

# ERSA Research Brief

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## Sanctioned Quotas vs Information Provisioning for Community Wildlife Conservation in Zimbabwe: A Framed Field Experiment Approach

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Local communities in Africa benefit from protected areas through a number of activities such as grazing their livestock and revenues gained from touristic activities. These two activities are not independent because the feeding habits of large herbivores such as elephants prevent bush encroachment thus maintaining healthy grasslands. In addition, the way the local community manages the elephants can substantially influence their reproduction. Both the grasslands which provides pastures for their livestock and elephants could substantially and drastically deteriorate due to poor management. If the elephant population drops too low, it would become harder for them to reproduce. Too few elephants would then result in bush encroachment seriously preventing domestic animals from grazing. This development can result in permanent changes from an elephant-rich grassland to an elephant-poor bushy area, which holds much fewer ecosystem services for the local community. Would the community spontaneously succeed in maintaining the elephant stock and grassland quality at a satisfying level or not? What kind of policy intervention would help reach the desired outcome? Should the authorities inform the community about these dynamics? Should they instead introduce a quota, a lower limit for the elephant stock that if trespassed would be sanctioned with punishment in the form of a fine to pay?

A team of researchers from the University of Cape Town and the Beijer Institute of Ecological Economics in Stockholm investigated the behaviour of resource users to policy interventions like sanctioned quotas and information provisioning in a collaborative research project. The research team performed an experimental study among communities that are managing common pool wildlife in Zimbabwe under the banner of Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). They found that user groups manage these resource systems more efficiently when faced with either a policy intervention (sanctioned quota), or information about the possibility of a drastic drop in stocks or combination of both. Although a sanctioned quota performs better than information under some circumstances, information can be a good substitute for a sanctioned quota in other circumstances. However, the combination of both interventions is better than either quota or information in managing linked resources. This study also provides pragmatic evidence to policymakers and development practitioners of the role of carrot and stick institutions versus information provisioning in governing common-pool wildlife in Southern Africa. If they aim is just to avoid a drastic drop in linked resources, they can either use a policy intervention with sanctioned quota or information. The combination of both types of interventions might be most appropriate for users to manage their resources well and increase their welfare.