

**COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF
INTRODUCED BLACK RHINOCEROSES IN LIWONDE NATIONAL PARK.
(INTERIM REPORT)**

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1. Overview

Black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) existed in Malawi but became extinct in the late 1980s. In 1993, the species was introduced in the country at Liwonde National Park (LNP) with a founding male and female pair from South Africa. Two other pairs were brought to the park in 1998 and 2000. The rhinos have been kept in fenced sanctuaries under high security and have multiplied successfully. To date, ten calves have been borne and three deaths have occurred. The first calf was translocated to South Africa in 2000 and another two to Majete Wildlife Reserve in 2006.

Liwonde National Park is surrounded by dense human settlements causing immense conflict. Many local people do not see the park as a resource that would benefit them. They have not seen the rhinos, although they may have heard, and do not realize their value. The park boundary fence constructed since 1993, to reduce conflict and improve security, has been regularly vandalized because it is seen as merely a barrier against them.

The national park authorities and its neighbours are now working collaboratively in managing the park. The communities will soon be benefiting from the revenues through a 50% revenue sharing from the park. The rhinos are a major source of revenue collected in the park. A constitution for a new Liwonde National Park Community Association is in draft form. The new association aims at improving collaborative management. Sensitization about the rhino and encouraging the involvement of the people will enhance the objectives of collaborative management.

2. Objectives

Objective 1. To increase awareness amongst local communities on the importance of rhino in particular and the park as whole through discussions and visits.

Activity 1. Quarterly meetings between park management and the LNP Community Association to sensitize communities, form a task force to develop an action plan and discuss project activities. (In Progress).

The first meeting with communities was held on <<<May 2008 was held at Namandanje Teacher Development Center on the periphery of the park. The project was introduced to local chiefs and leaders of the Community Based Organizations. The draft action plan was presented for discussion and approval. The DNPW informed the local leaders that we needed to work together for our mutual benefit. The local leaders welcomed the idea and said they had wished that it was so for a long time.

Another meeting was held on 16th August, 2008 at Masanje Scouts' Camp. Maintenance equipment bought by the project was presented to community leaders and DNPW fence attendants by the Director of National Parks and Wildlife Mr. Leonard Sefu.

These were ten push bicycles, twenty hoes and one hundred grass slashers. The bicycles are meant to assist in the patrolling of the fence and the hoes and slashers are clearing vegetation growth along the fence line. About sixty community members attended the function. The equipment was shared equally between the DNPW fence management staff and the community organization. Most of this equipment will be useful in the rainy season.

Objective 2. To develop an action plan of how to involve communities in rhino conservation.

Activity 1. Two stakeholder workshops to present and discuss action plan (In progress).

Two meetings were held to develop and discuss an action plan. The first meeting at Liwonde National Park, from 28 to 29th April 2008, involved seven DNPW officers who drew an action plan of activities. Some points of consideration were raised. It was noted that the relationship between park management and the people was generally fragile. This is because there is a lot of human/wildlife conflict mainly caused of elephants damaging crops. There was need to work with the people through the Upper Shire Natural Resource Committee that was formed around Liwonde National Park last year. It was agreed that the project must work with Natural Resources Committees in the villages of Wadi, Mjahito, Mjenjema and Chilawo because these are close to the rhino sanctuary in Liwonde NP.

It was also noted that while purchasing equipment, motor cycles that were in the original budget would be removed because the funding was not adequate.

Activity 2. Maintenance of the fences by clearing bushes, patrolling and reporting progress with communities (In progress).

This is an on-going activity that will continue to the end of the project. In addition to the equipment handed over at the ceremony at Masanje, more equipment and materials were purchased in order to implement the fence maintenance effectively. These were hoe handles and two tonnes of aggregate stones. Minor bush clearance works were done because it was already in the dry season and little bush was growing. The aggregate stones were used to strengthen some fence poles that had fallen or to fix new ones. A total distance of 15 km was maintained. This work was done together with some local people but they became reluctant because they wanted some cash incentives.

Activity 3. Implementation fire burning programmes with communities (In progress).

Burning was done from August to October in the dry season. Grass at this time of the year is dry and controlled burning helps to avoid wild fires. In the rainy season from November, grass will grow again. The next burning will be done after the rains next year.

Activity 4. Three community tours to the rhino sanctuary (Not yet started).

This activity has not yet taken place because we have been sorting out the fragile relationship between the DNPW and the local people. The local people do not understand the project and expect too much from it. The people want to be given money in whatever activity they participate. We are therefore, being cautious about what we do.

Activity 5. Community policing-reporting vandalism of the fence.

The matter was discussed at the hand-over ceremony of equipment that was held on 16th August. Communities were asked to report illegal activities to park authorities. Some community members were willing to report to the DNPW people who vandalize the fence. They however, expressed concern that if they are known to be passing information to the DNPW, they would be in trouble. They DNPW, however, assured them that all information will be treated confidentially.

3. Outcomes

Goal	Expected outputs	Outcomes
To conserve black rhino in LNP through collaborative management involving park management, communities and other stakeholders.	i. Improved relations between national parks authorities and local people and appreciation of the park's resources.	i. There have been several meetings to discuss the management of Liwonde National Park between authorities and the communities. ii. The project donated equipment (bicycles, hoes and slashers) to fence attendant and communities. iii. The Liwonde National Park staff and communities are working together. iv. Conflict resolution meetings have been held.
	ii. Improved management of	i. The park fence is maintained by both

	the rhinos with collaborative management.	the people and the park staff. ii. Local people and park staff worked together in habitat burning.
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4. Unexpected Results

Unexpected results		Remarks
i.	The peripheral fence was repaired by the project at the request of the communities.	The communities have suffered a lot of elephant-human conflict due to the mal-functioning of the peripheral fence. They, therefore, requested assistance from the project to reduce this problem.
ii.	The maintenance of the peripheral fence has assisted in the control of poaching in the area.	Poaching through wire snares and fire-wood collection is common in this area. The presence is fence attendants using bicycles during the maintenance exercises has resulted in the reduction of these.
iii.	Many people from the communities are willing to participate in fence maintenance work as long as they are given a minimal incentive.	There are many people wanting to participate with an incentive. This will reduce vandalism as they will feel responsible.

5. Way forward

The following will be the next activities.

- i. We will purchase six more push bicycles for the three fence attendants and two rhino trackers in the rhino sanctuary. The bicycles will boost their morale in managing the sanctuary.
- ii. The fence attendants and rhino trackers also do not have field equipment. We will, therefore, purchase four one-man tents, four sleeping bags and four rack-sacks for them. This equipment will be useful in the rainy season for their protection.
- iii. There will be a fence clearing exercise in the middle of the rainy season. At this time, the grass will be tall and will interfere with the performance of the fence. This will involve 50 community members and will take one week. They will be paid MK200 per day.

- iv. After the rains, seventy community members will be engaged in a one day burning exercise under the supervision of the Liwonde National Park staff. They will be paid MK200 each.
- v. We will purchase 5 tonnes of aggregate stones to continue maintaining the peripheral fence. The stones will be used to strengthen the fence poles in the ground.
- vi. After the rainy season, two trips for the communities will be arranged to the rhino sanctuary for them to tour.