



The Bua River, Nkhosakota Wildlife Reserve, Malawi.  
Photo credit: U.S. Forest Service International Programs

## A Former Fish Poacher No Longer Fears A Crocodile Demise

### Mango processing provides alternative livelihood path for poachers

With spear in hand and nets at the ready, Joseph Mwanga was 21 when he started making a living by poaching large salmon-type fish called mpasa (*Opsaridium microlepis*). In the early 2000s, he and his friends would probe Malawi's protected Bua River in Nkhosakota Wildlife Reserve to kill the meaty fish as they attempted to spawn. The Bua River flows all the way to Lake Malawi, where an increasing human population from three African countries depends on a fish population in decline.

"We formed a group of five energetic young men as hunters. We had very well-trained vicious dogs and together by using our spears, we never returned home empty-handed," said Mr. Mwanga. Eventually, Mr. Mwanga and his friends exchanged their spears for poison. They soaked katupe, a poison made from the plant of *Lasiosiphon klausianu*, in small pools of the Bua River, killing everything that took a sip, from mpasa to small animals.

Mr. Mwanga would barter his poached fish and animals for maize and cassava to feed his family. Poaching was how he secured his and his family's necessities, and he didn't see an alternative.

Natural resource crimes like poaching are an economic, national security, environmental, and human rights issue. Illegal wildlife poaching and trafficking undermine international governance and rule of law and can devastate the environment by stimulating rapid deforestation, biodiversity decline, and harm to natural capital, e.g. soil, water and air.

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Joseph Mwanga used to barter his poached fish and animals for maize and cassava to feed his family. Now he patrols the forests he used to hide in and processes and sells mango for income.

Photo credit: U.S. Forest Service International Programs, Sungeni Ngónamo

Poaching like Mr. Mwanga's was devastating the sustainability of a major food source, and the methods used were polluting fresh water for people and biodiversity alike.





Photo credit: ILRI/Susan MacMillan

African Parks took over management of Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve in 2015. To engage the local communities on livelihood alternatives, they started a poaching amnesty program that encourages poachers to turn in their weapons in exchange for training and support in conservation enterprises. Graduates of the program also have the option to join natural resource committees that actively patrol the forest to curb poaching.

Mr. Mwanga put away his spear in 2021 and joined a conservation enterprise that dries and juices mangoes for sale. He is part of a community association that plans to construct a large mango processing facility. He and the association currently operate mango solar driers supported by African Parks with funds from the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

The African Parks, the Forest Service and USAID supported conservation enterprises are providing an alternative to the dangerous and unsustainable lifestyle of a poacher. Mr. Mwanga's mango livelihood has alleviated his fear of being mauled by crocodiles or drowning, and instead of fearing being caught by park rangers, he now helps patrol the forests he used to hide in.

The Forest Service and USAID are partnering with African Parks at Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve to restore critical habitat, enhance tourism potential, and improve local livelihoods in border communities.



Joseph Mwanga with his U.S. Forest Service-supported mango solar drier.

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