IUCN SSC
Species Survival Commission

Position Statement on the Management of Human-Wildlife Conflict

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IUCN's position on human-wildlife conflict

The IUCN SSC Human-Wildlife Conflict Task Force urges governments, non-governmental organizations, researchers, practitioners, community leaders, environmental agencies and others to ensure that efforts to manage human-wildlife conflicts are pursued through well-informed, holistic, and collaborative processes that take into account underlying social, cultural and economic contexts.

Essential considerations for managing human-wildlife conflicts

Human-wildlife conflicts are complex and defy easy analysis and resolution. Each human-wildlife conflict is different from the next and what may work in one case may not be transferrable to another. Effective and sustainable practical methods to mitigate damage and minimise retaliation are often difficult to find and, even where they do exist, they are often not implemented in a socially and financially sustainable way. A seemingly straightforward issue of guarding a herd of cows or fencing a patch of crops can escalate into a deeply divided ongoing conflict about who is to blame, who should pay, who did what wrong in the past, to whom the wildlife belongs and who should be responsible for possible solutions. Given the different dimensions involved, there is a need for holistic, interdisciplinary approaches, which should consider carefully the following essential insights for human-wildlife conflict management:

1. Interventions that focus only on reducing damage are not transferable from one case to another. Interventions such as fencing, deterrents and compensation schemes are often urgently needed, especially when there is pressure on agencies, governments and conservation organisations to deliver solutions. In cases where there is no particular underlying social conflict, such damage reduction measures can work well if practically effective and economically viable – however, such scenarios are relatively rare. For most human-wildlife conflicts, developing an intervention to reduce damage by wildlife is best pursued as a process rather than a direct transfer of a pre-defined method from one site to another. Each case of human-wildlife conflict has unique ecological, cultural, social, physical, economic and political characteristics, and each has different histories, attributes and opportunities.

2. Poorly informed human-wildlife conflict mitigation attempts can make the situation worse. Attempts to manage conflicts rapidly and without consideration of underlying socio-political elements can exacerbate pre-existing tensions and escalate human-wildlife conflicts into intractable conflicts in which parties become polarised. This can occur when a damage reduction method is copied from one context and transferred to another without following a process of engagement with stakeholders. The method may work only temporarily, expectations and hopes may be raised and then dashed, leading to misunderstandings about responsibilities and ownership of the solution, and increased divisions and mistrust between the groups involved. Similarly, a trial-and-error approach to human-wildlife conflicts is generally not recommended. While some experimentation with damage reduction measures may be needed, such trials should be evidence-based as far as possible, and must be carefully designed together with the affected parties, not imported ready-made by an external party.

3. Context awareness and understanding of social and political backgrounds is crucial. Who are the various stakeholders and actors involved in the situation, what are their relationships, histories and power differences? While there is usually at least one notable community or group most directly affected by the species blamed, most human-wildlife conflicts are multilateral, involving (to varying degrees) other stakeholders as well. Understanding the values, social norms, beliefs, culture, economics and other social and political factors of the parties involved is key for planning and implementing any human-wildlife conflict mitigation initiative. Because of the complexity of contexts, questionnaire-based studies are best complimented with more in-depth approaches that provide additional understanding of the layers, histories and nuances of HWC cases. Such context he values, about.1

parties, while remaining aware of their own positions. Often the process of jointly defining project goals and plans is useful as a vehicle for building such collaboration, trust and cooperation among the

cases, there may be no other option than to implement imperfectly-informed damage control measures as soon as possible. Yet these can and should be swiftly followed by the development of long-term, collaborative and holistic plans for conflict management. As such, human-wildlife conflict presents not only a global challenge, but also an opportunity for biodiversity and communities – a crucial part in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda's vision for the planet, in which "humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected."