



Becky Walter

# AWF Conservation Schools

Research shows that wildlife fares better in places where people have access to higher-quality education. Education is also known to disrupt the cycle of poverty and resource degradation, providing students with sustainable employment options.

African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) has therefore launched AWF Conservation Schools, a program to establish a network of primary schools in priority conservation landscapes throughout Africa.

## Linking Education & Conservation

AWF Conservation Schools will empower communities while promoting continued conservation of their lands.

- **Short-term conservation logic:** Communities make a specific commitment regarding the conservation of their resources and wildlife, in exchange for the capital to construct the school. Usually, the community sets aside a certain piece of land for conservation.
- **Medium-term conservation logic:** Diversification of livelihoods. Young people with a sound educational foundation will have many other opportunities to continue with school or seek employment in the modern economy rather than being forced to exploit the resources around them for livelihood.
- **Long-term conservation logic:** Educated people make better neighbors for Africa's wildlife. Education, and especially female education, is a powerful social investment that helps disrupt the vicious circle of poverty—and the environmental degradation that typically results from this poverty.

## The Program

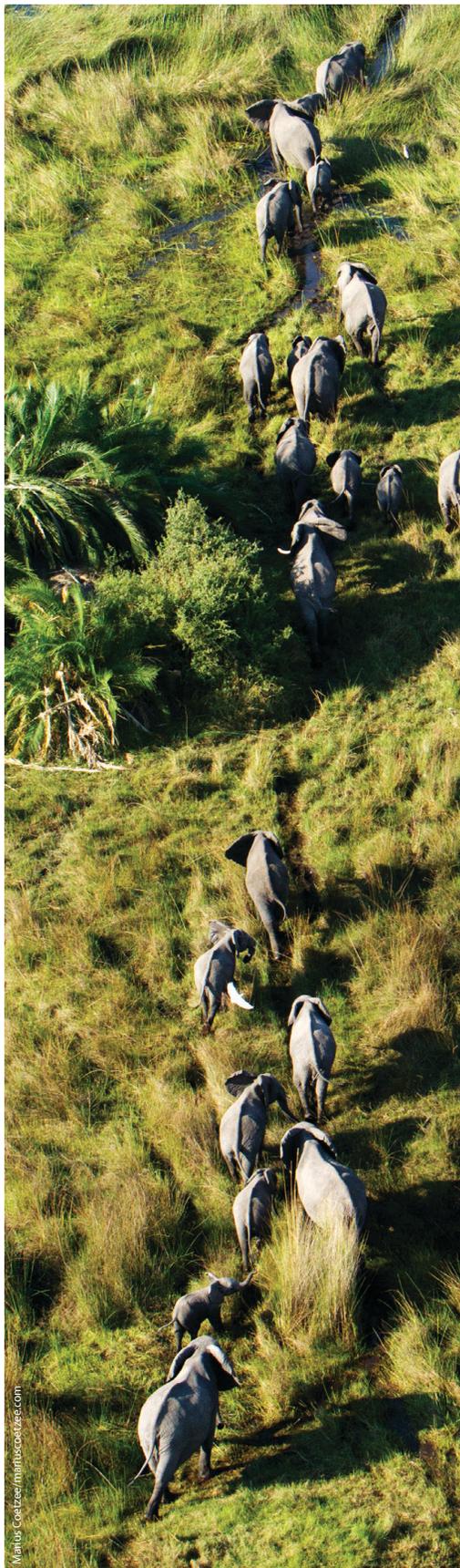
Historically, Africa's urban centers have attracted better educational resources. Via AWF Conservation Schools, however, students in rural areas who live in close proximity to wildlife will attend schools that rival the quality of those in Africa's cities.

Under the AWF Conservation Schools program, AWF will:

- Construct physical facilities, using building materials and techniques appropriate for the ecosystem;
- Provide ongoing teacher training to ensure all instructors meet a certain standard of qualification;
- Update the technological infrastructure to give students the best opportunities for educational enrichment;
- Provide programs that support student welfare, especially for female students; and
- Link the curriculum to conservation issues to raise awareness in a new generation.



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## Implementation

AWF has partnered with MASS Design Group, an award-winning architectural firm based in Kigali, Rwanda, and Boston, Mass., to ensure that all school campuses are designed in harmony with the natural environment. We are additionally in discussions with potential partners in educational training and curriculum planning, to ensure that AWF Conservation Schools will be synonymous not simply with effective conservation but also with topnotch education in Africa.



## Existing Conservation Primary Schools

### Lupani Primary School, Zambia

- **Conservation issue:** Wildlife populations in Zambia's Sekute Chiefdom were declining, primarily from unplanned settlement and land conversion.
- **AWF agreement:** The Sekute community designated 20,000 hectares of their community land, creating two critical wildlife corridors in exchange for the rebuilding of Lupani Primary School.
- **Result:** The Chiefdom boasts newly updated school facilities with six classrooms, new offices, teacher housing, and solar lighting kits. There has been a noticeable reduction in unsustainable natural resource use (such as charcoal production) and land clearance, and zero incidents of illegal harvesting of natural resources in the conservancy. Meanwhile, adult literacy lessons are being conducted at the school.

### Manyara Ranch Primary School, Tanzania

- **Conservation issue:** Manyara Ranch Primary School was located in the middle of a busy wildlife area, putting both children and wildlife in danger.
- **AWF agreement:** AWF relocated the school to allow for unimpeded movement of wildlife. It additionally improved school facilities and addressed overcrowding issues. AWF subsequently built a state-of-the-art IT lab.
- **Result:** Manyara Ranch School now sits in a safer location with larger classrooms, new student dormitories and teacher quarters. The IT lab has become a model for the country.

## Planned Schools

AWF is working to build 15 conservation schools across Africa in the next 10 years. AWF has begun working with MASS on a new conservation primary school and campus in the remote tropical forests of Ilima, Democratic Republic of Congo. Additional schools are being considered for new locations in Rwanda and Ethiopia, and updates are already underway for Lupani and Manyara Ranch Schools.



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