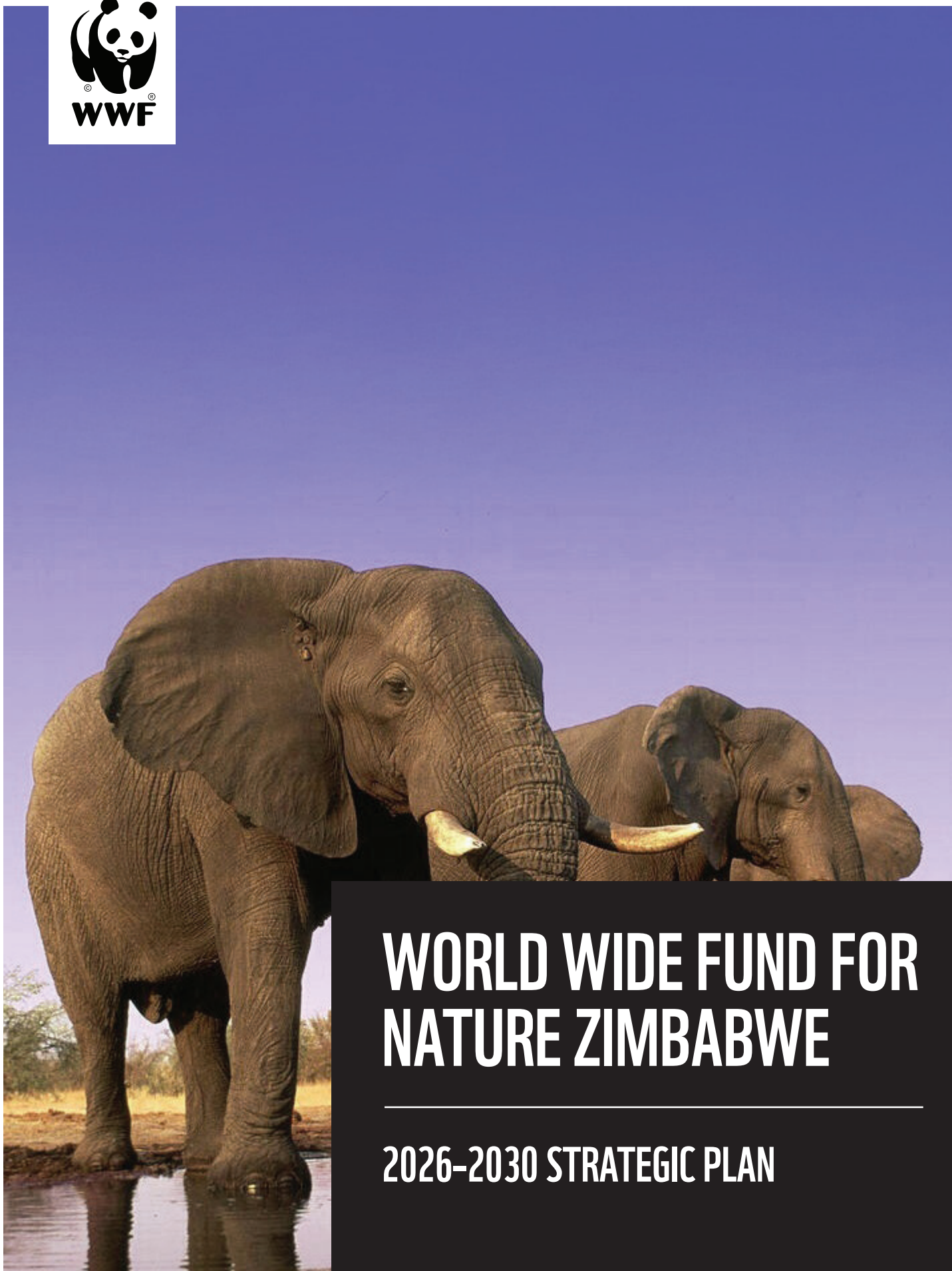


A photograph of two elephants in a savanna landscape. The elephant in the foreground is large and has a prominent tusk, standing in a small pool of water. Another elephant is partially visible behind it. The background shows a clear blue sky and some dry vegetation.

WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE ZIMBABWE

2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

FOREWORD



Zimbabwe stands at a pivotal moment in its sustainable development journey. As the country advances towards its Vision 2030 aspirations, the challenge is no longer simply balancing economic growth, environmental sustainability, and community well-being, but making deliberate choices where these priorities increasingly compete. Decisions taken today on natural resource management, climate response, and land use will shape ecological, economic, and social outcomes for generations.

It is within this context that I present the WWF Zimbabwe Office Strategic Plan (2026–2030). This strategy builds on past achievements and partnerships, while acknowledging the need to adapt. Pressures on ecosystems are intensifying, and the margin for inaction is shrinking.

Zimbabwe's natural capital remains exceptional. The country holds approximately 11% of Africa's elephant population and protected areas covering nearly 28% of its land. These ecosystems underpin tourism, water security, livelihoods, and provide a strong foundation for a sustainable bioeconomy. Yet they are increasingly strained by climate change, habitat loss, unsustainable land use, and competing economic demands. The challenge is no longer just protection, but ensuring quality, connectivity, and effective management.

The impacts are already evident. Recurrent droughts, extreme weather events, and declining ecosystem services are affecting food security, water availability, and livelihoods. At the same time, expanding investments in mining, agriculture, infrastructure, and energy present both opportunity and risk. If poorly managed, they will erode the natural systems that sustain long-term growth and a viable bioeconomy.

This strategy confronts these realities. While aligned with Vision 2030, the National

Development Strategy, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, it recognises the trade-offs inherent in implementation. WWF Zimbabwe will not only support alignment but contribute evidence, promote accountability, and help shape pathways where conservation, development, and the bioeconomy reinforce each other.

Over the next five years, WWF Zimbabwe will focus on strengthening landscape resilience, safeguarding critical ecosystems, and advancing sustainable natural resource management and climate action. Priority will be placed on scalable models that deliver measurable ecological, economic, and social returns. This includes supporting nature-positive investments, strengthening private sector accountability, and enabling policies and incentives that drive sustainability.

Achieving this ambition requires scale. WWF Zimbabwe will pursue innovative financing and partnerships to mobilise resources, with a target of securing more than USD 20 million over the strategy period to deliver high-impact interventions.

Inclusive conservation remains central. Women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and local communities are critical actors in conservation outcomes. This strategy goes beyond participation towards equitable benefit sharing, stronger voice, and shared decision-making.

WWF Zimbabwe will also strengthen its role as an independent and credible partner, investing in science, innovation, and policy engagement to drive systemic change in how natural resources are governed and valued, particularly within an emerging bioeconomy.

We recognise that ambition must be matched by realism. Delivery will depend on strong partnerships, adequate financing, and adaptive management in a changing environment.

I thank all partners who have contributed to this strategy and continue to support this work.

As we move forward, the path is complex but the opportunity is clear: to secure a future where Zimbabwe's natural systems sustain resilient communities, inclusive growth, and long-term prosperity.

Together, we can build a future where people, nature, and the bioeconomy thrive.

Itai Chibaya

Country Coordinator, WWF Zimbabwe

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The 2026–2030 WWF Zimbabwe Country Operational Strategic Plan is anchored in Zimbabwe’s realities and shaped by the leadership, knowledge, and priorities of its institutions and people. Government, academia, civil society, private sector, and conservation partners-including AGRITEX, BIO-HUB, CARE Zimbabwe, ECSDI (University of Zimbabwe), FBC Holdings, the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area TFCA Secretariat, Lupane State University, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, Wildlife Conservation Action, Connected Conservation, Environment Management Agency, Forestry Commission and the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority-have collectively defined the

direction and ambition of this strategy. Communities are recognized as central actors in natural resource stewardship, with their knowledge and agency underpinning both legitimacy and long-term impact. Support from the WWF Network-WWF International, the Regional Office for Africa, and National Offices including Germany, USA, Netherlands, and Switzerland-has enabled this process, while the strategy itself remains firmly grounded in Zimbabwean leadership and context. This plan affirms WWF Zimbabwe’s commitment to locally led conservation, equitable partnerships, and delivering measurable outcomes for people and nature.





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WWF Zimbabwe's Organisational Strategic Plan (OSP) 2026–2030 outlines a clear and ambitious path to address the country's pressing environmental challenges, positioning conservation as a catalyst for inclusive development, climate resilience, and systems transformation. Rooted in the vision of people living in harmony with nature, the strategy responds to a critical ecological moment—aiming not just to prevent loss, but to drive regeneration, equity, and long-term sustainability.

The plan focuses on four interconnected pillars: restoring degraded landscapes and habitats, recovering threatened species, strengthening climate and community resilience, and promoting green economies and inclusive livelihoods. Investments in institutional capacity, sustainable finance, digital innovation, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning support these.

The country has one of the world's highest deforestation rates, losing over 327,000 hectares of forest annually. Key species, including elephants, lions, rhinos, and vultures, are increasingly under threat. Climate change, poaching, human-wildlife conflicts, and unsustainable land use continue to undermine ecosystems and livelihoods. Over 7 million people depend on

smallholder farming, many of whom face persistent poverty and are highly vulnerable to climate shocks. Zimbabwe's most vital ecosystems—the Kavango-Zambezi and Mid-Zambezi regions—face severe degradation.

The strategy responds with integrated, community-led interventions that link ecological restoration to economic opportunity. It promotes inclusive governance, nature-based solutions, and systems thinking—aligning conservation with national priorities and global commitments such as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. By 2030, the OSP aims to achieve measurable gains in species recovery, habitat restoration, and carbon sequestration, while enabling at least 22,000 households to benefit from nature-positive livelihoods.

Delivering this vision requires a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach—including government, local communities, civil society, academia, and the private sector—alongside innovative financing mechanisms. WWF Zimbabwe commits to transparent, adaptive, and impact-driven work—so that Zimbabwe's people and nature can not only endure the challenges ahead, but gain resilience and flourish collectively.

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This Strategic Plan sets forth WWF Zimbabwe's vision, priorities, and pathways for the 2026–2030 period—a pivotal window for accelerating environmental action in the face of escalating climate and biodiversity crises. The plan provides a forward-looking framework to guide the country office's contributions to national, regional, and global conservation goals, anchored in WWF's overarching mission to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature.

Globally, the next five years represent a decisive period for achieving targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regionally, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is prioritizing landscape restoration, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods. Nationally, Zimbabwe is undertaking policy reforms and investment efforts to respond to climate risks, restore degraded ecosystems, and transition toward a greener economy.

In this context, WWF Zimbabwe's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan aims to sharpen the office's impact by aligning its work with these emerging imperatives. It outlines how WWF Zimbabwe will scale nature-based solutions, influence policies, empower communities, and partner with diverse actors to catalyze systemic change. The strategy also reaffirms WWF's commitment to equity, resilience, and environmental justice, ensuring that conservation contributes to human well-being, particularly among marginalized and climate-vulnerable populations.

WWF'S MISSION AND THE ROLE OF WWF ZIMBABWE

WWF is one of the world's leading conservation organisations, working in over 100 countries to protect the planet's natural systems, reduce humanity's ecological footprint, and foster sustainable development. Guided by its global 2030 Strategy, WWF focuses on halting biodiversity loss and achieving a net-positive future for nature and people.



WWF Zimbabwe is a key node within this global network. Established in 1985, the country office has evolved into a trusted conservation partner and regional knowledge hub. It plays a critical role in:

- Delivering conservation outcomes in priority transboundary landscapes, including the Kavango-Zambezi (Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area) and Lower Zambezi–Mana Pools–Save Valley ecosystems.
- Strengthening community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) and indigenous knowledge systems to ensure inclusive and sustainable stewardship.
- Influencing policy and institutional frameworks, especially in climate change adaptation, biodiversity protection, and green economic recovery.
- Fostering cross-sectoral partnerships, mobilizing civil society, the private sector, and government actors toward shared environmental goals.

As WWF Zimbabwe enters the 2026–2030 strategic period, it brings to bear its extensive experience, strategic positioning, and deep community relationships to respond to evolving conservation challenges with creativity, urgency, and resolve.

BUILDING ON THE PAST, RESPONDING TO THE FUTURE

WWF Zimbabwe's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan builds on a decade of impactful conservation and policy engagement across key landscapes. Under the previous strategic cycle (2016–2020, extended into 2022), the country office made notable progress in securing ecosystems, strengthening community-based conservation, and elevating Zimbabwe's voice in regional and global environmental platforms.

LANDSCAPE AND CORRIDOR PROTECTION:

Supported the protection of over 1,000,000 hectares of habitat across Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area and Mid-Zambezi through anti-poaching, wildlife monitoring, and improved land-use planning.

SPECIES RECOVERY AND MONITORING:

Strengthened transboundary elephant corridor initiatives with Botswana and Zambia, implemented vulture monitoring systems, and supported rhino protection in key strongholds.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Trained and supported more than 6,000 community members in Matabeleland North from at least 50 community-based organisations, launched community stewardship pilots in wildlife zones, and co-developed human-wildlife conflict mitigation protocols.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY:

Contributed to national biodiversity strategy revisions, in particular the GEF Target 3 National Plan and inputted into the Zimbabwe Climate Policy and several species management strategies in Zimbabwe, supported integration of ecosystem-based adaptation into rural development planning.



VISION AND SCOPE

VISION STATEMENT

A future in which Zimbabwe's natural ecosystems and habitats are ecologically vibrant, its biodiversity safeguarded, and its people prosperous—sustained by climate-resilient ecosystems and a regenerative, nature-positive economy.

This vision positions WWF Zimbabwe as a catalyst for transformative conservation

that serves both people and the planet. It reflects the organization's commitment to protecting life-supporting habitats, conserving iconic and threatened species, and reducing the human footprint on ecosystems—while ensuring that communities are at the Centre of environmental governance and benefit equitably from nature's contributions.

WWF Zimbabwe envisions a decade of renewal: where degraded ecosystems and habitats are restored, wildlife corridors reconnected, community stewardship deepened, and sustainability embedded across economic sectors. This vision builds on the country's conservation legacy and looks boldly to a future where climate resilience, equity, and innovation drive change.





STRATEGIC FOCUS: FROM THEMATIC SCOPE TO INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE APPROACH

In previous strategic cycles, WWF Zimbabwe's programming was organised around distinct thematic areas—such as habitats, species and footprint. While this structure facilitated thematic depth, it often resulted in siloed interventions and missed opportunities for synergies across ecological and socio-economic systems.

Under this 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, WWF Zimbabwe is adopting a geography-based, integrated landscape approach. This marks a strategic evolution designed to enhance impact, efficiency, and resilience by aligning conservation actions with the realities of complex, interconnected ecosystems.

THE FOCUS WILL NOW CENTRE ON TWO PRIORITY LANDSCAPES:

1. Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area Landscape (north-western Zimbabwe): This will remain the cornerstone of WWF Zimbabwe's programming, accounting for approximately 90% of the portfolio.
2. Mid-Zambezi Catchment and Southern Regions: The remaining effort will support scoping and consultation for potential expansion into the Mid-Zambezi Catchment and other southern areas. These regions, rich in miombo woodlands and forests, present strong opportunities for future programming beyond 2025. The map in Figure 1 visualizes the priority landscapes.

This direction is driven by growing interest from stakeholders who continue to engage WWF Zimbabwe for support, as well as opportunities for cross-boundary collaboration with WWF Mozambique and WWF South Africa. Within each landscape, interventions will cut across traditional themes—combining habitat restoration, species protection, climate adaptation, community empowerment, and sustainable green livelihoods into coherent, place-based strategies.

THIS INTEGRATED MODEL:

- Allows for systems-level thinking, where

conservation and development goals reinforce each other.

- Supports landscape governance structures and multi-stakeholder platforms that align local, national, and regional priorities.
- Enables spatial targeting of resources, ensuring investments match ecological importance and social vulnerability.

Cross-cutting enablers such as Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL), resource mobilisation, institutional strengthening, and digital innovation will support all landscape interventions, providing coherence and adaptability.

This shift ensures that WWF Zimbabwe is better positioned to address the root causes of biodiversity loss and climate vulnerability, while unlocking lasting benefits for people and nature across Zimbabwe's most important ecological corridors.

CONSERVATION RATIONALE

WWF Zimbabwe's strategic focus on the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area and Mid-Zambezi landscapes, with targeted engagement in emerging areas, is underpinned by a strong conservation rationale that integrates ecological urgency, climate imperatives, and human development needs.

Ecological Significance: Zimbabwe is situated within the Miombo ecoregion and the Zambezi basin, two globally important ecological zones. The Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area and Mid-Zambezi landscapes represent some of the last remaining intact wilderness areas in Southern Africa, offering:

- Rich biodiversity including threatened and keystone species.
- Ecological connectivity across international borders, essential for long-range wildlife movements and species resilience.
- Critical habitats like miombo woodlands, riverine wetlands, floodplains, and rangelands that support both biodiversity and human livelihoods.

These ecosystems perform vital ecological functions—storing carbon, regulating water cycles, stabilising soils, and sustaining pollinators.

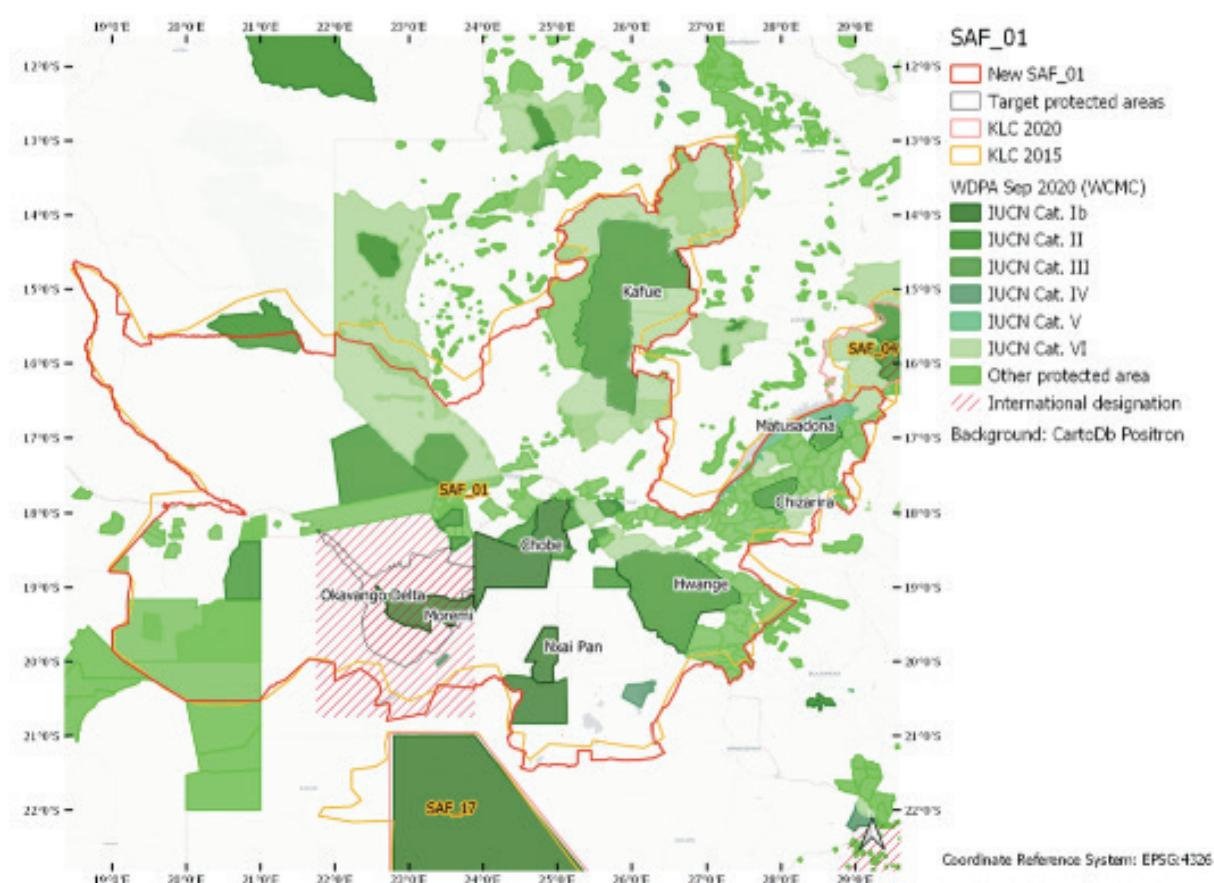


Figure 1: Map highlighting Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area and Mid-Zambezi landscapes

i. Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area

Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area is the largest terrestrial conservation landscape of its kind in the world, straddling five Southern African countries. Table 1 provides a summary of the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area landscape.

Table 1: Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area Landscape Summary Profile

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE	Northwest Zimbabwe: Hwange National Park, Chizarira, Sebungwe region, Matetsi, Kazuma Pan, and adjacent communal lands.
ESTIMATED AREA	Approx. 70,000 km ² (Zimbabwe's share of the ~520,000 km ² Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area Transfrontier Conservation Area, spanning five countries).
HUMAN POPULATION	Approximately 500,000 people live in or adjacent to the landscape, concentrated along ecological edges and corridors.
KEY HABITATS	Miombo woodlands, savanna rangelands, fresh water systems, and riparian corridors—crucial for carbon storage, wildlife movement, and ecosystem resilience.
FLAGSHIP SPECIES	- Elephants: ~45,000–50,000 (Zimbabwe component of Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area's total 225,000) - Lions: ~2,000–2,500 across the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area region - African Wild Dogs: ~1,500 individuals across the landscape - Cheetahs: ~300–400 in Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, concentrated in open woodland zones - Vultures: 5+ threatened species, including white-backed and lappet-faced vultures, with steep declines due to poisoning and habitat loss

KEY FOOTPRINT PRESSURES	Deforestation for agriculture and charcoal, overgrazing, illegal settlement expansion, poaching, infrastructure encroachment, and climate-induced stress
STRATEGIC RATIONALE	Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area is one of Africa's last large-scale conservation landscapes offering viable opportunities for transboundary species conservation, climate adaptation, and nature-positive development. WWF's engagement builds ecological connectivity, empowers local communities, and advances regional coordination aligned with global biodiversity targets.

ii. MID-ZAMBEZI CATCHMENT LANDSCAPE AND EMERGING AREAS

In addition to its core landscapes, WWF Zimbabwe will explore strategic partnerships largely on enriching best practices based on the National Action Plan developed for the GEF Target 3. The Mid-Zambezi Catchment and its adjacent areas are one of Zimbabwe's most biologically rich and ecologically strategic landscapes. The emerging areas also include the urban–peri-urban interfaces, particularly for piloting green infrastructure, urban water security, and youth-driven innovation. These zones represent future growth areas for integrated programming and testing of scalable conservation solutions. Table 2 provides a summary of the landscape.

Table 2: Zambezi Catchment Valley Landscape Summary Profile

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE	North-central Zimbabwe: Mana Pools National Park, Sapi and Chewore Safari Areas, Hurungwe, and adjacent communal lands. Connects to Zambia's Lower Zambezi.
ESTIMATED AREA	Approx. 20,000 km ² covering protected areas, buffer zones, and surrounding catchments in the Zambezi River valley.
HUMAN POPULATION	An estimated 75,000–100,000 people live in and around the landscape, relying on farming, fishing, and ecosystem services.
KEY HABITATS	Riparian forests, floodplains, dry woodlands (mopane and miombo), escarpments, and freshwater systems—vital for biodiversity and agriculture.
FLAGSHIP SPECIES	• Elephants: Significant migratory population (2,500–4,000), moving across Lower Zambezi and Mana Pools corridors • Lions and Leopards: Key predator species within core protected areas • Black Rhinos: Small, critically endangered population under intensive protection • Birds: >390 species, including crowned eagles, fish eagles, and migratory freshwater species
KEY FOOTPRINT PRESSURES	Poaching, illegal logging, slash-and-burn agriculture, encroachment into riparian zones, charcoal production, and climate-induced water stress.
STRATEGIC RATIONALE	A globally recognised biodiversity hotspot and UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Mid-Zambezi Valley plays a crucial role in transboundary species conservation, freshwater ecosystem health, and community-based natural resource management. WWF's focus here supports catchment restoration, wildlife recovery, climate resilience, and green livelihoods in one of Zimbabwe's most ecologically valuable corridors.



CONSERVATION FOCUS AREAS

WWF Zimbabwe's 2026–2030 conservation strategy is anchored in the understanding that healthy ecosystems are essential for both people and nature, particularly in the context of intensifying climate change, population growth, and unsustainable land use. The strategy prioritises two ecologically significant landscapes: the Kavango-Zambezi (Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area) region and the Mid-Zambezi Valley. In these areas, WWF seeks to protect and restore critical habitats, safeguard iconic

species, and pilot integrated models that advance ecological integrity, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods.

These landscapes not only provide vital habitats for wildlife such as elephants, lions, rhinos, and vultures, but also deliver essential ecosystem services—wetlands regulate floods, woodlands sequester carbon, and rangelands sustain both people and livestock. WWF's approach blends proven conservation practices with climate-smart innovations and inclusive governance, working toward a future where nature and communities thrive together.

Smallholder agriculture sustains most rural households in Zimbabwe but is also a leading driver of deforestation, land degradation, and biodiversity loss. This duality underscores the urgent need to transition from extractive practices to regenerative systems. WWF Zimbabwe's 2026–2030 strategy explicitly targets this paradox by promoting agroecological and nature-positive farming approaches that restore ecosystems while sustaining livelihoods—ensuring that the agricultural frontier becomes a source of ecological renewal rather than decline.



LANDSCAPE 1:

KAVANGO-ZAMBEZI (KAZA)

ECOLOGICAL PROFILE

Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area is the largest terrestrial conservation landscape of its kind in the world, straddling five Southern African countries, namely Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. With a combined area of approximately 520,000 square kilometres, Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area represents one of the most ambitious conservation collaborations globally. The region is home to around 2.7 million people, many of whom live along the lifelines of the Okavango and Zambezi Rivers, relying on natural resources for their livelihoods, culture, and survival.

Ecologically, Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area is a richly diverse landscape characterised by expansive miombo woodlands, wetlands, savanna rangelands, and riparian systems. It supports some of Africa's most iconic and threatened wildlife species and plays a critical role in maintaining ecological connectivity across international borders.

Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area's conservation area includes a complex network of national parks, forest reserves, community conservancies, game management areas, and wildlife sanctuaries. In total, the area comprises 20 national parks, 85 forest reserves, over 100 community-based wildlife areas, and three UNESCO World Heritage Sites—Victoria Falls, the Okavango Delta, and Tsodilo Hills.

Within Zimbabwe, the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area landscape spans the country's north-western region, linking protected areas such as Hwange National Park, Matetsi Safari Area, Kazuma Pan National Park, and surrounding communal lands. This mosaic forms a key ecological corridor for elephants and large carnivores, enabling seasonal migrations and gene flow between protected ecosystems across national boundaries.

Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area's ecological integrity, however, remains fragile. The region faces intensifying pressures that threaten both biodiversity and landscape functionality.

- Habitat fragmentation continues due to expanding agriculture, settlements, and unsustainable infrastructure development, particularly around key corridors.
- Unsustainable agricultural expansion is among the leading threats to ecosystem integrity in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area landscape.
- Overgrazing by livestock, especially near communal land boundaries, is reducing grassland quality and increasing erosion.

- Poaching and illegal wildlife trade remain persistent threats, targeting elephants, lions, and vultures, and undermining conservation gains.
- Uncontrolled fires, often linked to shifting cultivation and charcoal production, degrade woodlands and weaken natural regeneration.
- Climate stress—including prolonged droughts and shifting rainfall patterns—is exacerbating water scarcity and intensifying human-wildlife conflict.
- Finally, habitat fragmentation and human-wildlife interactions are intensifying, making the interconnectedness of environmental degradation, human health, and wildlife disease risks more apparent.

Maintaining the delicate balance between biodiversity conservation and community needs is essential—not only to safeguard globally significant wildlife populations but also to sustain the ecosystem services that underpin livelihoods and regional development.

Through the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area Treaty and associated frameworks, the five partner states aim to collaboratively manage this transboundary landscape for ecological, social, and economic benefits. WWF Zimbabwe's work in Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area focuses on strengthening corridors, restoring degraded ecosystems, promoting coexistence, and enhancing community stewardship as part of a landscape-scale, multi-stakeholder conservation model. About 95% of WWF Zimbabwe's work will be in Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area.

PRIORITY HABITATS

- Miombo and mopane woodlands (est. 35,000 km² or 3,500,000 ha): Carbon-dense habitats that support diverse flora and fauna.
- Dryland rangelands (est. 20,000 km² or 2,000,000 ha): Crucial for wildlife and pastoral livelihoods.
- Ephemeral pans and wetlands (est. 5,000 km² or 500,000 ha): Seasonal refuges for birds and mammals; critical for water flow regulation and security.

FLAGSHIP SPECIES

- Elephants (*Loxodonta africana*): The world's largest contiguous elephant population—estimated at over 225,000, representing nearly half of Africa's total.
- Lions (*Panthera leo*): Around 15% of Africa's lion population. The apex predator plays a vital role in ecological balance and tourism.
- Approximately 15% of the world's remaining wild cheetah population.
- An estimated 25% of Africa's wild dogs.
- Vultures (*Gyps* spp., *Torgos tracheliotos*): Scavengers key to nutrient cycling but severely threatened.

STRATEGIC APPROACHES

- Restoring transboundary corridors to maintain ecological connectivity under climate stress.
- Community-based nature conservation models with equitable benefit-sharing (e.g., wildlife credits, eco-tourism).
- Nature-based solutions for ecosystem resilience, and adaptation to climate change by communities and biodiversity (e.g. rotational grazing schemes, pasture reseeded and erosion control, waterpoint management, livestock-wildlife co-existence planning, payment for ecosystem models).
- Shift food systems towards nature-positive actions at the production (farming and grazing systems) and consumption level to regenerate rather than deplete ecosystems
- Anti-wildlife trafficking and digital monitoring systems across borders.
- Commitment to agroecology (community demonstration plots, farmer field schools and climate-smart land use planning) to stabilise cultivation frontiers and restore ecological frontiers.
- Climate-smart human-wildlife conflict mitigation using predictive mapping and deterrent technologies.
- Integrating ecosystem health into conservation and land management systems – including improved sanitation, zoonotic risk awareness and community led surveillance in high-risk areas.

HUMAN WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

- Enhanced food and nutrition security through nature-positive agriculture and agroecological approaches i.e. transition to regenerative farming systems that improve soil fertility, water retention, and crop diversity while reducing food loss and waste. Key practices include soil health restoration (e.g. composting and mulching), crop-livestock integration, rotational grazing, use of indigenous seeds, diversified cropping, and farmer field schools. Community seed banks and climate-resilient storage and processing technologies help strengthen local food systems and reduce post-harvest losses.
- Livelihood diversification through conservation-compatible enterprises (such as eco-tourism, beekeeping, sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and green microenterprises, particularly targeting youth and women).
- Water security through ecosystem restoration and governance
- Strengthened climate resilience through ecological stewardship (e.g. through access to early warning systems, climate-smart infrastructure, and nature-based adaptation measures (e.g., floodplain restoration, climate-resilient seed banks, fuelwood alternatives).



LANDSCAPE 2: MID-ZAMBEZI VALLEY

ECOLOGICAL PROFILE

The Mid-Zambezi Valley is one of Zimbabwe's most biologically rich and ecologically strategic landscapes. Anchored by Mana Pools National Park, Sapi, and Chewore Safari Areas, the region forms part of a 10,500 km² UNESCO World Heritage Site and lies within a critical transboundary corridor that connects to Zambia's Lower Zambezi landscape across the Zambezi River.

Spanning approximately 20,000 km², the broader Mid-Zambezi landscape is characterized by a diverse mosaic of riparian forests, floodplains, mopane and miombo woodlands, and escarpment ecosystems. These habitats support more than 390 species of birds, over 100 mammal species, and numerous threatened taxa. Notably, the area is home to one of Zimbabwe's last viable populations of black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), along with significant numbers of elephants, hippos, buffalo, lions, and leopards. The river itself is home to over 75 species of freshwater fish and supports key wetland systems of international importance.

The Zambezi River floodplain—which defines the valley's ecology—is essential for nutrient cycling, biodiversity, and the agricultural productivity of adjacent communities. Around 75,000 people live in or around the landscape, many of whom rely on subsistence agriculture, artisanal fishing, and tourism-related employment. Despite its ecological and economic importance, the Mid-Zambezi landscape faces escalating threats:

- Deforestation and woodland degradation driven by charcoal production, slash-and-burn agriculture, and illegal logging, with some districts experiencing forest cover loss exceeding 2% annually.
- Poaching and wildlife trafficking, including pressure on elephants, lions and rhinos due to proximity to international wildlife trade routes.
- Climate change impacts, including prolonged dry spells, shifting rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events affecting both ecosystems and agriculture.

The Mid-Zambezi Valley is more than a conservation priority—it is a national ecological asset and a globally significant corridor. Its protection and restoration will generate measurable biodiversity, climate, and community outcomes, making it a vital component of WWF Zimbabwe's long-term landscape vision. Urban cities like Harare and surrounding peri-urban wetlands in the broader Mid-Zambezi Catchment face wetland encroachment, pollution, and water insecurity. Our interventions will focus on green infrastructure

(nature-based, low-impact solutions that restore natural processes while also delivering essential services to people and wildlife), community-led wetland governance, and youth-driven climate action.

About 5% of WWF Zimbabwe's work will be in this landscape.

PRIORITY HABITATS

- Riparian wetlands and river systems: Support fisheries, agriculture, and biodiversity.
- Wooded escarpments and gallery forests: Refuge for large mammals and birds.
- Savanna rangelands: Shared space for wildlife and agro-pastoralism.

FLAGSHIP SPECIES

- Black and white rhinos: Critically endangered and essential for herbivore diversity.
- Elephants and lions: Iconic species with cross-border movement patterns.
- Zambezi aquatic species: Freshwater biodiversity is vital for food and income.

STRATEGIC APPROACHES

- Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) to enhance climate resilience in wetlands, floodplains and buffer zones.
- Nature-based solutions to restore, protect and sustainably manage degraded woodlands and riparian systems to provide ecosystem services and sustain livelihoods and biodiversity.
- Supporting transboundary collaboration for species monitoring and protection, particularly with Zambia's Lower Zambezi authorities. This will include transboundary anti-poaching and joint enforcement along the Zambezi River corridor.
- Sustainable fisheries and agroecology and nature positive agriculture pilots to balance human needs with ecosystem health.
- Nature-based solutions for rangeland management and water security (e.g. rotational grazing schemes, pasture reseeding and erosion control, waterpoint management, livestock-wildlife co-existence planning, payment for ecosystem models).
- Commitment to agroecology (community demonstration plots, farmer field schools and climate-smart land use planning) to stabilize cultivation frontiers and restore ecological frontiers.
- Expanding community wildlife conservancies and piloting coexistence models to reduce human-wildlife conflict. This includes eco-pathways and wildlife crossings in human-dominated zones to maintain species movement and reduce conflict.
- Promoting climate-smart livelihoods, including agroecology and regenerative agriculture (nature-positive agricultural practices), honey production, ecotourism, green enterprise development and other ecosystem payments.

HUMAN WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

- Inclusive local governance over natural resources.
- Improved household nutrition, food diversity, and incomes through sustainable fishing and farming practices that regenerate soils and aquatic ecosystems.
- Reduced human-wildlife conflict and improved security, mobility, and productivity for communities living in wildlife corridors.
- Increased household income, food security, and resilience through diversified nature-positive livelihoods linked to sustainable markets and ecosystem service rewards.
- Enhanced safety, pride, and economic opportunity in border communities through reduced poaching risks and joint wildlife stewardship that supports tourism and conservation jobs.
- Improved access to ecosystem services—such as firewood, clean water, and non-timber products—through equitable, community-led forest and watershed restoration.
- Reduced climate vulnerability and improved water and food security for floodplain communities through nature-based protection against droughts and floods.

CROSS-CUTTING INNOVATION AND CLIMATE RESPONSES ACROSS THE TARGETED LANDSCAPES

WWF Zimbabwe's conservation model is rooted in climate-responsive, rights-based, and technologically enabled approaches. These include:

- Nature-based solutions (NbS): Core to both landscapes for climate adaptation and ecosystem restoration.
- Green financing mechanisms: Leveraging carbon credits, biodiversity offsets, and blended finance to sustain conservation funding.
- Digital conservation tools: Remote sensing, mobile data collection, and community reporting for wildlife and habitat monitoring.
- Inclusive governance: Co-management models, especially with indigenous communities and local authorities, that ensure equity, ownership, and sustainability.
- Youth and gender integration: Engaging new generations and ensuring diverse leadership in conservation initiatives.



THEORY OF CHANGE (TOC)

The Theory of Change underpins WWF Zimbabwe's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, articulating how the organisation's inputs and interventions will lead to transformative, measurable impact. It maps the causal pathway from ecosystem restoration, species recovery, community empowerment, and climate-smart innovations to outcomes such as improved biodiversity, reduced human-wildlife conflict, enhanced resilience, and inclusive governance.

This Theory of Change adopts a landscape-based lens, with clear linkages between conservation and human well-being outcomes. It recognises that lasting change depends not only on direct conservation actions, but also on enabling systems—such as policies, institutions, knowledge platforms, and financing mechanisms—that sustain impact over time.

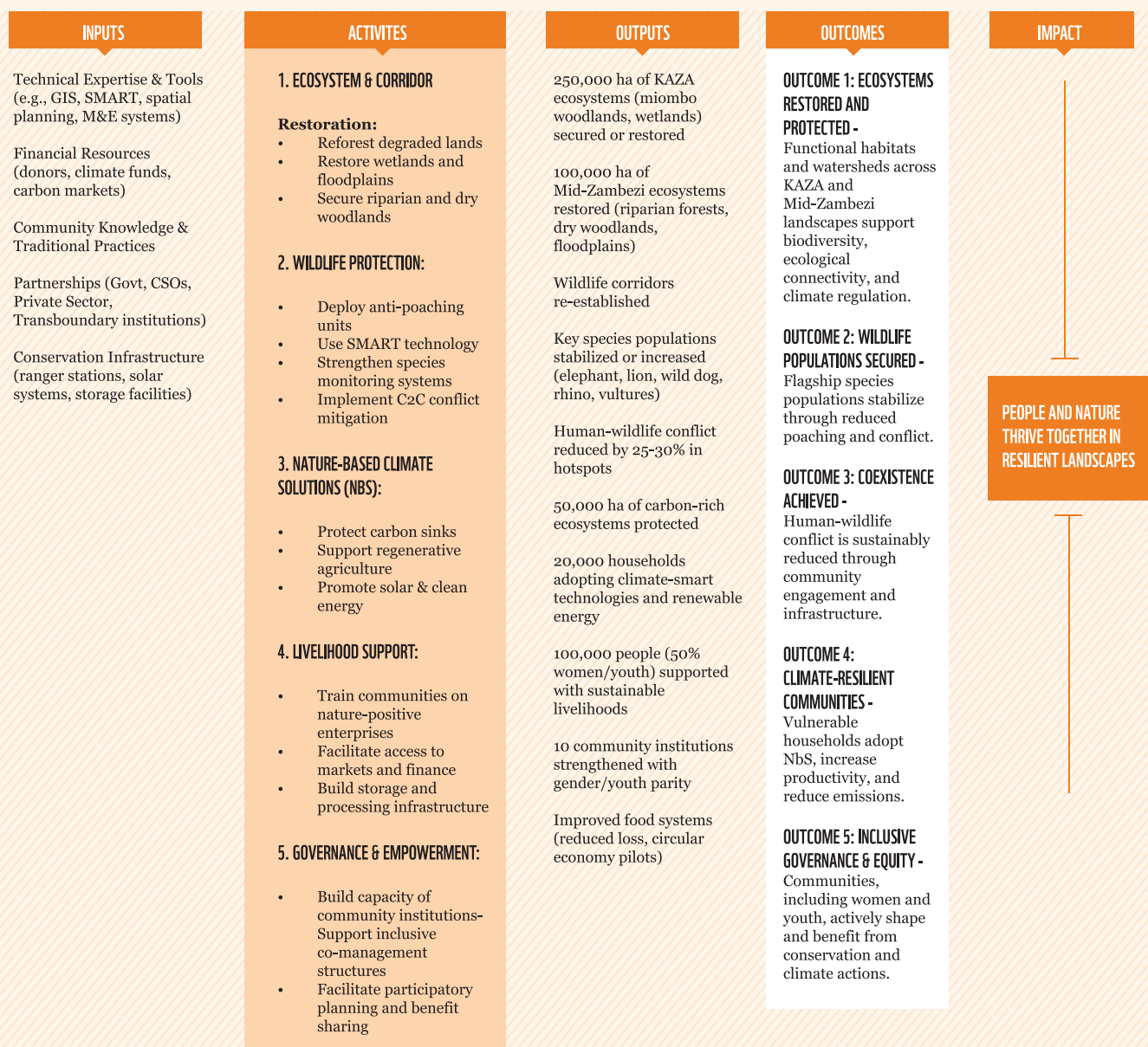
By aligning with WWF global results frameworks, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and

Zimbabwe's national priorities, the Theory of Change serves as both a strategic compass and an accountability tool. It also provides the framework for adaptive management, participatory learning (PERL), and results-based reporting across the life of the strategy.

TOC SUMMARY

IF WWF Zimbabwe restores critical ecosystems and strengthens community capacity through nature-positive livelihoods and inclusive governance, THEN biodiversity will recover, human-wildlife coexistence will improve, and communities will become more resilient to climate change, leading to a thriving, climate-resilient landscape where people and nature coexist in harmony.

Figure 2: Integrated Theory of Change



PROGRAMME GOALS:

OUR VISION FOR THE KAVANGO-ZAMBEZI TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA LANDSCAPE IS BUILT ON THE FOLLOWING GOALS.

- BY 2030, THE POPULATION SIZE OF THE TARGET SPECIES IS STABLE AND OR INCREASING.
- BY 2030, FOREST, RANGELAND, AND WETLAND HABITATS IN THE KAVANGO-ZAMBEZI TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA LANDSCAPE HAVE IMPROVED ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONALITY, CONNECTIVITY AND BIODIVERSITY.
- BY 2030, THE HUMAN FOOTPRINT ON LAND, WATER AND ENERGY WILL BE REDUCED.
- BY 2030, GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS ARE ALIGNED WITH NATURE-POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

WWF Zimbabwe aims to restore and protect the ecological integrity, biodiversity, and climate resilience of the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area landscape in Zimbabwe, through inclusive and adaptive landscape-level conservation that ensures at least 100,000 hectares are under improved management, flagship species populations are stabilised or increasing, and 20,000 people are benefiting from nature-positive livelihoods and climate adaptation interventions.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

OBJECTIVE 1: BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY

TO SECURE AND RESTORE AT LEAST 25,000 HECTARES OF CRITICAL MIOMBO WOODLANDS, FRESHWATER RESOURCES, AND RANGELANDS BY 2030, AND RE-ESTABLISH FUNCTIONAL WILDLIFE CORRIDORS CONNECTING PROTECTED AREAS AND COMMUNITY LANDS ACROSS THE KAVANGO-ZAMBEZI TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA LANDSCAPE.

OBJECTIVE 2: WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND HUMAN-WILDLIFE COEXISTENCE

TO STABILIZE OR INCREASE POPULATIONS OF KEY FLAGSHIP SPECIES (ELEPHANTS, LIONS, WILD DOGS, VULTURES) BY 2030 AND REDUCE REPORTED HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT INCIDENTS BY AT LEAST 30% IN IDENTIFIED HOTSPOTS.

OBJECTIVE 3: CLIMATE ACTION THROUGH NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS (NBS)

TO SCALE NATURE-BASED CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION ACTIONS BY PROTECTING AT LEAST 351,300 HA OF CARBON-RICH ECOSYSTEMS AND ENABLING 20,000 HOUSEHOLDS TO ADOPT RENEWABLE ENERGY, NATURE-POSITIVE AGRICULTURE, OR CLIMATE-SMART TECHNOLOGIES BY 2030—WHILE REDUCING FOOD LOSS AND WASTE THROUGH IMPROVED STORAGE, PROCESSING, AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY SOLUTIONS THAT LOWER EMISSIONS AND ENHANCE FOOD SECURITY.

OBJECTIVE 4: COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT, LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION, AND SOCIAL EQUITY

TO ENABLE AT LEAST 22,000 PEOPLE ACROSS THE KAVANGO-ZAMBEZI TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA LANDSCAPE—50% OF THEM WOMEN AND YOUTH—TO BENEFIT FROM INCLUSIVE, NATURE-POSITIVE LIVELIHOODS, INCLUDING SUSTAINABLE FARMING AND GRAZING, AND PARTICIPATE IN CO-MANAGEMENT OR DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES BY 2030.



OPERATIONAL LINKAGES

Achieving impact at scale in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area landscape requires more than field-based conservation—it demands a tightly integrated operational ecosystem that supports strategic delivery, ensures accountability, and enables innovation. WWF Zimbabwe’s operations are designed to function not just as support services, but as critical enablers of conservation outcomes.

Below are the key operational linkages that will drive the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area programme forward:



By making these linkages explicit and intentional, WWF Zimbabwe ensures that operations do not sit apart from conservation—but are fully mobilised in its service. This systemic approach enhances accountability, sustainability, and the ability to scale innovations across the entire Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area landscape. As alluded to earlier, 90% of the WWF operations will be in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area landscape.

