The Controversial Case of Trophy Hunting

What is the issue?

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- Trump administration recently proposed the lifting of import bans for elephants
- This is expected to ease the entry of trophy imports from countries such as Zimbabwe and Zambia.
- This has brought trophy hunting into the international limelight and the conservationists are divided in their opinions.

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What are the conflicting opinions on Trophy hunting?

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- Trophy hunting is the legal practice of selectively hunting wild game animals.
- The taxidermied parts of such animal such as the head or carcass are usually taken back home for display as a "trophy,"
- **Negative opinion –** Some fear that trophy hunting can endanger lion populations.
- Animal activists also advocate the ethical angle, where killing as a sport is argued as reprehensive.
- **Positive Opinion -** Countries like Namibia have shown that well-managed hunting programs can help conservation.
- Usually, in these hunts, select individuals, often old & infirm, are sacrificed, but the species wins due increased funds for its upkeep.

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How effective has hunting bans been?

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- **Hunting Bans –** Simply banning hunting hasn’t lead to an automatic increase in populations of endangered species.
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- In Kenya and India hunting bans exist since the 1970s.
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- But the wildlife populations do not seem better than in territories were hunting isn’t banned.
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- **Commersialising wildlife -** South Africa and Namibia, where wildlife has been commoditised are doing better in conservation.
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- Commoditisation of wildlife means “trophy hunting, wildlife tourism, commercial meat production and local consumption”.
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- This has also benefited the local communities by emerging as a employment and business opportunity.
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What makes the case for Trophy hunting?

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- Trophy hunting has in the past, helped recover species such as the black rhino and the straight-horned markhor (wild goat).
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- While it could risk some populations, there is limited evidence to show that it has substantial negative implications at a bigger level.
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- **Conservation Funds -** Financial incentives that trophy hunting provides for maintainance of lion habitats is significant.
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- If not for this, there is a risk of wildlife parks getting taken over for other uses due to the ever increasing need for land and resources.
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- **Challenges in Eco-tourism -** Ecotourism is usually favoured to generate revenue for conservation.

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- But it might not always be viable due to the difficulties of terrain.
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- Moreover, some experts claim that compared to ecotourism, high-value trophy hunting has a lower ecological footprint.
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What are the challenges Ahead?

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- **Improper Implementation -** Lack of proper hunting regulations & corruption can derail the conservation initiative.
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- Trophy hunting also has the inherent risk of promoting illegal hunting that may have serious negative consequences.
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- **Subsistence Angle -** The existing confusion about subsistence hunting with sport hunting also distorts the debate.
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- While the former is the preserve of the poor who take to hunting for survival, the later is a hobby for rich well off tourists.
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- These are embedded in different cultural contexts, and need to be evaluated through separate socio-political and economic frames.
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- **Sensationalism –** The debate on trophy hunting is taking away the focus from more serious issues such as man-animal conflict and widespread habitat loss & degradation.
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- **Elitist Politics -** The real impact of policy debates in the urban spaces of rich countries is felt in rural Africa where animals and people live in close proximity.
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- Significantly, those directly affected by outcomes have literally no say, which is more or less reminiscent of the colonial era.
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- Hence, local voices need to be recognised and accommodated.
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Source: The Hindu

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