

Depressingly, a fairly frequent reaction, when we approach people for donations, is: "Sorry, rhinos aren't a priority, I support 'people' charities." Yet saving rhinos is really all about people. Take, for example, the community conservation work we help to fund in Laikipia.

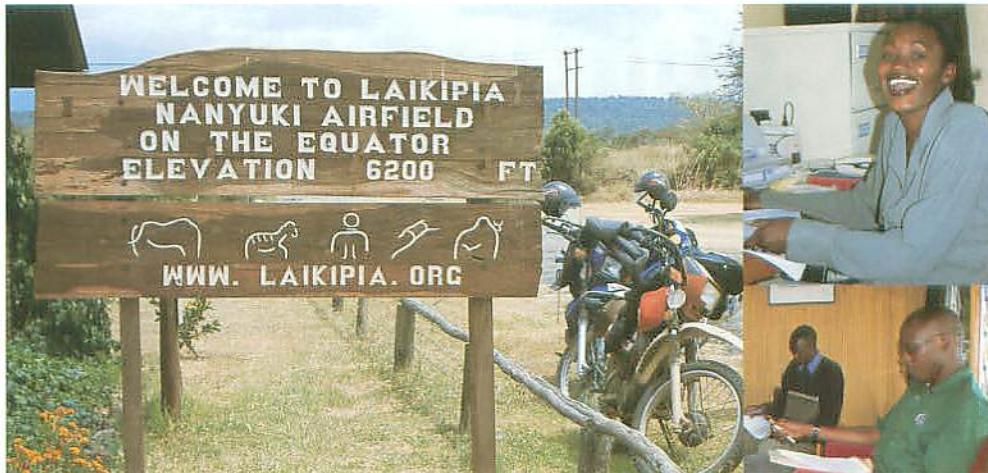
The Laikipia district is vast: some 20,000 km² to the north-west of Mount Kenya. Add to that a membership of 36 large-scale ranches, 47 community groups, 50 tour operators, 54 individuals and 8 interest groups, and you begin to get an idea of how complicated keeping everyone up-to-date with developments can become. Hence the Laikipia Wildlife Forum and the Community Liaison Officer programme.

Why has Save the Rhino chosen to fund the work of the CLOs? Well, for a start, the Laikipia District is home to over half of Kenya's black rhino programme, with five major fenced sanctuaries and another four smaller holdings. Some of the projects, such as Lewa Downs, have become so successful at breeding rhinos that they are able to help restock national parks and community conservancies.

But saving rhinos isn't just about protecting, breeding and translocating animals. It also needs the active support of the people in the local communities, and this is where the CLOs come in. I joined February's monthly meeting to find out what goes on.

I guess all staff meetings are broadly similar. There's usually a bit of routine admin to go through, some nags about punctuality and use of email, and maybe a bit of discussion about training courses. There's a lot of information swapping, some mutually supportive morale boosting, and then it's back to

Saving rhinos & helping people in Laikipia



work. You might think that sitting in on someone else's staff meeting would be even duller than attending (or should I say participating in?) your own. You'd be wrong.

For one thing, I don't expect your team members will have been chased by elephants on the way to the office, necessitating a bit of nifty navigation over a potholed road on a Yamaha 175 motorbike. And it's hard to imagine a discussion - in London offices at any rate - on the effectiveness of different kinds of bomas (livestock enclosures) against predators like lions, leopard and hyaena. Apparently those with solid gates work better; those with electric fences best.

The CLOs get involved in discussing contentious issues like new water supplies (making sure that the labour is shared fairly, or that everyone has access to the standpipe), or the use of

poisons. Other ongoing work includes setting up school schemes to plant and maintain tree seedlings as part of a larger reforestation programme, or advising local groups on how to encourage more tourists to visit a cultural manyatta. One of the community conservancies requires help with drawing up the legal framework and documentation, and future funders will want reassurance that each section of the community has been involved.

So although Save the Rhino's funds are not being used directly for rhino conservation in Laikipia, the CLO programme is helping reduce the human-wildlife conflict in the areas around the rhino sanctuaries. And after all, the survival of the rhino depends on us.

Cathy Dean



Save the Rhino's Trustees have agreed to continue funding the CLO programme beyond the end of the current two-year grant, which is due to finish in December 2003. We are giving US \$10,000 for the year 2004, and US \$5,000 for 2005. The CLO programme costs just US \$20,000 each to run, and the balance will be raised from the LWF's members, who increasingly appreciate the support provided by the CLOs.