



AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION
COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE
Close-Out Report, June 2021



Executive Summary

Day-to-day life changed profoundly early in 2020 when COVID-19 hit globally, shutting down industries, crippling economies, and demanding a radical reorganization of the systems and structures upon which we all depend. Millions of people suddenly found themselves with no incomes. To deal with rising numbers of pandemic casualties, governments went into crisis mode, redirecting funds to health services and other essential functions.

In Africa, the conservation sector was among the worst hit, along with the people who directly depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. With global travel lockdowns crushing tourism overnight, tourism-dependent rural communities were plunged into poverty while protected areas and community conservancies found themselves unable to continue operations due to highly diminished revenues.

People lost their jobs in towns and emigrated to rural areas to try their hand at agriculture, artisanal mining, and even poaching. Seeing the significantly reduced capacity among protected-area authorities to maintain security patrols, scientists predicted poaching spikes across the continent and issued dire warnings about increased pressure on natural resources.

For a heart-stopping period, it seemed like the continent would lose its hard-won conservation gains.

We knew we had to act.

In April 2020, a month after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) organized a virtual meeting for Africa's protected-area directors to discuss the conservation challenges introduced or exacerbated by the pandemic. Former Tanzanian president and AWF trustee Benjamin Mkapa was the keynote speaker. (Sadly, President Mkapa would pass away in July.) He characterized COVID-19 as an “opportunity to find ways to elevate nature to its rightful place — at the center of sustainable and resilient economies.”

We took President Mkapa's words as a clarion call to action, and in June 2020, we launched a multi-pronged emergency response. Our interventions and relief efforts were designed to meet immediate needs articulated by the protected-

area directors and channel significant resources toward the “pain points” rural communities had cited — food, income, information, and frontline defenses against COVID-19.

The initiative's success is a testament to what a highly dynamic, adaptable, and dedicated institution can do with a tireless work force predominantly anchored in the communities where we work — and with the support of very generous and responsive donors. With your help, AWF has delivered a highly efficient and effective program that went beyond our core business of conserving Africa's wildlife and wild lands to include public health campaigns, cash-for-work programs, and food distribution to vulnerable communities. We also convened government and civil society bodies to ensure Africa's recovery plans include substantial biodiversity investments.

AWF not only helped keep protected areas and community conservancies operational during a time of scarce resources, but we also ensured that conservation took center stage in conversations about COVID-19, public health, and economic recovery — and would continue to do so. COVID-19 has heightened awareness of the links between the planet's health and the survival of the human race. Many more people now understand why Africa cannot prosper over the long term without thriving biodiversity.

AWF's COVID-19 emergency response was organized around four core areas of work :

- 1. Support to protected areas and community conservancies*
- 2. Support to communities*
- 3. Expanded Canines for Conservation program*
- 4. Expanded partnerships with policymakers*

This report is a reckoning of our successes and the lessons we have learned while implementing this ambitious program. It also outlines our next steps as governments rebound and we integrate key lessons into daily operations. Our goal is to ensure the longevity and sustainability of our efforts as well as to remain true to our objective of building conservation leadership across the continent.

KEY INDICATORS









OBJECTIVE 1: Scale up preventive measures to limit the spread of COVID-19

 <p>25,286 People reached through promotion of preventive behaviours</p>	 <p>20,307 Community members provided with preventive materials</p>	 <p>36,609 Comprehensive hygiene kits distributed (glove, masks, sanitizers)</p>	 <p>224 Community level public handwashing stations established or maintained</p>	 <p>89.06% Population reporting self awareness and protection against COVID-19 as a result of AWF intervention</p>
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OBJECTIVE 2: Maintain and strengthen conservation systems and workers

 <p>6,324 Wildlife rangers and scouts facilitated with personal protective equipment to take part in patrols</p>	 <p>\$146,133 Amount of money paid to wildlife rangers as supplement to their monthly salary (incentives)</p>	 <p>13,665 Days facilitating food rations for rangers in protected areas & conservancies</p>	 <p>10,591 Glove sets distributed to communities as well as conservation agencies and AWF staff members</p>	 <p>95,255 Litres of fuel supplied to wildlife agencies (national/conservancies) to support patrols</p>
 <p>12,906 Hand sanitizer kits distributed to wildlife agencies/conservancies</p>	 <p>\$155,788 Amount spent to procure conservation relevant equipment and hardware during this emergency period</p>	 <p>69 Number of tents, boots, etc. supplied to wildlife agency & conservancies personnel</p>		

OBJECTIVE 3: Support for communities impacted by COVID-19

 <p>2,427 Number of awareness creation/campaign meetings on conservation and COVID-19</p>	 <p>2,689 Number of community members trained in COVID-19 management and prevention</p>	 <p>\$11,547 Amount spent on food for communities</p>	 <p>\$39,816 Amount spent on non-food items for communities</p>	 <p>\$25,029 Amount of cash-for-work payments disbursed to communities</p>
 <p>4,890 People reached, cash-for-work assistance</p>	 <p>3,791 Days facilitating food rations for patrols in community conservancies</p>	 <p>\$131,854 Value of equipment and other community conservation resources</p>	 <p>173 Human-wildlife conflict incidents mitigated</p>	 <p>3,251 Wildlife scouts supported with relevant information for awareness creation</p>

SUPPORT TO PROTECTED AREAS & CONSERVANCIES

We designed our landscape support to meet the needs of the people managing protected areas and community-conserved lands. African protected-area directors told us that the pandemic had exacerbated funding constraints and compounded the challenges most face daily: poaching, illegal wildlife trade, climate change, pollution, invasive species, human encroachment, Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC), and inadequate staffing, among others.

AWF stepped up quickly to help protected areas maintain vital activities. These included supporting essential functions like getting rangers paid, as well as maintaining — and in some cases amplifying — anti-poaching and habitat protection efforts. AWF's COVID-19 emergency response supported 14 landscapes in nine countries.



PROTECTED-AREA SUPPORT TO KENYA

In Kenya, AWF's COVID-19 support was instrumental in helping authorities put out fires that ravaged Tsavo National Park between July and August, destroying habitat and exacerbating HWC, as wildlife fled protected areas to communal lands. AWF provided fuel for water trucks deployed to the fire site and distributed patrol rations to rangers and scouts who battled the flames night and day.

AWF also increased its anti-poaching support to community conservancies throughout the Tsavo Conservation Area, distributing food, personal protective equipment (PPE), and allowances to scouts and rangers so they could continue security patrols. The rangers also benefited from training workshops that sharpened their skills in ecological monitoring, anti-poaching, and evidence gathering.



PROTECTED-AREA SUPPORT TO UGANDA

Our support to the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) targeted the landscapes where AWF has worked for years — Kidepo and Murchison Falls National Parks — and critical areas, such as Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, that needed a boost to effectively fight poaching intensified by COVID-19. A few months into the pandemic, UWA had seen a spike in poaching rates across Uganda's protected areas. The statistics showed a marked increase in the number of snares and guns seized

from the parks, which corresponded to the decrease in security patrols deployed across parks. AWF buoyed patrol numbers by providing patrol rations (fuel, food, camping gear, PPE, motorcycles, allowances) while also strengthening community resilience through alternative-livelihood projects such as mushroom farming in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.



PROTECTED-AREA SUPPORT TO CAMEROON

Government authorities in Cameroon raised concerns about increased poaching in Campo Ma'an National Park and surrounding community-conserved land, citing a 91 percent increase in wildlife trafficking. Authorities made frequent seizures of game meat from species including duikers, monkeys, porcupines, civets, and pangolins.

To help keep boots on the ground, AWF provided fuel and ranger allowances. Over the six-month duration of our COVID-19 emergency

relief, there was a 10 percent increase in ranger patrols, which significantly reduced human pressure on the landscape.

In the Faro landscape, AWF purchased an off-road vehicle as logistical support for park authorities. This helped to ease movement for rangers and officials, thus improving park management.



PROTECTED-AREA SUPPORT TO ZIMBABWE

In Zimbabwe, our efforts to help keep protected areas running — even as parks reeled from loss of tourism revenues — strengthened AWF’s long relationship with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (Zimparks). We supported patrol units in Mana Pools National Park with supplies such as fuel, food, PPE, and allowances, and also arranged for COVID-19 testing of park workers to ensure the safety of all as staff discharged their duties. As a result of consistent support, Zimparks rangers worked throughout the pandemic and reported no poaching spikes in the landscape.

In Mbire district, AWF amplified support to community conservancies by regularly providing community wildlife scouts with patrol rations. We also organized training courses that sharpened scout responses to challenges such as poaching, charcoal burning, and HWC. The scouts maintained consistent security patrols during the pandemic and responded to HWC incidents in the community, thereby maintaining a measure of normalcy during a difficult period.



PROTECTED-AREA SUPPORT TO TANZANIA

AWF’s long-standing support to Manyara Ranch intensified during the pandemic, with the provision of PPEs, food rations, and fuel to help ensure the continuation of security patrols. As a result, the ranch saw no poaching incidents during this period.

the community to prepare tree nurseries and plant trees. In addition, we expanded a climate-smart agriculture program in which cocoa and rice farmers had increased yields while exerting less pressure on the environment. As a result, Kilombero communities maintained conservation gains they’d won with help from AWF.

AWF also directed its COVID-19 resources toward enhancing landscape restoration efforts in the biodiversity-rich Kilombero District. To reforest degraded land and expand habitats for wildlife species, we marshaled



SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES

Indigenous communities are the backbone of conservation efforts; without them Africa's rich biodiversity would not have survived the ravages of modernity and runaway development that have decimated natural resources in other parts of the world. Many rural communities directly or indirectly depend on natural resources and wildlife economies and therefore bear the economic brunt of the pandemic. AWF's interventions helped communities feed their families and provided a frontline

defense against the pandemic, ensuring that essential services, including education and trade, could continue more safely. As a result of consistent messaging about COVID-19, communities in many of our landscapes report a keener awareness of diseases like COVID-19 and their links to exploitation of wildlife and wildlife habitats.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO ETHIOPIA

When the pandemic hit, the tourism-dependent communities living on the periphery of Simien Mountains National Park suffered devastating losses in income. They urgently needed jobs and food for their families. AWF jumped into action and distributed emergency food rations to 219 households. As a longer-term solution, we designed an innovative cash-for-work program that provided incomes for over 3,000 community

members. Most of the beneficiaries were young women. The activities under this program included maintaining and cleaning trekking paths and campsites, planting trees, and removing invasive plant species from the park. The work outcomes help ensure that the Simiens will be ready for visitors once travel resumes.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO NIGER

As in Ethiopia, we focused our COVID-19 response in Niger on creating jobs, in this case for families living adjacent to the Dosso Partial Faunal Reserve. The cash-for-work program in Niger focused on land reclamation efforts, including tree planting and maintaining tree nurseries, and benefited 3,077 people. In addition, AWF distributed face masks, sanitizers, and handwashing stations to the community

to provide a first-line defense against the virus. Finally, we conducted a sensitization campaign about COVID-19, focusing on its modes of transmission, symptoms, and the link between zoonotic diseases and wildlife. Eight local radio stations broadcast the campaign messages in French and local languages, and our staff printed and distributed hundreds of pamphlets and posters in towns and villages.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO CAMEROON

AWF harnessed the skills and talents of women living at the periphery of Dja Faunal Reserve to manufacture soap and face masks for the whole community. Liaising with local partner Tropical Forests and Rural Development, AWF channeled resources into helping the community keep itself safe from the virus, sharing information about COVID-19 and disease prevention. In addition, our staff raised awareness among eco-guards, local leaders, and government officials about how over-

exploitation of wildlife leads to zoonotic diseases, which hopefully will override the local community's reliance on game meat.

In Campo Ma'an, AWF distributed handwashing stations to schools and carried out COVID-19 sensitization campaigns in markets and villages, handing out informational pamphlets and posters, as well as t-shirts and caps.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO TANZANIA

One of AWF's Classroom Africa projects is Manyara Ranch School in southern Tanzania. Once the government opened schools throughout the country, AWF provided the school with masks, sanitizers, and handwashing stations, as well as new desks to prevent overcrowding.

AWF also distributed masks and sanitizers to communities around the school as well as tents and motorcycle tires to rangers and herders working on the ranch, a mixed-used, wildlife-rich conservancy.

In Kilombero, AWF conducted sensitization campaigns about COVID-19 through radio broadcasts in local languages, reaching thousands of people.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Communities in even the remotest parts of the DRC have been among the key beneficiaries of AWF's COVID-19 support. Riding hundreds of kilometers on motorbikes through the dense Congo forest, AWF field staff carried out COVID-19 sensitization campaigns and delivered face masks, handwashing stations, and sanitizers to villages in Lomako in DRC. The AWF-supported Lomako-Yokokala Nature Reserve is a bastion of research on bonobos, man's closest relatives. AWF's community

support directly contributes to this work by shaping people's attitudes toward conservation and heightening awareness of the links between biodiversity health and human health. AWF also distributed PPEs, handwashing stations, and informational posters in markets, schools and hospitals within the communities of Buta, Ango, Bondo, and Didga in the Bili Uele landscape, helping to limit community spread without jeopardizing the region's day-to-day activities.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO UGANDA

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park made news headlines last year when poachers killed one of its most iconic inhabitants, a silverback gorilla called Rafiki. It was clear that the tourism-dependent community on the park's periphery, having lost its major source of income to the pandemic, would need alternative livelihoods.

AWF started a mushroom-growing initiative with two community groups, providing training in mushroom-farming best practices, entrepreneurship, and assisting in the construction of four mushroom enclosures.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO ZIMBABWE

In Zimbabwe, AWF provided fuel to district officials in Mbire district so they could drive to schools to conduct COVID-19 prevention inspections before the schools reopened. In addition, AWF procured and distributed comprehensive hygiene kits to communities during COVID-19 sensitization campaigns, and conducted trainings for scouts and community members on handling human-wildlife conflict. Mbire

is a wildlife-rich area where farmers periodically lose their produce to marauding elephants. The COVID-19 HWC trainings complemented an ongoing program in which AWF teaches farmers to repel elephants through non-violent means such as planting chilis or burning chili blocks.

CANINES FOR CONSERVATION

Canines for Conservation, currently present in five countries, is one of AWF's most successful programs. The dogs have proved to be force multipliers able to deter wildlife crime at the source (poaching) and in transit (trafficking). Our COVID-19 response focused on Kenya and Tanzania.



CANINES FOR CONSERVATION SUPPORT TO TANZANIA

AWF expanded its canines program during the pandemic to cover the Serengeti and Tarangire-Manyara landscapes, anticipating spikes in poaching. We helped to pay dog-handler salaries, maintain kennels, and provided food rations, PPE, and veterinary supplies. Serengeti National Park also received three tracker dogs through AWF's collaboration with Tanzania National Parks Authority. The dogs were an efficient deterrent to wildlife crime and the expected poaching increase never happened.



CANINES FOR CONSERVATION SUPPORT TO KENYA

AWF provided tracker dog support to Lake Nakuru National Park and Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya to amplify protection for rhinos and other endangered species during the pandemic. This support included provision of patrol rations and dog supplies, as well as office items such as computers and cameras. AWF also paid salaries for dog handlers and provided them with kits including boots and binoculars. No poaching incidents were reported in either landscape during this period.

POLICY COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE SUMMARY

COVID-19 has challenged us to think differently, reflecting on shifts we can make, on work we can intensify, and on the role we can play in listening to key stakeholders and amplifying their voices, especially regarding challenges and needs, before governments and international donors. AWF's COVID-19 emergency response helped secure the following policy wins.



UNIFIED MESSAGING & APPROACH FOR PROTECTED-AREA DIRECTORS

The AWF policy team worked to coordinate and galvanize an African voice and position regarding COVID-19 crisis response through the facilitation of two virtual conferences to engage African protected-area directors. The directors discussed the impact of COVID-19 on protected areas and shared recommendations, which we later amplified via opinion pieces, one authored by the late Former President of Tanzania and AWF Board Vice-Chair Hon. Benjamin Mkapa, who was also the keynote speaker at the first convening. Two additional **reports** have been published since and are informing the development of the upcoming Africa Protected-Area Conference (March 2022).



AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS ON COVID-19 & STRATEGIC AFRICA-CSO ENGAGEMENT

ENGAGEMENT

AWF in collaboration with the **African CSOs Biodiversity Alliance** launched two campaigns. The first, #OurNatureOurHealth, aimed to create awareness about the link between nature and health systems in Africa, while seeking practical solutions. The campaign reached over 2,000 viewers, surpassing its target. The second campaign was titled “Securing a **#Future4GreatApes**.” This two-week campaign sought to promote action and engage communities, the tourism industry, and other key stakeholders in efforts to protect great apes. It culminated in a sensitization **video** about how to protect great apes and the development of a policy brief on the same.

STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS WITHIN KEY POLICY PLATFORMS

One of the key goals of the policy team in implementing the AWF emergency response was to engage strategic platforms to share proposed policies and measures and influence their adoption. The team took part in three International Conservation Caucus Foundation sessions, including a virtual Session on COVID-19 with South African members of parliament, a session on the funding of protected areas post-COVID-19 in South Africa, and a virtual **U.S. congressional staff briefing** on COVID-19's impact in Africa. This last was moderated by Edwin Tambara, AWF's director of external affairs. These engagements continue to position AWF as a leader in the US policy space in matters concerning conservation and development.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Listening to communities, protected-area managers, and tourism operators is critical

Without input from our partners, it would have been impossible to deliver an impactful pandemic response that met the most urgent needs of our stakeholders. We did not make assumptions about the needs of communities, protected-area managers, and tourism operators. Instead, we invested in a collaborative design process with our partners to deliver the best results. Not only did this approach ensure our partners could take ownership of the interventions, it also helped us integrate indigenous knowledge and solutions into the work, which is critical for sustainability. This approach has always been a non-negotiable best practice for AWF, and it was gratifying to see it work so well during the pandemic.

2. Quality over quantity

While the level of funding and support we were able to galvanize in a short time period was impressive, one of the key lessons learned was that informed, targeted interventions were the most successful. We are embedded in the landscapes, known and trusted by the key stakeholders, with a deep understanding of the issues at hand, enabling us to target interventions where they are most effective and efficient. In fact, some of our most impactful emergency-response programs required relatively low funding.

3. Wildlife and wildlands conservation is extremely vulnerable, as it relies heavily — almost entirely — on wildlife tourism

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, tourism declined by 72 percent in 2020, costing the industry around \$935 billion in revenue. This disruption severely jeopardized conservation operations in Africa, which rely primarily upon money earned from tourism. Conservation, often underfunded by governments and development partners, was even further sidelined during the pandemic, as resources went to other areas of the economy. Although quick action by organizations such as AWF helped to prevent a total collapse of Africa's protected areas, more sustainable and diversified funding sources are needed to build conservation resilience. It will take a long time for conservation on the continent to fully rebuild, and we must take this opportunity to build sustainable wildlife economies that do not depend solely on tourism to generate funds for conservation and that will shield communities from total income losses. It is time to find new, creative models of financing protected areas, including, but not limited to, partnerships with the private sector, as well as the mainstreaming of conservation into government economic priorities.

4. One planet one health

Never has the connection between wildlife and human health been more evident than during this pandemic. People have quickly woken up to the fact that exploitation of wildlife and diminishing wildlife habitats in Africa and elsewhere pose a grave threat not only to the environment, but to the survival of human beings. Scientists and analysts have released papers emphasizing that it is much cheaper and easier to prevent outbreaks of zoonotic diseases than to scramble to manage diseases, as the world is currently doing. COVID-19 is evidence of the steep cost of inaction and unpreparedness.

5. Hats off to conservation heroes

There are many conservation heroes across Africa, perhaps none more worthy of celebration than our staff in the field, who carried on despite lack of resources, risks of illness, and personal hardships, to ensure they delivered essential support to protected areas and rural communities. They are the best of humanity, and we celebrate their sacrifices and bravery in the face of considerable challenges. They have inspired a renewed vigor and faith in the work that we do. We have new ideas about how to support them and their work, how to help them build capacity and sharpen skills, and how to shore up their numbers for maximum impact and efficiency.

6. Our evolved model of conservation — that combines goals 1, 2, and 3 — is timelier and more important than ever.

We adopted and announced the AWF strategic vision 2020-2030 before the pandemic was a factor. The three core goals articulated in our strategy:

- *to promote African leaders who drive shifts in policy, planning, and finance which leverage wildlife and wild lands as essential to development*
- *to conserve, protect, and restore Africa's ecosystems and the services they provide*
- *to conserve Africa's wildlife in-situ, reduce poaching and trafficking as major causes of wildlife decline*

have proved to withstand the challenges wrought by the pandemic. We believe that achieving these goals is possible, despite the very real resource constraints introduced and exacerbated by COVID-19. We are on course, delivering real change and helping ensure the prosperity of wildlife and wild lands in a modern Africa.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Africa has done relatively well in managing and containing the pandemic. The predicted waves of fatalities and overwhelmed health systems witnessed in other parts of the world have not come to pass, and vaccinations are currently being administered. Despite vaccine shortages and skepticism, there is a cautious optimism in the air. Governments are carefully reopening economies and allowing a “new normal” that in most countries looks like life before COVID-19 — except that people are expected to wear masks in public.

AWF is finding its place in this new world. Many of our interventions during COVID-19 were extensions of regular programmatic work and continued unabated after the six-month emergency response.

In line with the three key objectives of the emergency response, our updated objectives include:

1. Support communities to protect themselves against COVID-19 and future pandemics in the landscapes where we work

- Continue to ensure easy access to relevant information on COVID-19
- Where there is a strong need, support provision of PPE
- Work with key partners to provide improved health facilities and access

2. Support protected areas and protect conservation gains

- Continue to provide critical support to parks authorities and communities to effectively protect their wildlife and wild lands
- Continue to build on successful programs started under the emergency response that engaged people in conservation, i.e., cash for work
- Encourage investment in the landscapes to further secure conservation programs

3. Build ecological and economic resilience in the landscapes where we work

- Support sustainable development through effective landscape planning
- Support enterprise development and improved livelihoods
- Protect critical ecosystem services
- Support communities to adapt to climate change

We recognize that the pandemic will influence our lives for a long time. We are actively listening to and collaborating with our stakeholders to meet any new challenges related to COVID-19. We are no longer in emergency mode, but we remain agile, dynamic, and accessible, able to offer resources, leadership, and information as needed. With the support of our trustees and donors, and by building contingencies into budgets where possible, we will remain flexible and responsive should new emergencies arise in our target landscapes. We are hopeful that with smart adjustments, economies will start to recover, tourism will pick up, and governments and development partners will once again channel funding to conservation.



Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the Board of Trustees' leadership. Our trustees, a vital part of the AWF family, never stopped believing in us and dug deep to meet our asks. Thank you for taking such a keen interest in AWF's work, for reading our reports and asking the right questions, and for your unyielding support of AWF's conservation approach, mission, and vision — an Africa where sustainable development includes thriving wildlife and wild lands as a cultural and economic asset for Africa's future generations. We would also like to thank individual donors, institutional donors, and development partners for their unwavering support to our core operations and for allowing us the flexibility we needed to implement this project.

Special recognition goes to our staff in landscapes, who went beyond what official duty demanded to keep “the lights on” in service to communities, partners, and Africa's wildlife and wild lands.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our government partners who have worked with us to design and implement forward-looking policies designed to protect Africa's natural resources for generations to come.

To the communities with whom we work, the primary stewards of Africa's wildlife and wild lands, thank you. Thank you for giving us access to the natural resources that you have enjoyed and protected over millennia, thank you for being so generous with your knowledge, and thank you for trusting us to deliver exceptional results.

And finally, our heartfelt gratitude to everybody — too many to name — involved in supporting this work and with the implementation of this program.