

2023 AKASHINGA IMPACT REPORT



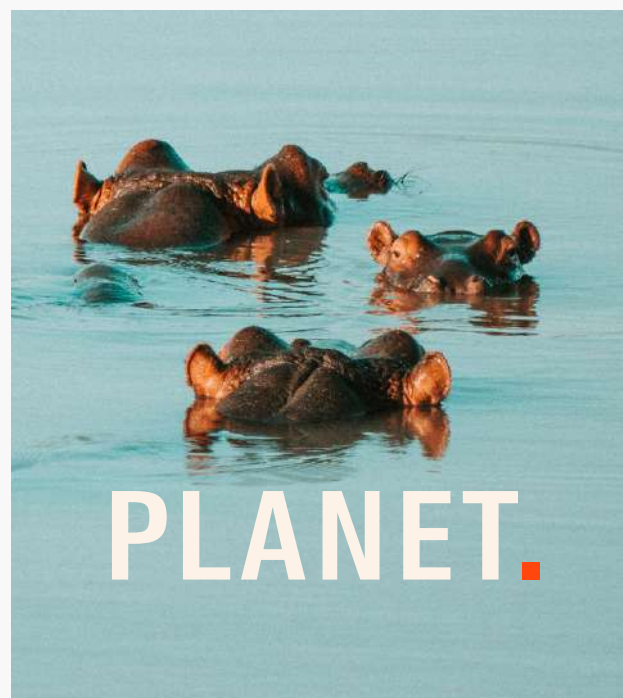
Letter from Akashinga's Executive Director

As we look back on the year 2023, I find immense pride and gratitude for the significant strides made by Akashinga – formerly the International Anti-Poaching Foundation (IAPF) – in our relentless commitment to forging a sustainable future on a healthier planet. Over the course of this year, unprecedented climate events have emphasized the crucial need to safeguard both people and our natural surroundings through the protection and restoration of invaluable ecosystems where nature, wildlife, and communities will thrive together for years to come. The stories shared here stand as a testament to the tireless dedication of our team, the steadfast support from our partners, and the pressing urgency of addressing the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and the future of all species, including our own.

Amidst the challenges we face, it is clear that collaboration across sectors is the linchpin for meaningful action. Together, we possess the ability to amplify transformation and contribute to the well-being of our communities and the conservation of nature and wildlife – because together, we thrive.

Your unwavering support serves as the driving force behind our success. We called upon you to be our partner in protecting wildlife and wild lands. You answered that call, and for that, [we are thankful](#).

Melody Westen
Executive Director
Akashinga



“One of the biggest mistakes we can all make is to think that the small changes in our lives can’t mean big changes in others.”

– Damien Mander, CEO + Founder

2023 Impact at a Glance

In 2023, our shared dedication to Akashinga has contributed to the day-to-day operations that drive our mission. From endorsing community-led conservation to covering the school fees of over 200 students in rural Zimbabwe, here are some of the notable ways we’ve created impact together this past year:

- Completed building a new school block at [Sizemba Highschool](#) in Zimbabwe’s Binga District with the help of [Wildhood Foundation](#) that provides a safe and comfortable learning experience for the **188 enrolled pupils**.
- **200 primary and secondary education scholarships** awarded including infrastructure development, teacher support, and the integration of conservation education into school curricula. Notably, these scholarships play a pivotal role in advancing female empowerment, with **70%** of them being exclusively granted to girls.
- Over **16,400 people** gained increased access to clean water, with **over 5000 patients** treated by [clinics supported by Akashinga](#).
- Assisted [Zimbabwe National Parks](#)’ rangers to **relocate three lions** from villages near Nyamakate in August and [collaborated with local community leaders](#) to deliver ongoing workshops about human-wildlife conflict and to implement strategies that foster sustainable coexistence with wildlife.
- **Over 50 human-wildlife conflict cases** assessed and mitigated, 25+ community meetings held, and numerous community socio-economic surveys conducted.
- A total of **875 patrols** conducted covering over 10,000km (over 6,200mi) with a **total of 319 arrests** made across the organization. In October 2023, this included **23 attempted and successful arrests**, ten of which were for pangolin poaching. **Six pangolins** were recovered alive and relocated to safely back into the wild.
- Sent **ten Akashinga instructors, including nine women**, for further training in Kenya. They have now become the first Zimbabwe-based trainers at our Phundundu [LEAD Ranger Academy](#).
- The [Akashinga Mozambique Programme](#) graduated **26 women as the first female ranger team in Mozambique** in June 2023. The closing ceremony for the graduation event showcased the programme’s recognition in advancing wildlife protection, conservation, and community engagement in Mozambique.

Akashinga in 2023 and Beyond

Since our formation in 2009, Akashinga has pursued a consistent vision of protection for the natural world. While expressed through evolving vision and mission statements during our 15 years, and mobilised through a range of field projects, there has been a constant thread of agility and growth.

In 2023, we **pushed our efforts** to protect, connect, and restore landscapes across Southern and East Africa even further. And with your support, we are achieving biodiversity outcomes and scaling our operations across vast areas by working together with local and indigenous communities, placing community first, and ensuring social impact is centralised around the empowerment of women.

We have seen frequent reminders of the scale and accelerating speed of the climate and nature crisis facing our planet, and **we remain committed** to tackling some of the most pressing issues concerning animals and their ecosystems by leading and supporting conservation initiatives, creating nature-based economies through social impact and rural development, and protecting vast wilderness landscapes across Africa and the species that call those landscapes home.

Akashinga aligns with addressing 15/17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Global 30x30 Challenge, Protecting our Planet Challenge, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and Agenda 2063 of the African Union.



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This is where we come from, and at the end of the day, this is where we go home to. We have to collaborate.

**– Purity Mapa,
Akashinga Ranger**

22-year old Akashinga Ranger Purity Mapa listening during LEAD Ranger instructor training in late 2023. Photo Credit: Steven Dean

9 Million+

Acres of critical wilderness landscapes protected – equivalent to one-third of the natural forest lost globally each year

16,400+

Increased access to clean water, medical care, sustainable livelihoods

5,000+

Patients treated each month at clinics supported by Akashinga

200+

Primary and secondary education scholarships provided (70% to girls)

500+

Local and global staff and contractors

400%

Increase in wildlife encounters in the reserves that we manage

90%

Decrease in elephant poaching

Community-Centred Conservation

With our expansion across wilderness landscapes in Africa comes increased adoption of our Akashinga model in local partnering communities. Since 2017, Akashinga has grown to include 500+ staff and contractors with a wilderness protection portfolio totaling over 9.1 million acres across four countries: Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique, and Tanzania. This acreage of wilderness under our management agreement – **a 10,000% in portfolio growth since 2017** and roughly about four times the size of Yellowstone National Park in the U.S. – is equivalent to one-third of the natural forest lost globally each year.

In 2024, we plan to expand our management footprint by an additional 3.6M acres – a 40% increase in portfolio size – with our extended goal being to employ one thousand women by 2026 and protect 30 million acres of wilderness by the end of the decade. This growth not only reinforces our conservation initiatives but also catalyzes elevated education rates, economic prosperity, gender equity, and holistic well-being within the very communities with which we partner.

We aim to make substantial contributions towards safeguarding our planet’s self-regulating system of nature by creating sustainable conservation through working with local communities in the landscapes where we operate. Through education, clean water access, health clinics, employment opportunities, and infrastructure support, Akashinga works with individual communities to support their needs, highlighting the economic value involved in conservation work. As one of the largest conservation employers in Southern and East Africa, we are breaking the mold on traditional conservation models and creating green economies that have positive generational outcomes.



A newborn baby receives his first vaccinations at the Nyamakate Clinic in Hurungwe, Zimbabwe. Akashinga helped the clinic receive solar electricity and a fridge so that vaccines could be stored safely. Photo Credit: Davina Jogi

PROJECTS

DETAILS

OUTCOMES

Long-term Wildlife Population Protection + Trend Monitoring

1622 arrests for illegal wildlife crimes and over 800 joint operations with law enforcement agencies

Recovery of 619 elephant ivory tusks; 119 pangolins; 70 illegal weapons; 16 rhino horns; 68 animal skins; and more than 700 snares removed.

Community Livelihoods, Health, + Wellbeing

500+ staff and contractors with the majority of the law enforcement staff being women

Significant reduction in elephant poaching and a notable increase in wildlife populations.

Bridging Gender Equity + Environmentalism for Lasting Change

The Akashinga Programme presents a unique approach that addresses systemic and structural inequalities and propels the conservation movement forward.

In addition to providing financial stability to families, many of the rangers take on a mentorship role – both for fellow rangers in the programme and community members in learning how to live in ways that promote sustainable well-being for people and the environment in which they live.



Akashinga Sergeant Margaret Darawanda (right) and Senior Instructor Petronella Chigumbura ride through Phundundu after leading a patrol along the Ruckomechi River. Photo Credit: Davina Jogi

Developing Women's Leadership

In the face of the climate crisis, women and rural communities often bear its profound impacts. Akashinga's innovative program, initiated in Zimbabwe in 2017 with 16 female rangers, not only safeguards wilderness and wildlife but also nurtures women's leadership. This gender-focused approach empowers women economically, linking our conservation model to community development and social impact by providing sustainable livelihoods as alternatives to harmful practices like unregulated fishing, illegal logging, poaching, and encroachment. By offering paid employment and training, Akashinga not only fosters financial stability and personal growth for local women but also opens doors to expanded career prospects, including tertiary, university, and specialist education.

Since its inception in 2017, Akashinga has trained and deployed over 300 law enforcement staff.

Women have a vital role to play in the preservation of Africa's biodiversity. As mothers and guardians, women often feel the impact of biodiversity loss and climate change more keenly, as gendered roles give them primary responsibility for feeding their families through activities like subsistence farming, drawing water, and collecting wood.

With Southern and East Africa facing numerous threats to its biodiversity – including climate change, human settlement and agricultural encroachment into wilderness areas, uncontrolled burning and resource extraction, and the overexploitation of animal species and plants through both deforestation and illegal poaching – Akashinga Sergeant Margaret (Maggie) Darawanda says **women are instinctively conservationists.**

And she would know – as both a mother and an Akashinga Ranger, Maggie has been in the frontlines of nature conservation for seven years.

As one of the first Akashinga Rangers selected in 2017, Maggie has progressed in her career from Field Ranger to Duty Officer, and more recently to Sergeant. As a community leader, she oversees 68 Akashinga Rangers, supervising their day-to-day duties and supporting the operations team to successfully manage rangers on patrols, duty rosters, and data collection.

Akashinga believes effective conservation comes from creating resilient ecosystems. This includes supporting women like Maggie to challenge stereotypes by taking a lead in protecting and managing the environment. With your support in 2023, we have trained and deployed more female rangers across the countries where we work than ever before. These rangers effectively protect each unique ecosystem and species, and they work with local community leadership to instil a widespread understanding of conservation and biodiversity.

There has never been a more critical issue in the history of human civilisation than the immediate protection of the natural world. Akashinga's investment in the entire ecosystem – from plants, animals, and humans to the future of our planet – protects and restores habitats, promotes sustainable practices, and creates lasting change, ensuring our mission and work remain transformative for us all.



Akashinga Ranger Purity Mapa spars with a partner during LEAD Ranger instructor training at Phundundu. Photo Credit: Steven Dean

Spotlight: LEAD Ranger Advanced Instructor Course

From November 6th to December 15th, 2023, the [Advanced Instructor Course](#) – which prepares instructors to run Akashinga Field Ranger courses, enabling them to provide the required training for our ranger teams – was conducted in Phundundu, Zimbabwe for a group of **14 rangers** from both the Akashinga Ranger Programme and [LEAD Ranger](#). The training concentrated on equipping Instructors with essential competencies in Ranger Law Enforcement Instruction, specifically the LEAD Methodology of Instruction at Level 3 (LMOI 3). The course programme included training in, but not limited to, the following areas:

- **Human Rights**
- **Use of Force**
- **Individual Arrest Procedures**
- **Ranger Self Defense**
- **Crime Scene First Responder**
- **Effective and Safe Use of Fire Arms**
- **Bush Safety**
- **Individual and Team Patrolling**
- **Reports and Returns**
- **Human Tracking**

The 6-week course ended with a full evaluation by the instructors on the subjects of logistics, follow-up, content, and schedule and planning. All 14 participants successfully completed the course, and the course will run in both Botswana and Mozambique in 2024.

Through LEAD, we have helped train over 300 rangers across more than 36 organisations.



A select group of Akashinga Rangers take a rest as they attend LEAD Ranger's Advanced Field Ranger Instructor Course at Phundundu. Photo Photo Credit: Steven Dean



The pangolin, often referred to as the "scaly anteater," is a unique mammal known for its distinctive protective scales made of keratin. These elusive creatures face severe threats from illegal trafficking, making them one of the most trafficked mammals in the world and emphasizing the urgent need for their conservation. Since 2017, Akashinga has recovered and saved 119 pangolins in Zimbabwe.

Spotlight: Zimbabwe

In 2023, Akashinga made a substantial impact in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe, through our dedicated ranger deployments and operations. Over a span of **802 patrol days**, covering a staggering distance of over 9,296km (~5,776mi), the team demonstrated resolute dedication to conservation. Our efforts in law enforcement yielded significant results with **286 arrests for wildlife crimes**.

Engaging in **67 joint operations** with local agencies, Akashinga successfully carried out **intervention on 33 ivory deals**, leading to the recovery of **93 tusks**. Ever dangerous, four weapons were seized during the raids. The team's focus extended to pangolin conservation, with 19 operations resulting in **37 arrests** and the recovery of **15 pangolins**, six of which were alive and were [safely returned to the wild](#).



Our impact went beyond arrests and recoveries, as vigilant patrolling by Akashinga's rangers **intercepted poaching groups 34 times**, leading to successful intervention. A total of **85 human-wildlife conflict cases** were reported and assessed, involving species such as elephants, hyenas, leopards, and lions. Working alongside local communities, our team engaged in **22 official community meetings**, fostering collaboration and understanding through continued engagement and ongoing conservation workshops.

Akashinga contributed significantly to biodiversity, with **1692 different sightings of various wildlife species**, including lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant, antelope, wild dogs, hippo, and warhog. Our work in 2023 highlights our commitment to conserving the Zambezi Valley's rich biodiversity and shielding it from threats.



Our ranger training course's closing ceremony where the first Akashinga Rangers in Mozambique graduated in June 2023 stood as a milestone, endorsed by ANAC (Mozambique's National Parks department), local authorities, and media as a first of its kind in Mozambique.

Spotlight: Mozambique

The Akashinga Mozambique Programme, initiated in 2022, has achieved notable advancements in 2023. Spanning **2.2 million acres, including 40 miles of coastline**, the Coutada 5 area is a comprehensive blend of terrestrial, coastal, and maritime conservation.

Following the successful training and graduation of the inaugural group of Akashinga Rangers in June 2023, the region is now under the protection of a proficient team of women, dedicated to safeguarding wildlife and natural resources. The deployment of these rangers has yielded tangible and positive outcomes for conservation efforts, and the programme's commitment to taking proactive measures against illegal wildlife activities is evident through law enforcement actions, yielding significant results in 2023, including:



- **Human-Wildlife Conflict Species Managed:** Hippopotamus, Bushpig, and Monkey/Baboons
- **Wildlife Sighting Species:** Guineafowl, Tortoise, Baboon, Hare, Grey Duiker, Bushpig, Suni, Python, Various Monkey Species, Kudu, Porcupine, Hippopotamus, Ant Bear, and Cane Rat
- **Number of Akashinga Rangers Employed in Mozambique:** 26 actively deployed with plans to recruit another 25 Akashinga Rangers in 2025

Emphasizing our holistic approach to ranger training and well-being, Akashinga Rangers participated in a **lifesaving ranger course** conducted by a team of trainers, enhancing their skills and preparedness in the field. Collaborative efforts also saw Akashinga Rangers joining forces with law enforcement agencies in **31 joint operations**, highlighting the importance of unified action against illegal wildlife activities. These achievements underscore the programme's resolute dedication and effectiveness of its rangers in protecting wildlife and enforcing conservation laws.

Spotlight: Botswana

In 2021, our partnership with NGO [Kalahari Research and Conservation \(KRC\)](#) expanded our our initiatives into Botswana. Operating within the vast Greater Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, covering **five million acres** (KD1 and KD2), we focus on protecting thriving lion, wild dog, and leopard populations. As the challenges of poaching and human encroachment escalate, safeguarding these species becomes crucial for maintaining the ecological balance of the region.



Between June and October 2023, KRC conducted a lion survey across the KD1 and KD2 sections of the Kalahari Transfrontier Park with the final estimate for lion present in the area around 80. Final results will be ready in 2024.

Our comprehensive strategy involves various projects aimed at preserving the biodiversity of the Kgalagadi. Notable efforts include the Kgalagadi Lion and Wild Dog Projects, carnivore surveys utilizing fifty camera traps, satellite tracking of vultures, and the Conservation Performance Payment (CPP) Project, which effectively addresses livestock incursions. This multifaceted approach promotes coexistence, while our Tracker Training initiatives contribute to building local conservation capacity. Embracing a community-led model, we have **created over 80 jobs**, providing stable income sources and emphasizing both gender equality and wildlife conservation.

Our commitment also extends to upliftment projects that support schools, ensuring a brighter future for the community. These projects encompass women's empowerment, healthcare, education, community gardens, and alternative livelihoods, reaffirming our dedication to holistic and sustainable development. To learn more about our impactful partnership, watch our [featured video](#).

In 2023, we achieved significant progress across key pillars: **wildlife conservation, gender equity, and community development**. Noteworthy initiatives included the establishment of a community vegetable garden in Ncaang, provision of a photocopier and printer for Ncaang Primary School, and the installation of solar power in the Ukhwi community guest house. The community-focused efforts extended to building gates, toilets, and supplying essential resources to various schools and villages. Empowering women in the region remains a priority, with the implementation of a comprehensive training programme and camera trap initiatives in the villages of Ncaang, Ukhwi, and Ngwatle. These efforts not only empower women in community conservation but also act as a deterrent against poaching through active participation in anti-poaching patrols and camera trapping deployment.

KRC conducted a comprehensive **lion survey**, deploying camera traps and satellite collars, and establishing an early warning system with vultures proved effective in detecting poaching camps. We also engaged in **anti-poaching patrols**, resulting in the apprehension of poachers and the establishment of a bush base in KD2. The organization facilitated **poison training** for both wildlife vets and its own staff, contributing to broader conservation efforts.

Amidst these accomplishments, KRC facilitated academic achievements, with two students obtaining **wildlife-focused master's degrees**. The team actively participated in wildlife conferences, contributed to scientific publications, and initiated a Ph.D. research project. Operational enhancements included acquiring new vehicles, equipment, and renting additional housing to support an expanding team. The organization also hosted international visitors, fostering collaborations and knowledge exchange. Our partnership with KRC in Botswana continues to be a strong commitment to sustainable community development and nature conservation.