process by impacting on grass quality and yield, which in turn can have an impact on herbivore numbers, which would have a further impact on predators. Also, fires can cause an imbalance which is difficult to rectify. Large and uncontrolled fires threaten wildlife directly – with fast moving fires catching wildlife in their path, along with people's homesteads and harvested resources (e.g. thatching grass and wood). In Liuwa, Zambia, WWF works closely with African Parks. This NGO, that takes on the complete responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of national parks Africa, is working on fighting the fires through various initiatives, involving local communities.



The number of fires, their scale and intensity changes annually and seasonally in Africa, depending on rainfall and the subsequent grass load. Fires continue to be a significant issue in Liuwa Plain National Park in Zambia. They largely arise from the community within the park who use burning for several different reasons, including opening new land for agriculture and cattle grazing. They also use fire as a poaching strategy to attract wildlife to new green grass growth which arises after fire. Fortunately, there is a decrease in this practice as newly burnt areas are more actively patrolled. The NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System, integrated into the Parks' software which provides a visual interpretation of historical and real-time park data, allows for real time alerts of fires which will help to monitor and mitigate this type of illegal activity.

### Alternative livelihood projects

Prevention of the fires however, can only be a success when there is an alternative for farmers to replace their 'slash & burn' practices. With more than 10,000 people legally living inside Liuwa Plain National Park who rely on its resources, good community engagement and development initiatives including alternative livelihoods projects, education and healthcare, are essential to ensure the sustainability of the ecosystem for both people and wildlife.

With support from partners such as WWF Zambia, African Parks is working extensively with the community to educate them around fire and the impact it can have on both themselves and the system they live in. The organisation has implemented a conservation agriculture project in Liuwa, which focuses on using smaller portions of land and increasing the yield – making it easier to manage and more productive. The organization is engaging perceptions and encouraging the uptake of climate resilient crops, which require less land and less water, and which will hopefully reduce the use of fire to clear areas.





## Fire management plan

Along with alternative livelihood projects, African Parks and its stakeholders are developing a fire management plan encompassing traditional practices around fire management, with the aim of combining traditional principles with scientific data and best management practice.

The community must be active participants in the development of this plan, from the traditional leadership through the grass roots community members. Stakeholder meetings should aim to ensure all participants have an equal voice and opportunity to provide input into the development of the plan. The plan is ultimately only the starting point; active and continual engagement along with sensitization to regulations is necessary to ensure compliance. African Parks's goal is to restore the balance to a level that can be considered natural and in which fire continues to play its function within the system, without overtly dominating. Communities should feel valued in the process and have an equal voice in the management of an important driver of the Park's ecological dynamics, ensuring their endorsement of fire management interventions. African Parks hopes that the traditional aspect of fire management is incorporated into a modern management plan – culminating in a unique fire management plan for a truly unique landscape.