

A contribution to the symposium “Beyond enforcement”, South Africa

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Background Paper

Conservation, crime and communities:

case studies of efforts to engage local communities in
tackling illegal wildlife trade

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The views of the authors expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of IIED or the Beyond Enforcement Symposium organisers.

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SULi Sustainable Use
and Livelihoods
Specialist Group



TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

iied International Institute
for Environment
and Development



Wildlife crime is at the top of the international conservation agenda. Current strategies for addressing it focus on law enforcement, reducing consumer demand and engaging local communities in conservation. To date considerably more attention has been paid to the first two strategies than to the third. This volume of case studies explores a range of different models of community engagement – from awareness-raising to community-based rapid response teams – and a wider range of conservation incentives – from land leases, to sustainable use schemes, to reinvigorated cultural institutions and social status. The case studies highlight that while community engagement is not a panacea for tackling wildlife crime – and indeed there are examples where it has proved to be a real challenge – it can, under the right circumstances, be highly effective. We need to learn from these examples. In the long run, the survival of some of the world's most iconic wildlife species lies in the hands of the communities who live alongside them.

Contents

1 Introduction	6
2 Case studies	11
Northern Rangelands Trust, Kenya <i>Juliet King and Ian Craig</i>	11
Olderkesi Conservancy, Kenya <i>Calvin Cottar</i>	14
The Ruvuma Elephant Project, Tanzania <i>Max Jenés and Wayne Lotter</i>	17
The Mali Elephant Project, Mali <i>Susan Canney and Nomba Ganamé</i>	20
The Greater Kilimanjaro Landscape, Kenya and Tanzania <i>Kathleen H Fitzgerald and Philip Muruthi</i>	23
The Rhino Rangers Incentive Programme, Namibia <i>Jeff Muntifering, Boas Hambo, Kenneth /Uiseb and Pierre du Preez</i>	26
The Ploughshare Tortoise Protection Project, Madagascar <i>Hasina Randriamanampisoa and Sarah-Louise Adams</i>	29
The Hawaii Integrated Coastal Management Project, Guatemala <i>Collom Muccio</i>	32
ASOCAIMAN, Colombia <i>Giovanni Ulloa Delgado and Clara Lucia Sierra Diaz</i>	35
Vicuña Management in the Andes, Latin America <i>Gabriela Lichtenstein</i>	38
Community-based Conservation of Chinese Pangolins, Nepal <i>Ambika Prasad Khatiwada</i>	41
3 Conclusions	44
References and notes	47
Appendix	48

The Rhino Rangers Incentive Programme, Namibia

Jeff Muntifering, Boas Hambo, Kenneth /Uiseb and Pierre du Preez

At a glance

COUNTRY	Namibia
LOCATION	Communal land in north west Kunene and Erongo Regions
SPECIES	Black Rhino (<i>Diceros bicornis</i>)
ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE CONTEXT	Relatively low, but significantly increasing level of rhino poaching for the international black market
TYPE OF POACHERS	Poachers and middlemen outsiders, but some local people are complicit by providing information and/or not reporting criminal or suspicious behaviour
TYPE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN TACKLING IWT	Community rangers/eco-guards
CONSERVATION INCENTIVE MECHANISM	Revenue-sharing from tourism Enterprise development Legally recognized community based natural resource management institutions Social status

The story so far

In response to the escalating threat from poachers, communities in Namibia's northwestern region are themselves the catalyst in an initiative to strengthen their commitment and capacity to protect the last truly wild population of Black Rhino.

Already engaged under the Ministry of Environment and Tourism's innovative Communal Rhino Custodians scheme, community leaders and game guards sought help to improve their monitoring skills and effectiveness while, in turn, expanding their income-generating opportunities from emerging rhino tourism. This community-driven demand led to the creation of the Rhino Ranger Incentive Programme.

The programme's overall aim is to further reduce local tolerance to poaching by enhancing the relationship between rhinos and local people. In the first step to achieve this, a new generation of 'rhino rangers', chosen by and accountable to their local communities, were trained and equipped to carry out rhino monitoring. The next step will be to co-develop rhino tourism activities that will fully integrate the rangers' work and provide a sustainable source of funding for the monitoring as well as additional benefits to the broader community.

Backed by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, the programme draws on the experience of a small group of locally-based rhino and tourism specialists, known as the Communal Rhino Custodian Support Group. They also serve to leverage the skills and expertise from a diverse group of Conservancy support organisations, primarily: Save the Rhino Trust, Namibia; Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation, Namibia; and Minnesota Zoo, USA.

The approach is guided by the belief that securing a future for wild rhino depends on local people refusing to tolerate poaching, and rhino being more valuable alive than dead.

serious about enforcement

With the value of rhino horn on the black market at an estimated US\$65,000 per kilogramme, the rhino is under siege. Across Africa, three rhinos are currently being killed by poachers every day. In Namibia poaching is also on the rise with middlemen purportedly offering at least US\$2,500 for horn.

Namibia is a stronghold for the black rhino, with one third of global population occurring in the country. The country is tough on poachers. Penalties are among the highest on the continent: a maximum of 20 years in prison or



A Conservancy Rhino Ranger stands proudly before a cow and calf that he has tracked during a patrol (Minnesota Zoo and Save the Rhino Trust)

a US\$200,000 fine. To add to this commitment, the Defense Force recently publicised their intention to assist in anti-poaching activities countrywide.

In this national context, the Rhino Ranger Incentive Programme in the rugged northwest Kunene region, is building on existing partnerships between government, local communities, conservation NGOs and private sector tourism, established over 30 years.

A key incentive for community involvement in rhino protection was the 1996 Nature Conservation Amendment Act. This gave a legal framework for local people living in communal areas to form conservancies as a basis for conditional rights to manage and benefit from wildlife on their lands.

Although managing rhinos remains a highly centralised government-led initiative, the Rhino Custodianship Programme was created to promote a more open and collective decision process with commercial farmers and, more recently, communal conservancies that volunteered to become 'custodians' of the rhino on their land.

It was envisaged that this innovative public-private partnership would help significantly expand the rhino range, leverage additional monitoring support from registered custodians and create new revenue-generating opportunities from rhino tourism at the local level to help increase the value citizens attach to conserving them.

improving the amount and quality of monitoring

With poaching on the increase, leaders from the Communal Rhino Custodian Programme asked for help (in 2011) to raise the rhino monitoring capacity of appointed community rangers. The first stage of the programme, which began in 2012, focused on improving

overall monitoring effectiveness with state-of-the-art equipment and on-the-job skills development through joint patrols with rhino specialists. Other incentives, such as new camping kit and performance-based cash bonuses, have dramatically improved the quality and quantity of community-based rhino monitoring.

Stage two is now delivering training that integrates the Rhino Rangers' work with rhino tracking tourism activities that are in high demand. This more structured and strategic community-based rhino tourism model will increase security for the rhino by tightening tourism regulations as well as boosting the number of 'boots on the ground' in the rhino areas. It will also generate new local income that not only finances the monitoring work by the rangers but also provides additional revenue that may benefit the broader community.

What works and why?

After just two years, the programme has already resulted in a twelve-fold increase in the number of Communal Rhino Custodians actively monitoring rhinos on communal land and tripled the number of trained and equipped rhino monitoring personnel in the region. Focused rhino patrols and associated patrol days as well as confirmed, individually-identified rhino sightings by community-appointed rangers have shot up from nothing in 2011 to 88 joint patrols which produced 1,013 patrol days and 727 ranger rhino sightings in 2014. Of the eighteen rangers who joined the programme in 2012, only two have left for other jobs and were quickly replaced by their respective conservancy. While around 40 per cent of the region's rhinos live within Communal Rhino Custodian land, only 22 per cent of the confirmed poaching cases through 2014 have occurred in these areas.



Providing professional uniforms creates pride and identity (Minnesota Zoo and Save the Rhino Trust)

There was high interest in the programme and strong local support from the outset; no doubt linked to the fact that it was the Communal Rhino Custodians themselves who desired and demanded more support.

It is also helpful that the programme is building on existing relationships between rural communities and institutional initiatives.

The long term interests of the local people lies at the heart of the Rhino Rangers Incentive Programme and this has driven an inclusive approach to understanding what incentives and which elements of the programme will maximise the value local people place on conserving rhino.

Although hard to quantify, it seems that motivational ideas – such as uniforms, bi-annual team building events, training seminars, certificates for achievement in exams and bonus payments – have helped to increase the Rhino Rangers' enthusiasm and pride in their role.

The programme has also introduced Rhino Profile Cards; simple tools which help rangers to identify individual animals and find out about their life history. Not only have these cards improved identification, they have also built a stronger bond between the rangers and 'their' rhinos.

While the focus of the programme is reducing tolerance of poaching, training also includes recording and reporting criminal behaviour or suspicious activity to the appropriate officials. The point of this is to better align enforcement-based and incentive-based strategies, increasing the ability and willingness of locals to detect and report wildlife crime.

Conservancies have contributed roughly US\$25,000 per year to support their Rhino Ranger team salaries with performance based bonuses (up to around US\$150 per ranger per month) awarded by the Communal Rhino Custodian Support Group.

Although low by international standards, this level of pay is competitive at the local scale and is complimented by the suite of non-financial incentives as mentioned above. The significant measured increases in the quantity and quality of recorded sightings certainly suggests that current rewards are indeed yielding improvements in local knowledge, attitude and pro-rhino behaviour.

Challenges

- The distance between the homes of some rangers and rhino areas creates a management challenge and increased costs for these individuals (transport and time).
- Turnover in conservancy leadership has strained communication between conservancies and the programme support group in a couple of cases.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that witchcraft beliefs could be discouraging people from reporting suspicious behaviour.
- Sustaining local interest and support while ranger patrol and tourism training is completed, and full benefits are realised and appreciated.
- Longer term uncertainty about whether new revenues from rhino tourism will actually change attitudes in the wider community.
- Available resources currently limit the project to working with conservancies that already have resident rhinos.

Lessons learnt

- Taking time to fully understand the social context (key players, their perspectives and values) has helped identify the right mix of instruments and incentives that so far suggest that impact is being achieved.
- It takes time to carry out a needs assessment that takes account of how to increase local benefits from rhino.
- A transparent and inclusive decision process that works closely with appropriate local institutions is key for ensuring decisions are made that reflect the common interest
- Anticipating potential and actual barriers to effective implementation increases success. Simply providing training and equipment is not enough.
- Carefully drafted letters of agreement, developed and signed by both parties, helps clarify roles and responsibilities among the partners.

COULD THIS WORK ELSEWHERE?

Many aspects of the programme are transferable, although noteworthy factors inherent in this specific case include: high tourism appeal, low human population density, rugged terrain and strong social and institutional networks.

The key to a successful policy is that it must be structured to engage, empower and benefit the local communities living alongside rhino.