

Wildlife Economies Decision and Investment Support Toolkit

An Overview for Decision-Makers and Practitioners

AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

ALU SCHOOL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

CSF CONSERVATION STRATEGY FUND

Executive message

To unlock potential, wildlife economies should be treated as a strategic development sector at national, subnational, landscape, protected area/site, community and, where relevant, transboundary scales - not as peripheral conservation activities or isolated tourism initiatives.

Across many countries and landscapes, wildlife, wild landscapes and healthy ecosystems already support livelihoods, enterprise, public and community revenue, food and water security, cultural identity, tourism, natural products and resilience to climate shocks. Yet much of this value remains invisible in national and subnational statistics, public budgets, investment strategies, protected area and landscape plans, and land-use decisions. Because contributions are poorly measured and responsibilities are fragmented across institutions and scales, public authorities, communities, conservation organisations and investors undervalue natural assets, underinvest in their stewardship and frequently support choices that erode the ecological foundations of long-term prosperity.

A valued, well-governed wildlife economy offers a practical development pathway at multiple scales. It can diversify local, national and regional economies, strengthen value chains, create employment and enterprise opportunities, generate public and community revenue, and mobilise climate, biodiversity, development and private finance. It can also make conservation economically relevant by aligning stewardship with legitimate benefits. These gains are not automatic: they depend on secure rights, ecological safeguards, transparent institutions, credible data, viable markets, responsible investment and equitable benefit-sharing especially for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), women and youth.

The Wildlife Economies Decision and Investment Support Toolkit is, therefore, a necessary instrument. It provides a flexible framework of interconnected building blocks for moving from fragmented information and disconnected initiatives towards coherent, evidence-based and investment-ready wildlife economy processes. It is not a rigid methodology: users may begin with the modules most relevant to their mandates, capacities, available data, financing, priorities and resources; undertake activities concurrently; and revisit modules as conditions change. It provides a flexible framework of interconnected building blocks for moving from fragmented information and disconnected initiatives towards coherent, evidence-based wildlife economy strategies and investments. National and subnational institutions, protected area authorities, local administrations, community institutions and IPLCs, NGOs, private-sector actors and investors, development partners, research institutions, landscape organisations and conservation programmes can use it to strengthen governance, assess assets and contributions, identify viable value chains, diagnose barriers, understand finance conditions, and translate evidence into strategy, reform and project pipelines.

The Toolkit's value lies in empowering consideration of biodiversity and natural capital evidence in planning decisions that are often made separately and at different scales. It links biodiversity and natural-capital evidence with development and management planning, public finance, land-use choices, investment promotion, community priorities, protected area objectives and private-sector participation. It also establishes a basis for accountability by defining expected economic, social and ecological outcomes and supporting regular reporting.

Used as a collaborative, whole-of-government and whole-of-society framework, it can reduce investment risk, improve coordination and policy coherence, and help stakeholders unlock the opportunities that nature provides without liquidating the natural assets on which future growth and resilience depend.

For policy and decision-makers and other implementing partners, the immediate task is to define the scale, questions and entry points that matter most, secure appropriate leadership and participation, and connect the Toolkit to relevant planning, management, budgeting or investment processes. At national or subnational level this may involve senior sponsorship and cross-sector coordination; at landscape, protected area/site, community or transboundary level it may build on the legitimate institutions and partnerships already in place. The objective is not another diagnostic report or a prescribed sequence. It is a practical programme of decisions: what assets and opportunities exist, which activities are sustainable and competitive, what reforms are required, which projects should be prepared, how finance can be mobilised, and how benefits and risks will be shared and monitored.

The case for Wildlife Economies at a glance

Economic value

Diversification and revenue
Broadens rural production, supports enterprises and value chains, and can generate community, local, subnational and national revenue.

Resilience value

Natural infrastructure
Maintains ecosystem functions that underpin water, food systems, climate adaptation, disaster-risk reduction and productive landscapes across administrative and ecological boundaries.

Social and governance value

Rights and stewardship
Can strengthen local ownership, cultural value, participation and conservation incentives when rights, responsibilities and benefits are clear and equitable.

What is a wildlife economy?

A wildlife economy comprises commercial, public-interest and subsistence activities that depend on wild biodiversity and the ecosystem services generated by healthy landscapes and seascapes. It includes both established and emerging activities, provided they operate within ecological limits and deliver fair social value.

Established activities

- Ecotourism, cultural and nature-based tourism
- Community-based natural resource management
- Sustainable fisheries, forestry and wild products
- Wildlife ranching and regulated sustainable use
- Bioprospecting and biodiversity-based products

Emerging and enabling opportunities

- Ecosystem and watershed services
- Carbon and biodiversity credit markets
- Nature-positive infrastructure and restoration
- Conservation finance and impact investment
- Data, technology, research and advisory services
- Film and Photography
- Wildlife Estates

The policy and investment gap

Countries, subnational jurisdictions, landscapes, protected areas and communities already derive value from wildlife and ecosystems, but these activities are rarely managed as a connected economic system. The Toolkit addresses four recurring failures that prevent governments and other stakeholders from converting natural assets into durable development outcomes at the scale relevant to them.

Recurring gap	Why it matters	Toolkit response
Invisible value	Economic and social contributions from nature and intact ecosystems are omitted from planning, accounts and budgets, leading to underinvestment and poor trade-offs in development decision-making.	Build a credible baseline at the relevant scale using natural-capital, socio-economic, spatial and value-chain evidence.
Fragmented mandates	Environment, finance, tourism, agriculture, trade, land use planning, local government, protected area, community, civil-society and private-sector actors often work without a shared framework.	Create fit-for-purpose governance, common objectives and coordinated responsibilities across public, community, civil-society, research and private-sector actors.
Weak project preparation	Lack of investment-ready opportunities; promising concepts lack feasibility work, safeguards, revenue models and clear benefit-sharing arrangements.	Prioritise opportunities and develop investment-ready concepts, pipelines and de-risking mechanisms suited to the relevant scale and market.
Enabling environment	Incoherent policies, uncertain tenure and access rights, unclear mandates, weak enforcement and inequitable benefit distribution increase conflict and investor risk.	Assess and strengthen the enabling environment while embedding ecological integrity, rights and equitable participation.

Why the Toolkit is a necessary decision instrument

The Toolkit is more than an assessment methodology. It is a flexible decision architecture that links evidence, institutional coordination, policy reform, project preparation, finance and accountability. Its core value is to bring intentionality, help different stakeholders work from a shared evidence base, and reduce the distance between strategic ambitions and implementable wildlife economy programmes with tangible returns for people and nature.

What the toolkit enables	Decisions supported across mandates
Make nature visible	Which wildlife and ecosystem assets are economically and socially important, where they are located, what condition they are in, and at what scale they should be managed.
Set shared priorities	Which sub-sectors, landscapes, protected areas/sites, value chains, products and communities should be prioritised, based on evidence and shared objectives.
Improve the enabling environment	Which laws, policies, mandates, institutional arrangements, incentives, rights and data systems should change to support responsible growth.
Build an investable pipeline	Which opportunities can become viable projects, what preparation is needed, which partners should be involved, and which financing instruments are suitable.
Track value and accountability	Which economic, social and ecological indicators will demonstrate impact, safeguard public and community value, and guide adaptive management.

How the Toolkit works

Eight modules are grouped into two connected phases to make the framework easy to navigate. Phase 1 brings together building blocks for understanding the wildlife economy by clarifying what exists, what is viable and what may need to change. Phase 2 brings together building blocks for growing the wildlife economy by translating evidence into strategy, policy, investment, reporting and public legitimacy. The grouping does not prescribe a fixed order: the relevant combination depends on scale, existing evidence, institutional arrangements, capacities, financing, priorities and resources. Users may enter through different modules, apply activities concurrently and revisit them iteratively as circumstances evolve. Ideally, module one should be the first, the rest can be applied in a flexible manner.

The below table summarises the interconnected building blocks. The decision chain that follows illustrates the core functions a wildlife economy process should address, rather than a mandatory sequence; users can move between functions as opportunities, evidence and conditions evolve.

Module	Focus	Key policy question	Principal output
Module 1 Establish the Process Framework	**Establish the process**	What scale, scope, questions, governance and stakeholder participation are appropriate?	Mandate or agreed governance arrangement, coordination structure and workplan
Module 2 Status & Potential Assessment	**Assess status and potential**	What biodiversity and ecosystem service assets, activities, contributions, risks and opportunities exist at the relevant scale?	Wildlife economy baseline and opportunity assessment
Module 3 Enabling Environment Assessment	**Assess the enabling environment**	Which policies, laws, institutions, rights, mandates and market conditions enable or constrain growth?	Reform and institutional priorities
Module 4 Financial & Investor Landscape Assessment	**Assess finance and investors**	What finance flows, gaps, investor interests, risks, partners and instruments are relevant?	Finance landscape and investor strategy
Module 5 National Strategy, Action Plan & Investment Blueprint	**Develop strategy and investment blueprint**	What shared vision, priorities, incentives, infrastructure and projects should guide action at the relevant scale?	Strategy, investment blueprint and/or roadmap at the relevant scale
Module 6 Policy & Institutional Framework Strengthening	**Inform policy and planning**	How will findings enter relevant development plans, budgets, land-use systems, protected area or landscape management, and other sector strategies?	Mainstreaming and policy action agenda
Module 7 National Platform for Monitoring, Reporting & Investment	**Build a reporting and investment platform**	How will opportunities be promoted, projects supported and outcomes reported at the relevant scale?	National, subnational, landscape, site, community or transboundary platform
MODULE 8 Developing Wildlife Economy Awareness	**Develop awareness and capability**	How will political support, public understanding, stakeholder participation, capability and leadership be sustained?	Communication, education and capacity programmes

The decision chain



Priority policy actions

Governments and other stakeholders can select and combine the Toolkit actions that are most relevant to their mandates and context, using them to organise a practical programme of reform and investment rather than a stand-alone study. The following actions provide a minimum agenda that can be adapted, sequenced or pursued in parallel at national, subnational, landscape, protected area/site, community or transboundary scales.

	Priority action	Purpose
1	**Recognise wildlife economies in relevant national, subnational, landscape, protected area/site, community and transboundary development frameworks.**	Give the wildlife economy agenda an explicit mandate, an appropriate institutional home and a route into planning, management, budgeting and investment decisions at the relevant scale.
2	**Establish fit-for-purpose cross-sector leadership and inclusive technical structures.**	Align finance, planning, environment, tourism, agriculture, trade, local government, protected area authorities, community institutions and IPLCs, civil society, research organisations and the private sector.
3	**Invest in credible baseline evidence and regular monitoring.**	Measure natural assets, value chains, livelihoods, fiscal and community contributions, ecological condition and distributional outcomes at the relevant scale.
4	**Reform policies, regulations, rights and incentives.**	Reduce unnecessary barriers and risk while strengthening safeguards, enforcement, transparency, secure rights and local ownership.
5	**Develop a strategy roadmap and investment blueprint.**	Prioritise opportunities, infrastructure, capacity, finance requirements and bankable project preparation at the scale where action and investment will occur.
6	**Create or strengthen a reporting and investment platform.**	Improve transparency, coordination, investor engagement, project support, knowledge exchange and impact tracking at the relevant scale.
7	**Embed equitable benefit-sharing and meaningful participation.**	Ensure that IPLCs, women, youth and other rights-holders share in decisions, ownership, employment, enterprise opportunities and revenue.
8	**Mainstream wildlife economy evidence across relevant institutions and decision systems.**	Integrate findings into land-use and management decisions, public finance, sector plans, protected area and landscape strategies, climate action, education and investment promotion.

Expected outputs and measures of success

Effective use of the Toolkit should produce decision products and evidence that stakeholders at the relevant scale can use in planning and management, implement directly, or take forward for financing not only analytical reports. Success should be assessed across economic, social, institutional and ecological dimensions.

Core outputs

- Wildlife economy baseline and natural-capital evidence
- Policy, regulatory and institutional reform agenda
- National, subnational, landscape, protected area/site, community or transboundary strategy or roadmap
- Investment blueprint and project pipeline
- Financing and investor-engagement strategy
- Reporting, monitoring and investment platform at the relevant scale
- Communication, education and capacity products

What success should look like

- Wildlife economy priorities reflected in relevant plans (at managment or/and strategic level), budgets, management frameworks and investment decisions
- Improved project quality and access to appropriate finance
- Greater local ownership, IPLC participation and equitable benefit-sharing
- Growth in viable enterprises, jobs, revenue and value chains
- Improved ecological condition or reduced pressure on assets
- Clear safeguards, data transparency and public accountability
- Regular learning and adaptation based on measured outcomes and changing conditions

Principles for credible implementation

The Toolkit should be adapted to national, subnational, landscape, protected area/site, community and transboundary circumstances. Users may select, combine and revisit modules according to their mandates and resources, but implementation should retain the following principles to protect public value, rights, ecological integrity and investor confidence.

Principle	Practical implication
Whole-of-government and whole-of-society leadership	Use legitimate leadership and coordination appropriate to the scale so findings influence relevant planning, budgets, land use, management and investment decisions.
Place-based and evidence-led	Adapt methods and module entry points to ecological, institutional and market conditions while using credible spatial, economic, social and ecological evidence.
Ecological integrity	Define sustainability limits, safeguards and monitoring before promoting growth or finance.
Rights and equitable benefits	Clarify tenure, access, ownership, consent and benefit-sharing, with meaningful participation by IPLCs, women, youth and other rights-holders.
Investability with public value	Prepare viable projects and appropriate risk-sharing mechanisms without weakening environmental or social standards.
Transparency and adaptive management	Publish assumptions and outcomes, track distributional impacts, and revisit modules, priorities and strategies as evidence and conditions change.

The central proposition

The Toolkit gives public institutions, protected area and landscape authorities, local administrations, community institutions and IPLCs, civil-society organisations, researchers, development partners, private-sector actors and investors a flexible instrument fordefining and valuing wildlife economy assets in order to surface opportunities at a range of scales. By joining evidence, governance, reform, investment preparation and accountability, it can shift wildlife economies from fragmented activities to coherent, inclusive and investable development sectors and shift the public narrative from nature as a fiscal cost to nature as productive capital for communities, landscapes and economies.



This overview relates to the below full Toolkit report and can be cited as:
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Full report:
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