

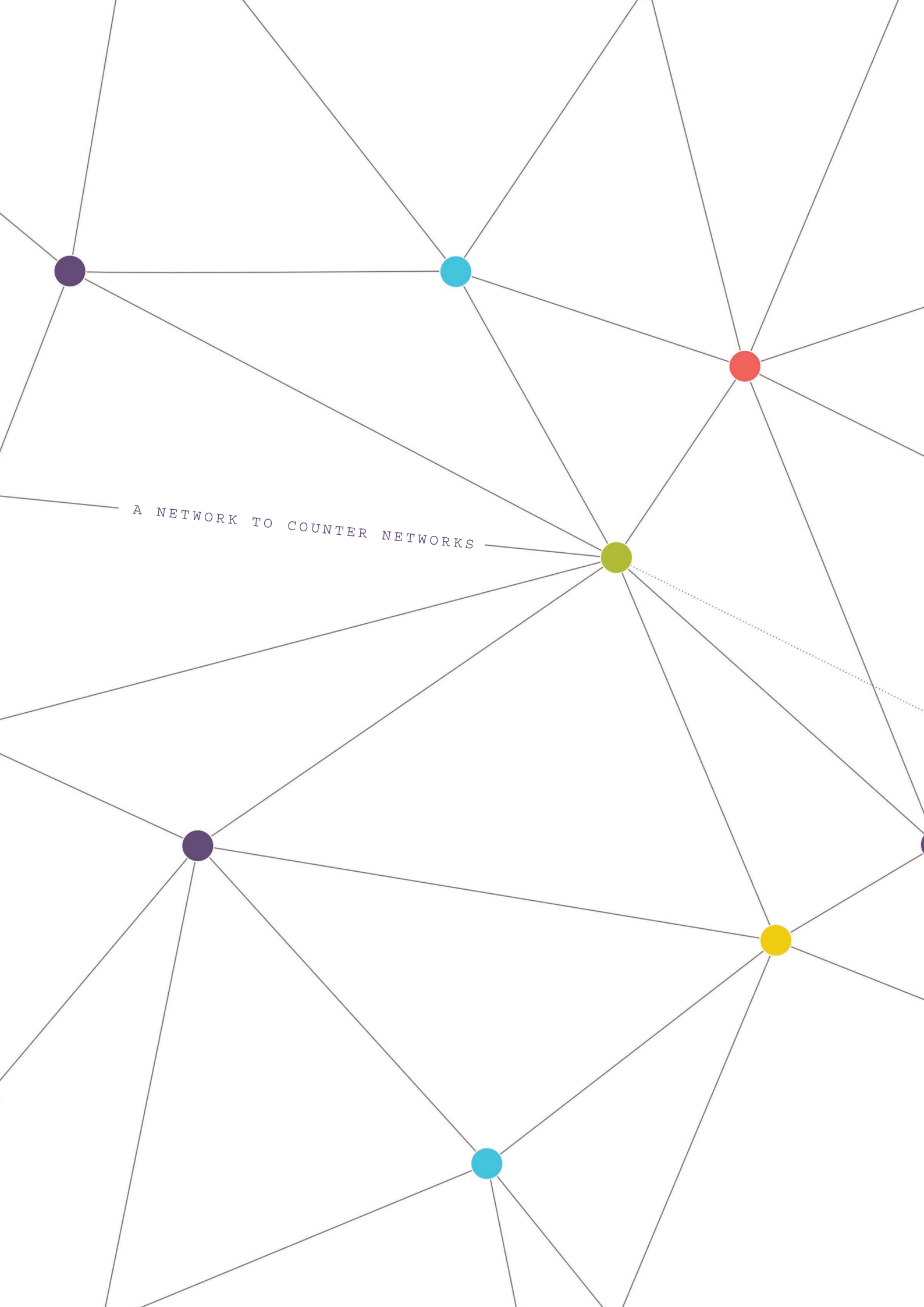
THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

ENDING WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

*Local communities
as change agents*

Annette Hübschle with
Clifford Shearing

August 2018





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Abbreviations and acronyms

CBNRM community-based natural resource management

CITES Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

CoP Conference of Parties

CSO civil-society organization

GLTP Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park

IIED International Institute for Environmental Development

IRDNC Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation

IUCN International Union for the Conservation of Nature

KNP Kruger National Park

LNP Limpopo National Park

RDC rural district council

WWF World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly World Wildlife Fund)



‘The rhino has its own doctor, its own policeman, its own helicopter, its own land and there are rangers that protect it. We don’t have these things. If the rhino goes extinct tomorrow, maybe we can finally get these things.’

– Focus group with local community members,
Greater Kruger National Park, December 2017

‘Rhinos are really important for our country’s economy, and also for our young people’s future. If all rhinos are extinct, then our youth will have nothing to take care of and protect.’

– Lazarus Hoxobeb, Headman, #Khoadi-/Hôas Conservancy, Namibia
Source: Save the Rhino Trust, Namibia

Summary

A large number of anti-poaching, conservation and management measures have been implemented to protect rhinos. None of these responses has achieved tangible results in lowering unnatural rhino deaths through illegal hunting in southern Africa. The international donor community, conservation NGOs and governments have disbursed millions of dollars to fight this illegal wildlife trade, and continue to do so. We argue in this report that these measures are bound to fail, as they do not engage with the most important change agents in conservation: local people who live in or near protected areas and game reserves. The report therefore aims to provide a better understanding of why African rural communities participate in wildlife economies, both legal and illegal, and how alternative, community-oriented strategies can help build a more resilient response to organized wildlife crime than has hitherto been achieved.

Introduction: Why should we protect rhinos?

This report explores the challenges of illegal wildlife trafficking – in particular as it affects rhinos – and the related opportunities for wildlife protection and conservation in southern Africa today. The African rhino species are used as an example because of the high-profile nature of the illegal rhino-horn trade and the existence of transnational criminal networks engaged in it.

The report’s findings and the design principles for community interventions to tackle the illegal wildlife economy are generalizable beyond the rhino, however. Many other wildlife species and plants are also illegally trafficked across the globe. The pangolin, for example, is now considered the most trafficked animal species in the world, and cycads the most threatened plant species.

So, why should we be protecting wildlife and, more specifically, the rhino? And how could alternative interventions have an impact on illegal wildlife trafficking? The illicit trafficking of wild fauna and flora has moved beyond

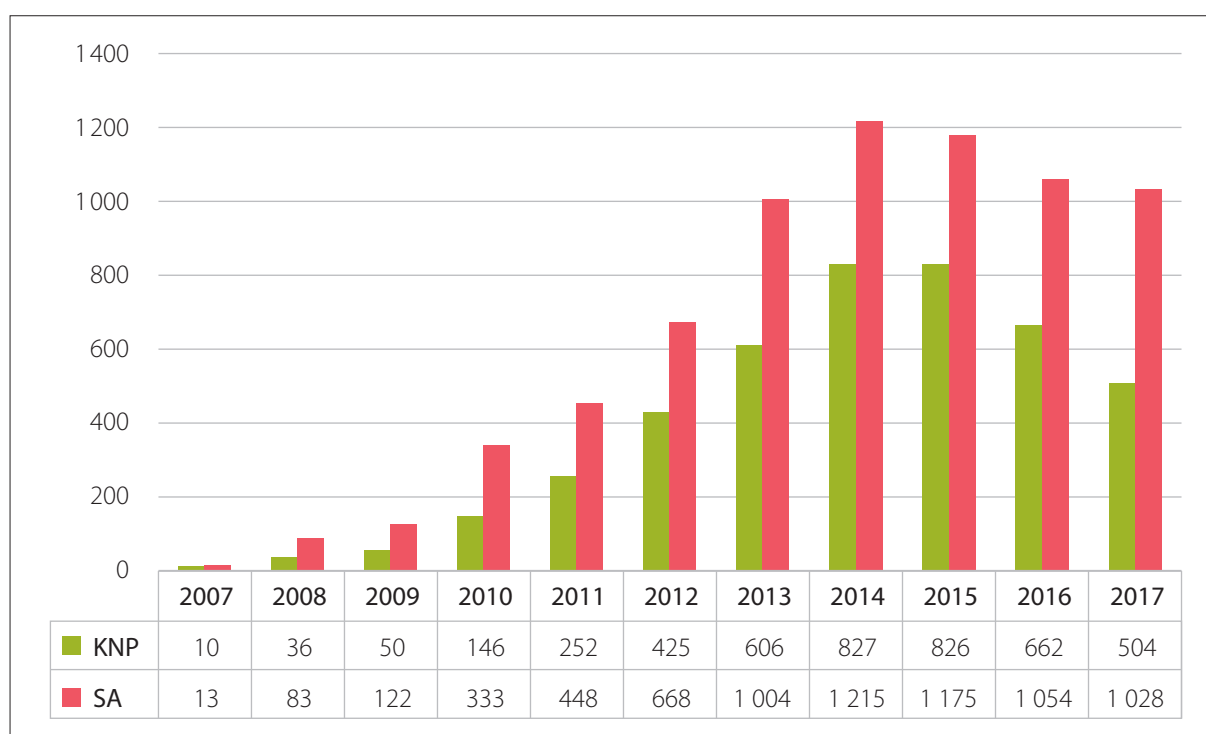


being branded a parochial environmental issue. It is now widely acknowledged that transnational organized-crime networks control and benefit from this highly lucrative trade. These networks tend to operate in a number of legal and illegal economies, depriving future generations of natural and cultural heritage, and denying them the benefits this entails.

The objectives of this report are to analyze conservation policies and practices in southern Africa, and examine the benefits of certain schemes and the failings of others. The main focus is South Africa, home to most of the world's surviving rhinos, but case studies and examples from elsewhere are used to complement and illustrate the findings and recommendations.

African rhinos have survived several poaching epidemics over the last century. The most recent upsurge began in Zimbabwe in the early 2000s; subsequently, poaching flared up in neighbouring South Africa and Namibia. More than 7 000 rhinos have been killed and dehorned in South Africa alone since 2007 (see Figure 1). Rhino poaching also spiked in Namibia from 2014 to 2016 but levels were levelling off in 2017.¹

Figure 1: Unnatural rhino deaths in South Africa and Kruger National Park (2007–2017)



Sources: Annette Hübschle, Fluid interfaces between flows of rhino horn, *Global Crime*, 18, 2017: 199; South African Department of Environmental Affairs, Minister Edna Molewa highlights progress on integrated strategic management of rhinoceros, 25 January 2018, https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/molewa_highlightsprogressonimplementationofintegrated-strategicmanagementofrhinoceros

Although the South African Minister of Environmental Affairs said that rhino poaching had 'stabilized' by 2015, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a global conservation body, warned of a 'deepening rhino poaching crisis in Africa'. The IUCN reported that 1 377 rhinos had been killed across the continent in 2015.² According to senior officials from South Africa's Kruger National Park (KNP),³ there were an estimated 2 500 attempted poaching events, involving 7 500 poachers, in the KNP in 2015. This figure went up to an estimated 2 900 and 2 600

poaching events in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Many poachers are repeat offenders. The pool of willing and able poachers is estimated at around a thousand in the Greater Kruger area.

In 2016, there was a 19.85% fall in the number of rhino killings in the KNP. The trend continued in 2017 with a further decrease of 24% in unnatural rhino deaths. However, the number of rhinos hunted illegally for their horns increased in other parts of the country, most notably in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.⁴ Moreover, 67 elephants were poached in the KNP in 2017, which suggests that rhino poachers may be diversifying their wildlife contraband offering. Some ivory traffickers may also be shifting their operations south after elephant populations have been taking a serious knock across Africa.⁵

The embattled environmental and conservation authorities in southern African countries where rhinos occur in the wild have put emergency measures in place in an attempt to save the last rhinos. But the outlook is bleak owing to the combined forces of growing demand for rhino horn in consumer countries and the presence of highly efficient transnational trafficking and illicit-trade networks. These organized-crime networks facilitate the transportation and distribution of this highly coveted good.

Rhino horn is increasingly sought after as an investment tool and as a criminal currency.

Powdered rhino horn has been used in traditional Asian medicine for more than four millennia. Carved into hilts for traditional daggers, rhino horn was also in great demand in Yemen during the 1970s and 1980s.⁶ Rhino stocks have also been depleted over the years as a result of sports hunting and clearing of farmland. But driving the current poaching crisis is the strong demand for rhino horn in consumer markets in the East. Rhino horn is increasingly sought after as an investment tool and as a criminal currency. It also serves as a status symbol and as a religious or cultural artefact among the upper strata of Asian societies, fuelling the illicit trade.

Rhino horn fetches between \$25 000 and \$85 000 per kilogram in consumer markets, depending on its provenance, type, end use and the kinds of platforms where it is sold. Although local rhino poachers receive just a fraction of the price paid by end consumers (about 15% to 20% of the end price, but often less),⁷ the returns still exceed the earning potential of many poor Africans.

The rhino is a so-called keystone species, which means it has important environmental functions.⁸ But, besides their role in supporting the environment, the African rhino species are also culturally revered among many African communities. There is also an economic imperative to save rhinos, in that they attract visitors to national parks and reserves. The international conservation community considers the rhino as a crucial component of the world's natural heritage. Hence the IUCN affords the world's five rhino species varying levels of protection based on their degree of imperilment. Similar arguments about instrumental, biodiversity and cultural values could be made about most wildlife and plant species.

Given these imperatives, why is rhino protection failing – especially as the threat of the criminal networks is well known? One reason is that wildlife conservation has always benefited economic and political elites while local and indigenous communities have remained mostly excluded from the benefits. At the heart of the rhino poaching crisis and the illicit trade, therefore, is a conflict over access to resources, benefits and land. Although the goal of conservation is the protection of the environment for future generations, conservation often comes at a huge cost to local and indigenous communities. In many instances, the only benefits accruing to communities from wildlife are not from its conservation, but from the money to be made by being part of the illicit wildlife trade. The depleted rhino stock is therefore symbolic of the failings of broader wildlife conservation strategies. For most communities living adjacent to Africa's national parks and game reserves, a dead rhino is simply more valuable than a living one.

At the heart of the rhino poaching crisis and the illicit trade, therefore, is a conflict over access to resources, benefits and land.



Some organized criminal networks have infiltrated local communities who live near protected areas. From experiences elsewhere,⁹ we know that civic responses to organized-crime networks can soften the impact of violence and violations associated with organized criminal governance. In the Sinaloa region of Mexico, for example, grassroots actors have developed resilience and capacities that render them important allies in the quest to dismantle criminal networks and disrupt trafficking supply chains. It is important to identify vulnerabilities, risks and opportunities faced by communities to enhance those conditions that allow such actors to withstand everyday and extraordinary adversities, and develop non-violent responses and coping mechanisms.

The Global Initiative launched the #Giresilience project in 2017 with the intention to amplify the unheard voices of those most affected by organized crime. The project focuses on community perspectives and innovative responses to transnational criminal networks with the objective of disrupting the narrative of a 'war on crime' and of shifting the focus to successful responses enabled by ordinary people.¹⁰

The community resilience approach is an example of a whole-of-society response to crime. The concept refers to the capacity of a community to respond to adversity while retaining its functional capacities. Shared values and cultural understandings may strengthen cohesion and trust within communities. The formation of formal and informal networks among individuals and groups may become the drivers of change and resilience in times of crisis.¹¹ An understanding of the role and impact of wildlife poaching and trafficking, and their associated organized criminal networks at grassroots level, is thus crucial to enhancing community resilience in the face of growing organized environmental crimes.

One of the objectives of this report is to understand why local people support illegal wildlife economies and get involved in wildlife crime. Some poachers originate in local communities living near parks and reserves. However, what should be more worrisome is the finding that many local communities shield poachers and wildlife criminals from law-enforcement responses. The report has uncovered deep rifts and conflicts between some actors in the conservation field – most notably between local communities and private and public conservation management authorities.

This report therefore aims to provide a better understanding of why African rural communities participate in illegal wildlife economies and how alternative, community-oriented strategies can encourage these communities to help support anti-poaching interventions. It explains why and how communities should be included in conservation programmes and why failure to do so makes conservation a utopian project with little prospect of success. A lot more has to happen to allow local communities to reap the benefits of active and engaged citizenship while helping combat the illegal wildlife economy.

Community-driven crime-prevention strategies are not unique to transnational organized crime, but have found broad application in the field of general crime prevention. The report acknowledges that wildlife trafficking networks operate at the transnational level. Conventional approaches suggest that law-enforcement measures should target both the supply and demand side of the market – and whatever happens along the supply chain in between. New perspectives in the literature on plural policing, however, suggest that illicit networks and flows could be disrupted through nodal forms of policing.¹² Likewise, although transnational responses are of crucial importance, the argument made here is that communities should be considered fulcrum institutions when it comes to the prevention of wildlife crime and disruption of trafficking networks. The supply chain and trafficking networks are rendered useless when communities pull out and no longer support illegal wildlife economies. The report ends with design principles for community-based interventions that may render rural communities resilient, help them contribute to combating transnational criminal networks and allow them to benefit from and live in harmony with ecosystems.



Research methods

The report is based on insights gained from a study undertaken by the researcher during her doctorate in 2013 and 2014,¹³ and subsequent visits to the field in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The research focused on local communities and protected areas in Namibia, Mozambique and South Africa. The report also benefited from field visits to Kenya, Tanzania and Swaziland. The sample includes interviews, group discussions and focus groups with people living in or near protected areas, convicted poachers and traffickers, conservation and government officials, law enforcers and representatives from conservation- and development-oriented NGOs. Court files, policy documents and minutes of parliamentary debates and portfolio-committee meetings complemented the findings.

The author participated in and/or contributed to several high-level policy and law-enforcement initiatives,¹⁴ which brought home the conundrum practitioners face in reconciling short-termism with the need for socio-economic upliftment of communities, while also paying attention to conservation-oriented endeavours. The author has tried to make sure that the voices of marginalized community members in southern Africa have been heard, and their sentiments, concerns and wishes captured.

The research process was guided by strict institutional research ethics.¹⁵ The anonymity of the participants is protected owing to the sensitivity of the research topic. All interview data was therefore anonymised, except in cases where direct permission for being quoted in the report was obtained from the interviewee.

Communities: The missing link

Many protective measures have been implemented to save wildlife in Africa. These include militarized anti-poaching responses, regulatory changes and tougher enforcement measures in supply, transit and consumer states. These responses, however, have seen limited success in curbing rhino poaching and the illegal transnational trade in other forms of wildlife.

As mentioned, the international donor community, NGOs and governments have disbursed huge sums of money in the fight against the illegal wildlife trade. According to a report by the Global Environmental Facility, 24 international donors committed more than \$1.3 billion to fight the illicit wildlife trade in Africa and Asia between January 2010 and June 2016.¹⁶ And there have been numerous other sources of funding, such as lotteries, cash donated by individuals and companies to conservation NGOs, online campaigns and crowd-funding initiatives.

The bulk of this cash ends up funding law-enforcement and anti-poaching operations. It is mostly used to equip and train rangers and security personnel, and to pay for new equipment and technologies.¹⁷ In some cases, conservation authorities have enrolled military officials, private investigators, private military contractors and security firms.

Some critics have questioned the efficacy of this approach and are demanding accountability in light of the enormous cost of what has become a military-industrial complex in support of conservation efforts.¹⁸ Others say that conservation authorities and their partners are 'waging a war' on poaching, with long-term consequences for conservation management and community relations.¹⁹ Scholars argue that this so-called 'green militarization' has led to an arms race between poachers and rangers,²⁰ and that violence is being deployed in the name of nature conservation.²¹

Paramilitary-type anti-poaching approaches are misguided for a broader strategic reason: they fail to take advantage of a significant change agent in conservation: the local communities themselves.



For the affected rural communities, the securitization of anti-poaching measures has led to anger at and resistance towards the conservation authorities and private-security operatives. After all, some of the men who have become poachers return in body bags or end up in correctional centres.

But paramilitary-type anti-poaching approaches are misguided for a broader strategic reason: they fail to take advantage of a significant change agent in conservation: the local communities themselves. The question here is, why have communities not been recognized as the most crucial actors in wildlife conservation? Why are conservationists calling for a militarized response – more boots on the ground, helicopter gunships and new technologies – when communities that dwell near wildlife reserves hold the key to conservation and, by association, to combating the criminal wildlife economy?

The answer can partly be found in history, which shows that wildlife conservation efforts have tended not to be pro-community, pro-poor or pro-women.

Defining communities

The concept of community has a chequered history in the context of colonial Africa and apartheid South Africa, where white people were granted individual agency while black people were depicted as members of collective communities. The label pigeonholed complex African societies into communal containers. For the purposes of this report, it is acknowledged that the concept of community is a controversial construct rooted in colonial race ideologies. The question of land was central to the colonial project: communities were tied to specific locations and local customary authorities.²² Due to the violent history and lasting legacy of forceful evictions and dispossession, many communities are made up of individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds, differing social strata and political affiliations, as well as different geographies.

In contemporary, democratic South Africa, the government, legislators and policymakers – as well as the development community – have embraced the concept of community and community participation.²³ The South African Constitution acknowledges communities as important constituencies in governance matters because this is seen to legitimize laws and policies,²⁴ including community participation in responses to crime and conservation policies. We define 'local community' as a group of people who are tied to a specific location at a specific point in time.²⁵

Lessons from history: From dispossession to participation?

During Africa's colonial past, indigenous and local communities lost land and access to grazing and cultural sites, as well as hunting rights, to make space for the conservation of wild animals, safari parks and private game reserves.²⁶ In the early 20th century, reserves were designed to provide a sanctuary in which certain species of wildlife could prosper, 'free from all human interference'.²⁷ The benefits have been inequitable, privileging economic and political elites. Although the state, hunters, farmers, tourist operators and investors have benefited from the conservation economy, local communities have gained very little, other than in the form of menial employment and occasional handouts. Conservation and wildlife management became tools for economic and social exclusion.

In this context, many communities were evicted from protected areas, which became an exclusive domain for affluent tourists. Some local communities were relocated to nearby villages and townships. Protected areas that were established by forcefully evicting local groups remain intact today. Privately owned and controlled buffer zones have been created between communities and conservation areas to protect wildlife.²⁸ Indigenous and local African property and hunting rights, and ancestral burial grounds were not considered when these reserves and



parks were established. A case in point is that more than half of the area of the KNP is subject to land claims.²⁹ According to Kruger Park officials, 15 valid land claims have been received, while one still needs to be validated.³⁰ No land will be restored to local communities (compare with the case study that follows on the Makuleke land claim) inside the Kruger Park. Instead, claimants are receiving financial compensation.³¹

In South Africa, from the 1930s the dominant policy approach to national parks and reserves was to preserve the wilderness without human habitation. Hence national parks came to represent another mechanism of apartheid rule. Dealing with the nearly 400-year-old legacy of colonial land dispossession is an ongoing government project in South Africa, where the land question is closely linked to persistent poverty and structural inequality. The redistribution of land taken from indigenous and local communities in the colonial and apartheid eras has either not been tackled or only partially so.

Forced removals: The case of the Makuleke

The last forced removal from the KNP involved the Makuleke people, who had been living in the northern Pafuri section of the park. Their communal land was incorporated into the park in 1969³² and became subject to a successful land claim in post-apartheid South Africa. The 1998 settlement returned the land to the community while maintaining its conservation status for 50 years. The title deed does not grant mining or prospecting rights, or the use of the land for residential or agricultural purposes. However, the land can be used for conservation and 'associated commercial purposes'.³³ Although this case of redistribution is heralded as a success story, the conflicting interests of South African National Parks (the parks authority) in limiting resource use and the Makuleke's economic aspirations have led to tensions and a conflictual relationship between the two.³⁴

Historically, so-called fortress conservation – a notion whereby wildlife conservation is deemed possible only when wildlife and communities are kept apart – has built insurmountable barriers between the conservation authorities and the local communities. And the practice of keeping communities away from protected areas continues today in the name of conservation in some places.

Mavodze: A village in the Limpopo National Park, Mozambique



Photo: A Hübschle

Living on the edge: Rural settlement, Limpopo province, South Africa



Photo: A Hübschle

The role played by local people in the protection and management of natural resources is recognized in the laws and policies of many southern African countries. However, good intentions have often been jettisoned in the pursuit of short-term outcomes that are meant to bring down poaching statistics. Unfortunately, the current rhino-poaching crisis has put further distance between people and parks in South Africa. User rights that had been devolved to communities after the end of apartheid, such as access to ancestral and cultural sites,³⁵ and to water, medicinal plants and grazing, have diminished.³⁶ The justification provided by park authorities for the reversal of some community rights and access is that rangers and other anti-poaching personnel are unable to differentiate between people who have legitimate business in protected areas and those in pursuit of animal contraband.³⁷ The old conservation ethos that local people and wildlife should be kept apart persists.

During the 1960s, the development of wildlife ranching contributed to the commodification and privatization of wildlife in general, and the rhino in particular. In fact, the rhino plays an important role in the privatization drive of wildlife in South Africa, something from which black South Africans were excluded during apartheid. Given the slow pace of economic transformation, ownership patterns have changed little: today, black communities look after just 0.5% of black rhinos through a World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-sponsored custodianship programme.³⁸

Following South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, the National Assembly started working towards the transformation of exclusionary institutional arrangements and policy frameworks of the apartheid administration. Environmental rights, sustainable development and use of natural resources became enshrined in the new South African Constitution. Although apartheid institutions have largely been dismantled since then, conservation practices have not kept pace with the transformation agenda of the postcolonial state. The main objective of post-apartheid environmental legislation was to develop a human-centred approach to conservation. However, so-called 'command and control' methods³⁹ are still the primary mechanism for enforcing compliance with wildlife laws.⁴⁰ Although South African laws make extensive provision for the need to include communities, implementation of community conservation programming has been slow.⁴¹

The command-and-control approach also provides little incentive for local communities to protect the environment. Often the only pathway out of poverty available to people in rural areas is through participation in illegal wildlife economies.

CITES and rural communities: A missed opportunity

In its early days, the conservation ideology underpinning the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)⁴² excluded the possibility that wildlife trade could benefit species, ecosystems or people.⁴³ It was assumed that trade regulation constituted the most effective way of achieving conservationist goals.⁴⁴ However, although illegal trade might pose a threat to the survival of species, trade regulations may be inappropriate in dealing with threats such as human encroachment, climate change or organized crime. The CITES species listings not only affect the wild fauna and flora that the convention seeks to protect, but also impinge upon the communities that live close to them because rural dwellers often eke out a living from harvesting or trading in wild animals or plants. Therefore, from one day to the next, a former harvester may be labelled a criminal. As a consequence, there were calls that CITES should consider the plight of rural people when passing measures that affect their livelihoods.⁴⁵

In 1992, CITES recognized that most of the species it sought to protect were in the Global South. It also acknowledged that the sustainable use of wild fauna and flora, either consumptive or non-consumptive, provided a viable economic option for local and indigenous people.⁴⁶ It was accepted that unless conservation programmes took into account the needs of local communities and provided incentives for sustainable use of wild fauna and flora, conversion to alternative forms of land use might occur.⁴⁷

To this day, the notion of sustainable use is a highly contentious issue at the CITES Conferences of Parties (CoPs). There is a significant lobby within the environmental movement (predominantly from the Global North) that is vehemently opposed to any form of trade in animal species, particularly when it is premised on the killing of these animals.⁴⁸ This lobby holds considerable sway at CITES, directly and indirectly informing decisions that lead to restrictions on trade in wildlife. Some countries in the Global South object to the strong influence of this animal-rights lobby.

Despite this apparent conflict, CITES acknowledged the developmental concerns of the custodians of most of the remaining biodiversity in the Global South in its strategic plan of 2000, which confirmed 'the recognition by the parties that sustainable trade in wild fauna and flora can make a major contribution to securing the broader and not incompatible objectives of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation'.⁴⁹

This endorsement of sustainable development cleared the way for countries of the Global South to insist that developmental concerns should be considered in future formulations of wildlife policies. At CoP 16, CITES approved a new framework for future policy development. Most significantly, this framework claims to consider 'cultural, social and economic factors at play in producer and consumer countries'.⁵⁰

Whether this chosen path will create more division among parties at CITES or help the international body regain credibility and legitimacy is a matter for future analysis. What is known, however, is that data collected for this project revealed negative feelings towards CITES, its listing decisions and the perceived influence that Western conservation NGOs and the animal-rights movements exert on the convention's policy decisions, while African environmental-justice movements and local communities had little or no representation at CoPs. Although such community representatives are vocal during CITES events, their voices are often drowned out by the wheeling and dealing that goes on behind the scenes over controversial listing decisions or bans.

Representatives from the Southern African Development Community region interviewed for a project on organized-crime trends in southern Africa portrayed CITES as an institution that was developed and sponsored



by countries of the Global North.⁵¹ It is therefore seen to reflect Western conservation philosophies and animal-rights ethics, while paying 'little concern to the plight of African rural people and their developmental concerns'. The question arose as to why Africans should preserve Western-style safari parks filled with wild animals for the enjoyment of affluent tourists while their own families were struggling to make ends meet. Moreover, it was noted that European countries had failed dismally in conserving their own 'wilderness' areas and endangered species. The northern lobby is seen as able to influence CITES listing decisions that are detrimental to African rural communities. Compensation is seldom paid for listings that affect rural livelihoods.

Although Dr John Scanlon, the CITES secretary general, branded the 2016 CoP 17 as a 'game changer for the world's most vulnerable wild animals and plants',⁵² there are key constituencies that do not share the sentiment. Among these are states parties and local communities from the Global South, who feel that their voices are not heard when crucial listing decisions are made. Yet they are the ones who have to live with the consequences of CITES resolutions and decisions.

The elephant in the conference room was why parties and conservation NGOs far removed from the realities of living with wild animals should have so much say in CITES listing decisions. For example, in reference to a proposal to 'uplist' all elephant populations to Appendix 1 (thus banning international trade in ivory and trophy hunting), a community representative associated with the CAMPFIRE programme in Zimbabwe (of which more later in this report) said: 'Give value back to those communities that bear the brunt of living with wildlife. Remove the proposed annotation and allow vulnerable people to benefit from utilizing the resources. It's costing us a lot of money and resources to allow elephant populations to grow.'⁵³

A coalition of rural communities backed by southern and East African countries⁵⁴ put forward a proposal to establish a Special Committee on Rural Communities at CoP 17. Many southern African governments enrol community representatives in their official delegations at CoPs. However, community interests do not always align with those of the state representatives.⁵⁵ Community representatives were pitching for their own dedicated committee, which would consider and undertake due diligence of listing proposals. The original proposal stated:

Community-based initiatives must be given the support they need to deliver incomes to local people through legal wildlife utilisation, incomes that are crucial in alleviating poverty. This support shall include the right for indigenous peoples and local communities to be consulted as equal partners in wildlife conservation.⁵⁶

The proposal received limited support. CITES parties agreed that rural communities were important stakeholders and undertook by way of a resolution to include them in listing processes in the future.⁵⁷ However, the CITES secretariat did not support the proposed establishment of the new committee, although it set up a working group to discuss how to effectively involve rural communities in future CITES processes at the 69th meeting of the Standing Committee in November 2017.⁵⁸ The working group held its first meeting in Nairobi in February 2018.⁵⁹ The secretariat's response suggests that a lengthy bureaucratic process lies ahead with an uncertain outcome.

CITES missed a great opportunity that could have indicated to rural communities that concerns over the conservation of endangered animals and plants do not trump the livelihoods and concerns of those who live with them on a daily basis. The significance and agency of rural communities in conservation outcomes have not been fully acknowledged and mainstreamed into CITES approaches and processes. Rural communities ought to be afforded more support and influence in CITES decisions. The voices of local communities should be heard not only at plenary, but also at committee level. Beyond supporting calls for inclusive decision making, the international community and individual states should sponsor no-strings-attached support to assist institutional development and processes at community level.



Why do local people support illegal wildlife economies? Insights from the fieldwork⁶⁰

The real challenge when it comes to responding to the illegal wildlife economy is not how to bring poachers to book but how to garner inclusive community support for wildlife conservation. As long as local communities remain on the margins of protected areas and are excluded from the economic benefits of conservation, one should not be surprised when they fail to support the conservation drive, or even take to poaching.

From the fieldwork, factors such as economic marginalization in the form of displacement and dispossession, disempowerment, conflict with the authorities and the quest for economic freedom were cited as drivers for those who choose to take part in the illicit wildlife economy.

The rhino has a bounty on its horn that far exceeds the average annual income of those living in rural communities along the boundaries of the KNP. However, as mentioned, participation in illegal wildlife economies needs to be understood in the context of historical marginalization of rural communities and their continued sense of exclusion. Poachers and other community members who participated in this study cited the loss of their land, and hunting and land-use rights as triggers for dissent and as factors that drove them to poaching. An old woman who had been recently relocated from the Limpopo National Park (LNP) said:

As long as local communities remain on the margins of protected areas and are excluded from the economic benefits of conservation, one should not be surprised when they fail to support the conservation drive, or even take to poaching.

There's no peace here, no hope. They can give you a house and the next day, they can remove it from you, and give it to someone else. We don't have a school here, no fields to grow our own food, and the youths are struggling to get jobs in this village. ... Some end up stealing because of the lack of jobs, others do rhino poaching. Some come back, some die and some get arrested.

Given South Africa's conflictual past in terms of protected areas, conservation management and the land issue (discussed in the previous section), the South African National Parks authority instituted so-called community park forums, which are intended to improve interactions between the parks authority, neighbouring communities and other stakeholders living adjacent to national parks.⁶¹ These have had only a limited impact, however.

Although these forums departed from the apartheid era's focus on forging relationships with traditional leaders, women and youths remain inadequately represented.⁶² Furthermore, a 1% community levy was introduced in 2011 on all tourism reservations to help uplift communities living near parks. The levy was established to support the provision of infrastructure and resources for education, youth development, healthcare and other areas deemed appropriate by community members. However, with more than 2.3 million people living near the KNP alone by the end of 2016,⁶³ it is clear that the tourism levy and other initiatives, such as the South African National Parks corporate social investment programme,⁶⁴ have limited impact, as the funds have to be spread very thinly or do not reach those most in need.

The KNP became part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) in 2001. The GLTP joins Kruger with Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe and the LNP in Mozambique. Along the western boundary of the KNP, and covering an area close to 2 000 square kilometres, lies a string of private game reserves.⁶⁵ Another group of private reserves,



forming a so-called 'buffer zone', are located along the eastern boundary of the park and south of the LNP in Mozambique. South African corporate entities, individuals and shareholding companies lease these concessions from the Mozambican government.⁶⁶ The changed conservation status of the LNP from multi-use to total protection contributed to economic hardships and reduced levels of food security for some village communities living inside or on the edge of the park. Without viable economic alternatives available,⁶⁷ this area is home to an ever-growing pool of alienated rural dwellers who are either willing to risk their lives to hunt wildlife, especially rhinos and elephants, or who are not favourably inclined towards the park authority.

At the time of the initial fieldwork for this study in 2013 and 2014, 70% of rhino poachers were believed to enter the KNP from Mozambique. This had changed at the time of writing the report in 2017, by which time most rhino poachers operated along the western boundary in South Africa. Park officials assume that this geographic displacement is a response to increased law-enforcement activities close to the Mozambican border.⁶⁸ Many poachers are believed to come from South African communities living near the park or within it, some posing as tourists or park personnel. A rhino-poaching kingpin explained that the villages inside the park were not only used for launching poaching excursions into the park, but that they had also become effective recruiting grounds for poaching expeditions.

Because of diminished food security,⁶⁹ conflict between humans and wildlife (for example, elephants were reintroduced in some areas and big cats have attacked livestock) and social fragmentation in villages, many residents were seeking relocation to improve their livelihood after the transfrontier conservation area was declared. However, political and economic processes, as well as financial austerity, are delaying the relocation of some of the villages.⁷⁰



Photo: A Hübschle

For example, Mozambican government authorities have repurposed land initially set aside for relocation and given it to a private investor for a sugarcane and ethanol plantation.⁷¹ The resettlement of Mozambican communities forms part of South Africa's national strategy to reduce rhino poaching and should have been completed by the end of 2017.⁷² For example, villagers in Massingir Velho (a border town in Mozambique's LNP) were moved 75 kilometres away as an anti-rhino poaching measure in early 2016. Five communities are still awaiting resettlement and many of those who have been resettled want to return to the park.⁷³

Massingir: Buildings in Massingir, Mozambique, built from rhino horn profits

Broadly, displacement and dispossession have emerged as drivers of illegal wildlife hunting, pushing rural dwellers to become involved in the illegal wildlife trade, and likewise motivating communities to shield perpetrators from law-enforcement agents. As a rhino horn trafficker and his personal assistant observed:

Because the people are still staying in the park, they are angry. It increases rhino poaching. The people have agreed to be moved. There is just no money and land to relocate them. ... Sometimes when they [park rangers] find a person walking in the park, then they say they are visiting their relatives, even if they are there for illegal hunting. ... If they [the authorities] remove them, it will reduce the poaching but it will not stop it.⁷⁴

Map 1: The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park and the Greater Lebombo Conservancy



Akashinga: Empowering marginalized rural women



Photo: Adrian Steirn for Alliance Earth

Conversely, private concession holders located along the Mozambican border with the KNP are seeing their land tenure rights protected, as their concessions have been declared as buffer zones in the name of protecting rhinos.⁷⁵ For example, the Greater Lebombo Conservancy is described as ‘the first shield of defence against rhino poaching’, providing ecotourism development opportunities for private investors and creating a deterrent to poaching through tourism.⁷⁶

Mozambican state officials, together with private concession holders, have been seeking to incorporate the patchwork of private concessions and state and communal lands into an integrated conservancy/buffer zone.⁷⁷ As a result of these new conservancies, local communities have to move, restricting their access to resources. An intelligence operative said: ‘You might be moving potential poachers further away from the park, but where there is a will, there is a way. You have basically just added another 40 km for them to walk, and they will, and you have made some villagers very angry.’⁷⁸

In this context, often the only pathway out of poverty available to people living near parks is poaching. There may also be indirect benefits accruing from the provision of services to poachers. And then there is the trickle-down effect, whereby profits made from poaching may benefit to some degree the community to which the poacher or wildlife crime organizer belongs. It should therefore not come as a surprise that some poachers originate from communities living near protected areas and private reserves. Some locals provide support services to poachers, such as accommodation, food and drink, intelligence, traditional medicine, and tracking and transport. In return, rhino poachers and traffickers provide the communities with material assistance and money where the state and conservation authorities have failed to assist.



Interviews conducted among affected communities show that they feel that conservationists and the state value the lives of wild animals more than those of rural black people. As a rhino-horn trafficker said:

This [rhino problem] is because of conservation. They say that we need those things [rhinos]. Some of the white people here treat them like their friends. They value the rhino more than black human beings. And now they see it as a business – if you have two rhinos, you are rich.

Picking up on this theme, Julius Malema, leader of South African political party the Economic Freedom Fighters, said:

... there is a big campaign and a huge investment in saving the rhino. People have statues of them everywhere, they even organize marathons where they 'run to save the rhino'. This tells you, right here in South Africa, a country with a majority of blacks, that black people are worth less than rhinos.⁷⁹

The notion that parks and the interests of foreign tourists trump those of rural communities was a recurring theme in interviews and focus groups in South Africa and Mozambique for this report. The importance attributed to the rhino has taken on a symbolic meaning to some communities, whose concerns over land restitution, land-use rights and livelihood strategies appear to be lower on the state's agenda than the need to protect a wild animal.⁸⁰

'We are using rhino horn to free ourselves'

Some community members feel strongly about the lack of bottom-up negotiation when it comes to resolving conflicts around land rights, resettlement, who benefits from resources and socio-economic development initiatives.

Conflicts have arisen over inequitable income distribution of benefits.⁸¹ Local political elites, including traditional leaders, chiefs and village headmen, often act as intermediaries between communities and the authorities in rural southern Africa, negotiating political, economic, social and land restitution deals.⁸² Community members remarked: 'If you are on the wrong side of the chief, then you will see no money or benefits.'⁸³

Women are seldom among the beneficiaries here. Their interests, which tend to include those of their children, take a back seat when negotiations take place. Although gender mainstreaming has become a development aid prerogative, it seldom translates into concrete changes for the most marginalized group of people: rural women.

It is evident, according to participants, that feelings of anger, disempowerment and marginalization are also factors that lead to rhino poaching. As one South African poacher remarked:

You see, in a rural area, they [political and traditional leaders] used to call each and every-one that stayed there, and they talked with us to decide about things that concerned us. Now things are different. They don't ask us any more. They do things on their own. It is them that behave like they are crooks. That's why we end up killing the rhinos.⁸⁴



When asked about what motivated them to become poachers, most of the interviewed poachers cited feelings of shame at not being able to provide for their families (or at having to do so through illegal means), of emasculation, stress, disempowerment and anger.

It is against this backdrop that rhino kingpins⁸⁵ and poachers have emerged as self-styled freedom fighters, who use rhino poaching for social and economic upward mobility. Or, in the words of a Mozambique-based kingpin, 'We are using rhino horn to free ourselves.'⁸⁶

Some rhino poachers claim they are fulfilling functions akin to social welfare, community development and political leadership. Like latter-day Robin Hoods, they see rhino horn as instrumental in achieving these altruistic goals in an environment where the state is failing to do so. Indeed, representatives of the state and traditional leaders fulfil ceremonial duties that are often heavily subsidized by resident kingpins and poachers.

Although many rhino kingpins have a criminal past linked to a range of illegal markets and organized crime (some used to work as police officers or in conservation), participants portrayed their criminal careers in rhino poaching as legitimate livelihoods. Two Mozambican kingpins, for example, have constructed their identity around the notion of being 'economic freedom fighters';⁸⁷ who struggle for the economic and environmental emancipation of their communities. Others have labelled themselves as businessmen, developers, community workers or retired hunters.⁸⁸ These strategies of legitimizing their activities also include appropriating job labels from the wildlife industry. Rhino poachers regard themselves as 'professional hunters' or simply 'hunters'. The position of a hunter comes with status and prestige in village communities, where a young boy's first hunt is a rite of passage.⁸⁹

There is also the perception among some park officials that villagers benefit in equal measures from rhino poaching, with wealth being redistributed among the needy through a form of social banditry carried out by the poachers.

Yet not all are motivated by collective upliftment. One poacher in his mid-20s argued that, because he bore the risk alone during his poaching sorties in the KNP, he was not prepared to share his profits with the community. 'It benefits me, I don't give to the community,' he said.

The role, functions and identities of kingpins and poachers are clearly complex, then, and contingent on the local context. Although many poachers originate from local communities, others join hunting crews from communities elsewhere, and even foreign countries. Therefore, the level of social embeddedness of kingpins and poachers varies among the communities. And not all poachers are paid equally well.

A generation gap can also be detected when it comes to motives for poaching. Whereas older poachers (i.e. those who were 30 and over) were concerned about family and community well-being, younger poachers displayed more individualistic traits, seeking self-realization and accumulation. A teenage poacher cited the adage of 'get rich young or die trying' as the motif and inspiration of his generation of poachers.

Perceptions vary among communities as to whether their fortunes and livelihoods have improved from poaching. Many local communities appear to benefit; others less so, or only indirectly. Direct handouts often appear to be limited to some of the more generous kingpins throwing a village party by slaughtering a few cows and providing traditional beer after returning from a successful poaching expedition to the KNP. Others, however, have constructed small roads, water wells, spaza shops⁹⁰ and shebeens,⁹¹ and occasionally some cattle are donated to provide meat to community members. Compared to the meagre livelihoods of village communities, kingpins and poachers have purchasing power, allowing them to buy greater volumes of goods and services, which indirectly benefits community members.



The influx of hard cash into some communities has also had negative consequences, including increased alcohol consumption, drug use and prostitution. In short, some communities may benefit from the trickle-down effect but it is not always the case, as the story of a grandmother illustrates:

A grandmother's sorrows

While walking through a Mozambican village close to the KNP, I came upon an elderly woman. She was looking after a group of toddlers and children outside a ramshackle dwelling. She explained how the village and its people had changed since 'the young boys discovered rhino horn'. She said that most of the men were unemployed or had left the village for the big city before rhino poaching 'became a thing'. Women used to be the breadwinners, looking after the families through farming and small business enterprises.

Rhino poaching had changed this. The 'young boys' were now in charge – but they were not sharing their poaching proceeds with the community, she said. Five of the kids were the old woman's grandchildren. Her daughter had left the father of these children for one of the 'young boys'. The grandmother was disgruntled about the state of affairs. Although parenting the grandchildren full-time, she had not been receiving financial or material support from either of the parents. One of the grandchildren had to be hospitalized after being severely burnt but the family could not get hold of the mother because 'when the boys come back from Skukuza,⁹² then there is money, booze and celebration'.

It is incorrect to assume, however, that entire communities are complicit in or benefit from poaching. In fact, some community members reported that they feared 'the outsiders', while others were threatened to collaborate or told to turn a blind eye. Focus groups revealed that mothers and wives in particular were deeply concerned about the poaching phenomenon, fearing for their children's or husbands' lives, and the potential loss of a breadwinner should they get killed or arrested. Far from being supportive of poaching, the women who chose to participate in the research said that it had affected the social fabric of village life, mostly to the detriment of women and children.

There was an awareness of the ceiling to the rhino horn fortunes: kingpins acknowledged the existential threat to rhinos through poaching and that they would have to seek new sources of income, or return to their old ones once the rhinos were gone. By 2017, the returns from rhino poaching had started to crumble on the Mozambican side where community members stated that poachers had squandered the rhino profits. Had they invested the money wisely, then there could have been a 'high level of development', they said.⁹³

Focus groups with community representatives showed that the deaths, disappearances and arrests of fathers, husbands, sons and brothers had led to outright antagonism among community members towards the park management, especially Kruger officials. The increasing militarization of responses to rhino poaching is pitting communities against park authorities, rangers and rhinos. According to Major General Johan Jooste (retired head of special projects at South African National Parks), the duties of a ranger nowadays are 90% law enforcement (i.e. anti-poaching operations) and 10% conservation-orientated.⁹⁴

It perhaps should not be surprising that some local people are motivated by the illegal wildlife economy. For some, the high profits associated with rhino poaching appear to offer immediate relief. It is important to note that displacement, land dispossession (whether historical or current) and food insecurity are fuelling the fire by not only providing pathways to poaching but also turning communities against conservation authorities, protected areas and the wild animals within them. The effects of structural violence and deprivation are visible in many village communities and peri-urban neighbourhoods, where people live not only on the edge of parks, but also on the edge of society.



The myth of criminalized communities prevents such communities from being included in solutions to the poaching crisis. Understanding leverage points that would enrol more community members in legal rather than illegal economies may well convince local people to become guardians of wildlife and protected areas. The current approach is closing pathways to community involvement in the protection of wildlife.

Community-based initiatives in the legal wildlife economy: Case studies from Africa and Asia

The notion of a wild Africa, of an endless empty land, underpinned so-called fortress conservation, which, as mentioned, was the dominant conservation paradigm of the colonial period. It was a model based on an outdated assumption that local communities and protected areas are best kept apart.

In Africa's post-independence period, parks continued to be treated as political and economic assets for the select few, while adjacent rural communities remained excluded from the benefits.⁹⁵ Later, the 1980s and 1990s saw the ascendancy of the sustainable-use paradigm, in the form of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM).⁹⁶

At the heart of the CBNRM model is a shift in perspective. Whereas, formerly, wildlife had been perceived as vermin or a liability affecting people's crops and livestock, the CBNRM approach reframed wildlife as a potential economic asset. Targeted at rural African dwellers, CBNRM became fashionable among international donors because of the putative benefits of combining ecological sensitivity with rural poverty alleviation. Conservation organizations and NGOs developed programmes that promoted local community participation in conservation and an ethos that communities should be the beneficiaries of such programmes.

Community participation in conservation initiatives has taken a whole range of forms, from comprehensive community-centred approaches, where management responsibilities and property rights are devolved to communities, to mere tokenist interventions conducted solely to tick boxes in donor reports. Typical of many well-intentioned development initiatives, donor funds were not only flowing towards local communities but also supported administrative infrastructures and consultancy fees of technical experts from abroad.

There are numerous CBNRM programmes in place worldwide, although they differ in important aspects. The following case studies provide insight into how a selection of community-oriented models operate, as well as their underlying assumptions and shortcomings. These cases aim to provide an assessment of what appears to have worked and of lessons learnt where approaches have been less successful.

The first two programmes are both in southern Africa – the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE)⁹⁷ in Zimbabwe and community conservancies in Namibia. While the former provided the blueprint for similar programmes across southern Africa, the latter has been lauded as one of the most successful models of community-based conservation.

Case study 1: CAMPFIRE

The CAMPFIRE programme was conceived shortly after Zimbabwe attained independence. Black people had lost land and property rights during the colonial regime. In the post-independence era, land reform emerged as the country's major political and economic issue.



Within this context, the overarching goal of CAMPFIRE was to share the benefits generated by the wildlife economy with local communities, in the process ensuring that wildlife conservation remained a viable income-generating option for communities. It was envisaged that benefit-sharing would be achieved by devolving property rights and management to rural district councils (RDCs) (and not the communities themselves). Foreign donor agencies provided start-up capital for basic infrastructure, project development and administration (and continued to do so until the country's economic disintegration in the early 2000s). The RDCs were tasked with implementing the post-colonial government's policy of sustainable use of natural resources.

CAMPFIRE has had successes and challenges. The benefits derive from sustainable wildlife use, which includes safari hunting, game cropping, photographic safari drives and other ecotourism ventures. But, although communities receive a share of these revenues, they have no equity in wildlife utilization.⁹⁸ International and local tourism companies, hunting operators and ancillary services are the main beneficiaries. Benefits are supposed to trickle down to communities but, in reality, foreign and local elites gain the most from the programme.

CAMPFIRE generated more than US\$20 million of transfers to the participating communities between 1989 and 2006, with revenue from safari hunting and ecotourism being the main income streams. The amount disbursed to communities was 52% of the total income earned.⁹⁹ Sports hunters and eco-tourists would buy game and trophy hunts; the RDCs, in turn, would then pay out dividends to communities based on an agreed formula. However, there have been underpayments and delays in processing payments.¹⁰⁰

Communities in CAMPFIRE areas were not granted full authority to own wildlife or determine wildlife production, and therefore have only limited control over the revenue that is generated. They also pay taxes to RDCs to cover the cost of wildlife management.¹⁰¹ In the end, direct earnings have been minimal. Each of the approximately 100 000 households that participated in income-generating CAMPFIRE projects received on average an equivalent of US\$5 in direct earnings in 2001.¹⁰² According to a recent CAMPFIRE community benefits report,¹⁰³ there are only 15 districts that have sufficient wildlife resources to generate some financial benefit to communities.

Brian Child, a former wildlife official in the early days of the programme, said: 'My personal insight was that if wildlife provided only public benefits, no matter how many schools and clinics were built, this would never achieve conservation. It was how wildlife affected the money in their pockets that would ultimately determine how individual farmers viewed wildlife.'¹⁰⁴ According to CAMPFIRE records,¹⁰⁵ unnatural elephant deaths through poaching in CAMPFIRE areas are 'relatively low and average only 25% of annual national statistics'. Community members look out for poachers because every animal that is killed by poachers means less income for them. Local anti-poaching operations led by CAMPFIRE community members have resulted in a decline in elephant poaching in Mbire district from 40 cases in 2010 to five in 2017 (figure provided in September 2017). However, there are CAMPFIRE areas (such as Hwange) where income is too low to control poaching or manage human-wildlife conflict.

Since the early 2000s, political and economic changes in Zimbabwe have affected the good fortunes of the programme. The government's land-reform drive, farm invasions and the departure of donor agencies and NGOs from Zimbabwe led to diminished earnings for CAMPFIRE communities.¹⁰⁶ But the external environment was not the only factor that constrained the performance of some CAMPFIRE projects. Local residents cited bad management in the programme, as well as corruption, nepotism and intimidation. The perception was that some of the projects no longer benefited the community because traditional leaders were seen to monopolize the benefits.¹⁰⁷

Yet, despite the country's economic and political instability, CAMPFIRE has survived. In fact, the programme's areas make up 12.7% of Zimbabwe's total land mass. According to the CAMPFIRE Association, hunting generated 90% of CAMPFIRE income in 2017.¹⁰⁸ At the time, 200 000 households were directly involved in the programme, while a combined 2.4 million rural residents were CAMPFIRE beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the Cecil the Lion saga¹⁰⁹ captured the imagination of the international community in 2015, leading to renewed calls for the closure of hunting markets, and several countries banned the import of trophies of certain species. CAMPFIRE suffered a further setback when



the US suspended the import of elephant trophies in 2014. This led to a sharp decline in income for the CAMPFIRE programme and its benefiting communities.

From the outset, the CAMPFIRE approach received both praise and criticism. For one, some conservationists and NGOs were unhappy about the implicit consumptive use, such as the trophy hunting of charismatic megafauna.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the CAMPFIRE model assumes the dominant role of economic incentives in shaping human behaviour and disregards indigenous knowledge and value systems. Although CAMPFIRE has provided income for rural communities and reduced wildlife crime in some areas, it prioritizes the creation and viability of protected areas over the well-being of local people, who receive some indirect and partial benefits from wildlife.¹¹¹ Expert knowledge and political influence provide the edge in negotiations. Unequal power relationships and elite capture tend to characterize negotiations between local communities, NGOs, government representatives and donors. But, despite these shortcomings, CAMPFIRE has been used as a blueprint for similar initiatives across southern Africa, including the community conservancies in Namibia.

Case study 2: Community conservancies in Namibia

Namibia is known for its community conservancies, which employ, among others, former poachers and community members as wildlife guardians. These community conservancies are self-governing democratic entities, run by local people, with fixed boundaries that are agreed on with adjacent conservancies, communities or landowners.¹¹² The Namibian case provides useful insights as to what works and what does not work in terms of the marketization of conservation.

During Namibia's colonial era administration under apartheid South Africa, people living in communal areas had limited rights over wildlife and land use. Although the first community-based initiatives pre-date Namibian independence, after the country's independence in 1990 new legislation laid the foundation for community-orientated natural-resource use. In so doing, Namibia was the first African country to incorporate environmental protection and broad-based environmental benefits for all citizens into its constitution.¹¹³ The results of a survey in rural areas found that many communities wanted the same rights over natural resources hitherto enjoyed by (white) commercial farmers, who could hunt game and establish tourism enterprises on their land. Ostrom's design principles on common property resource management institutions¹¹⁴ informed the institutional framework for devolving wildlife proprietorship to communities living on state-owned land.¹¹⁵

The 1996 amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1975 formally recognized the devolution of rights to communities over natural resources, including income from wildlife and tourism.¹¹⁶ These rights are exercised through Namibia's communal conservancies. To form a conservancy, a community needs to appoint members, define its physical boundaries, elect a representative committee, agree on a plan for the equitable distribution of benefits and adopt a legally recognized constitution.¹¹⁷ Conservancies are obliged to put in place game management plans, conduct annual meetings and prepare financial reports. The conservancies are integrated into the tourism and hunting industries, and local communities benefit to varying degrees.

In 2017 approximately 190 000 Namibians were living in and benefiting from 82 registered conservancies encompassing an area of 161 900 km².¹¹⁸ In 2016, conservancies employed 1 544 people on a full-time basis and another 6 000 part-time.¹¹⁹ Local communities earned more than US\$6 million from conservancies in 2014. Unlike in Zimbabwe, none of the income that derives from wildlife is diverted to local or national government or third parties, or diluted through taxation.

International donors, such as USAID and World Wildlife Fund US, provided seed funding for the establishment of conservancies and institutional development while seeking partnerships with local NGOs and civil-society organizations (CSOs) to build local capacity. Although the financial support of donors has been steadily decreasing



since the 1990s, continued funding of Namibian CSOs and conservancies suggests that the programme is not yet self-sustaining and may remain dependent on funding and support in kind for the near future. Because of their financial and administrative support, the question has been asked whether external funders have been influencing agenda setting at the local level. Meanwhile concerted efforts are being made to indigenize and render conservancies and CSOs independent and self-governing.¹²⁰

Conservancies derive income from two main sources: hunting and tourism. Trophy hunting generates income for game guards and to finance anti-poaching measures, while game meat provides food. Where tourism potential exists, private-sector operators have entered into joint ventures with communities. However, these do not always benefit both parties in equal measure. Due to unequal power relationships, private-sector operators often manage to negotiate a better deal. There also have been instances where tourism businesses have doctored their books and presented smaller profits to minimize payments to conservancies.¹²¹

Map 2: Namibia's community conservancies, as of 2014



Note: The green shading shows the distribution of the conservancies, covering some 160 000 km² of land.

Community game guards and rhino monitoring

According to the IUCN Species Survival Commission's African Rhino Specialist Group, Namibia is home to approximately 1 950 black rhinos and 820 white rhinos¹²² – the second largest populations of African rhinos. As recently as 2012, Namibia appeared immune to the surge in rhino poaching that was affecting its neighbour South Africa. Said the head of the Protected Resources Unit, a division of the Namibian Police Force, which specializes in wildlife-trafficking cases: 'We thought we were safe. We thought it would never happen here. And then it did.'¹²³

Conservation experts believe that the success of community conservancies, was partly to thank for having kept rhino poaching at bay. These good fortunes changed, however, in 2014, when 24 rhino and 78 elephant carcasses were found in Namibia. Later, more than 200 rhino carcasses were discovered between then and the time of writing the report in the second half of 2017.¹²⁴ Community conservancies were not spared, and a number of rhinos have been poached in them since 2015.¹²⁵

An innovation at community level that is likely to have mitigated the effect of rhino poaching was the establishment of the community game guard programme. Save the Rhino Trust of Namibia piloted the community game guard system on black rhinos in the Kunene region.¹²⁶ Assisted by local leaders and community members, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), a Namibian NGO, created a network of community game guards who monitor rhino stocks and established a pilot project to bring tourism revenue to communities as an incentive for wildlife conservation.¹²⁷ Community game guards are locally hired, trained and deployed on patrols in each registered conservancy. Incentive-driven conservation has created 'allies on the ground' and 'eyes and ears' in community conservancies.¹²⁸

In 2011, Namibia's Communal Rhino Custodianship Programme¹²⁹ asked for help to raise the rhino-monitoring capacity of community rangers. Since 2012, 26 conservancy rhino rangers have been appointed. They have been given training and monitoring equipment, and receive performance-based bonus incentives. This has led to an improvement in the quantity and quality of conservancy-led rhino patrols.¹³⁰ A notable innovation here was to combine rhino ranging with rhino-tracking tourism activities, whereby local trackers demonstrate their animal-tracking skills and local knowledge to tourists while helping save rhinos in the process.¹³¹ Of the 18 confirmed cases of rhino poaching in the north-western regions of Namibia, none were in an area where rhino tourism is practised.¹³²

Namibia's conservancy programme is not without its challenges, however. For one, it is alleged that accountability and transparency among some conservancy committees are not always present. A form of elitism is also preventing bottom-up consultations on important decisions in some conservancies – on the basis of who has an influential voice.¹³³ In other instances, old elite interests – legitimate or otherwise – who were threatened by the establishment of conservancies and the empowerment of local people have opposed and derailed efforts.¹³⁴ In some instances, input and advice from community elders and traditional leaders have not been taken onboard.¹³⁵ There has been a high turnover in conservancy committees, with some members not originating from or living in the conservancies they represent.¹³⁶ Allegations of nepotism and corruption have also arisen. Furthermore, some conservancies are on marginal land that has limited or no potential for tourism or other uses, and these offer little prospect for income generation.¹³⁷

There have also been reports that benefits from the conservancy programme do not always reach the most needy and marginalized,¹³⁸ namely women, youths and the elderly. Kahler and Gore found that some locals were prepared to break wildlife laws and conservancy rules as a way of voicing their disagreement with the existing rules. These negative sentiments among communities centred on the inequitable benefit derived from certain conservancies.¹³⁹ A follow-up study looked at how human-wildlife conflict might influence how a community evaluates wildlife, and



might lead to poaching. Kahler and Gore suggest that broader engagement with local communities is necessary to mitigate the challenges posed by human–wildlife conflict.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, human–wildlife conflict is a key factor that may erode the goodwill of local communities. IRDNC found that the participation of women in particular was crucial in projects aimed at mitigating the impact of human–wildlife conflict. The later case study on the Black Mambas – a majority female anti-poaching unit in South Africa’s Balule Nature Reserve – corroborates the notion that women can play an important role in anti-poaching initiatives. Although some traditional community structures exclude women from decision-making, women are powerful and influential in some African rural contexts. Food provision and basic livelihood strategies, for example, are often managed by rural women. Although there are few known female poachers,¹⁴¹ women are motivators for poaching if they need food to feed their families. An innovation in this regard was the appointment of local women as community resource monitors whose tasks include information sharing on CBNRM issues with fellow members in their communities.¹⁴² There have been other examples of inspirational women taking on leadership roles in conservancy committees.¹⁴³

Although community conservancies have not been spared the swelling incidence in rhino poaching in the region, community members and rhino guards have provided crucial intelligence that has led to arrests of suspects. A suite of other measures, including law enforcement, however, also need to be in place. Local people are concerned about the possible fallout from poaching in community conservancies,¹⁴⁴ fearing that it may make people question the efficacy of the community programme. It is also noteworthy that a number of traditional leaders developed an action plan to stop rhino poaching in 2015, revitalizing a community information network.

The Namibian experience provides interesting insights into the successes and failures of incentivizing communities as part of the response to wildlife crime. The long-term sustainability of wildlife conservation in communal conservancies hinges on economic, institutional and social factors. Among others, community goodwill may influence the future viability of the country’s conservancy programme.

What stands out about the Namibian example, however, is that it is widely regarded as one of the few successful attempts at bridging the conservation–community divide and addressing the nature versus culture conflict. Although there have been problems with implementation, the underlying philosophy of combining conservation with developmental goals ticks several boxes for the donor community, international governments and NGOs. However, conservation prerogatives continue to trump the needs of rural residents. Therefore, the outlook for the long-term viability of wildlife conservation through community conservancies might be uncertain.

Case study 3: Rhino protection in Nepal – Chitwan National Park

Other than in Nepal and India, the Asian rhino species are not faring better than their African relatives. The Indian, or greater one-horned rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), is the most common Asian species, with an estimated population of 3 557 in 2016.¹⁴⁵

Hunting, poaching and human encroachment had reduced the rhino population to about a hundred animals by the late 1960s. Later, Nepal’s civil war from 1996 to 2006 led to a stark decline in rhino numbers.¹⁴⁶ Like the horn of its African relatives, rhino horn originating in Nepal is destined for consumer markets in Vietnam and China.

According to the WWF, Nepal recorded a 21% increase in rhino numbers between 2011 and May 2015.¹⁴⁷ In a report to the CITES Secretariat for CoP17, the IUCN Species Survival Commission’s African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups said that the assistance of the Nepalese army in rhino protection had led to only two rhinos being poached over that five-year period.¹⁴⁸ However, earlier, heavy poaching between 2000 and 2008 had led to rhino numbers falling by almost a third.



What is curious about the report to CITES referred to above is that no mention is made of a much touted community programme, which other researchers regard as a key ingredient of Nepal's successful rhino protection strategy. Although there are vast geographic, political and economic differences between African and Asian rhino range countries, researchers have suggested that there are global lessons to be learnt from this programme, which has been deemed a case of exemplary rhino conservation.¹⁴⁹

Located north of the Indian border and incorporating some 932 km² at the foot of the Himalayas,¹⁵⁰ Chitwan National Park is home to 94% of Nepal's rhinos. The park and its forerunners, the Mahendra Deer Park and the Rhino Sanctuary, were established on land where the Tharu people had lived for many centuries, in the forests of the Chitwan district. In line with the fortress conservation model, Nepalese conservation policies excluded local communities from living on land designated as national parks and restricted the use of natural resources found within the boundaries of the park.¹⁵¹ There were 26 village clusters at the time the site was declared a national park in 1973; all were forcefully evicted with the exception of one.¹⁵²

Most Tharus were removed without compensation from their traditional lands to beyond the boundaries of the park. These communities were no longer permitted to access the former freely available natural resources in the park. For example, their cattle were no longer allowed to graze in the forest, leading to an 80% decline of livestock in some villages.

Map 3: Chitwan National Park and buffer zones



There were limited alternative livelihood strategies available to the dispossessed communities after the park was established. Few Tharus are employed by the park or its related tourism industry. Many continued to venture into the park to access fodder, firewood and grazing, justifying, in their minds, the now illegal use of natural resources within the park as a form of compensation for the losses they had incurred.¹⁵³

The early history of the management of protected areas in Nepal is therefore not dissimilar to the southern African experience, where black communities were also systematically excluded from conservation and its benefits. And also, echoing the situation in southern Africa, a study commissioned by Transparency International Nepal in 2009 found a legacy of antagonism between people living near the park and the park authorities. In reference to the broader environment that had triggered poaching and illegal trade in wildlife, the report found:

The issues of poaching and illegal trade are not merely related to conservation systems, but also involve governance, politics and societies. ... The politicization of crime and protection of criminals as well as lawlessness compounded with the aforementioned factors, contribute to the continuation of poaching. Protected areas are not only conservation areas, but also play an important role in socio-economic dimensions.¹⁵⁴

Against this backdrop of community–conservation tension, in the aftermath of the civil war Nepalese conservation authorities decided to reach out to local communities to get them actively involved in protecting rhinos and conservation areas. Since the early days of the park, the socio-economic and political context and conservation management regimes have shifted towards a more liberal model – one that ‘recognizes more clearly the contributions of people living and working within protected areas.’¹⁵⁵

Nepal initially embarked on community-based conservation programmes back in the 1980s. The approach gained momentum with the formal recognition of community forests¹⁵⁶ and buffer zones.¹⁵⁷ The so-called ‘fences and fines’ approach to conservation management was supplemented with incentive measures, such as legally sanctioned removal of thatching grass, the creation of buffer zones and revenue-sharing schemes.¹⁵⁸

Nepal’s Buffer Zone Management Regulation of 1996 granted rights to local communities to manage and use natural resources within those zones. Local people were able to choose which development activities to become involved in through a buffer-zone management committee, which consisted of elected representatives of the community.¹⁵⁹ Development activities in buffer zones were mostly focused on infrastructure development, such as the construction of buildings, roads, telephone-line installation, irrigation, water infrastructure and ablution facilities.¹⁶⁰ In 2009 an instrument that provided for the payment of compensation for livestock losses to communities was also established.

Conservation agencies have also worked with local communities on innovative measures to reduce the incidence of human–wildlife conflict, including the construction of trenches, electric fencing and watchtowers, and the supply of torches and binoculars.¹⁶¹ In addition, the park authorities share about a third of the park’s revenue with communities that live adjacent to protected areas. The community management committees decide which conservation and development initiatives to support.¹⁶²

These various measures for achieving a rapprochement between the local communities and the authorities seem to have achieved some success. A study comparing local residents’ perceptions of benefits and losses associated with protected areas in India and Nepal found they were more favourably inclined to protected areas in Nepal. The Chitwan National Park was one of the study sites. The researchers attributed this greater enthusiasm in Nepal because the country is better known for wildlife tourism and is more successful at involving local communities through benefit sharing.¹⁶³



Nepal has made strides in rhino conservation. A group of researchers have suggested that a combination of institutional and legislative changes allowing for effective community involvement have been key to Nepal's success in rhino protection.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, however, Nepal has also adopted tougher penalties for wildlife crimes. Wildlife authorities are afforded special judicial powers, including the right to issue fines and detain those suspected of wildlife crime.¹⁶⁵ But others are doubtful whether law-enforcement agencies and security personnel have contributed much to lowering poaching levels in Nepal.¹⁶⁶

Either way, the country's renewed focus on involving local communities in conservation management, enforcement and revenue sharing is laudable and appears to have made some measurable difference.¹⁶⁷ Yet, while there are certainly global lessons to be learnt from the Nepalese case, it should not be construed as a perfect model for conservation, especially since grand and petty forms of corruption are pervasive, and the country's human-rights record is less than desirable. What is, however, remarkable about the Nepalese rhino protection regime is that the conservation authority is open to learning and incorporating new ideas. Relationships between local people and park authorities appear to have markedly improved over the past decade.

It may make little sense to compare the Nepalese rhino protection regime with South Africa's in light of the marked geographical, political and governance differences, but there are lessons to be learnt from both. It would make sense for African and Asian rhino range states to exchange notes and collaborate on issues of shared interest.

Case study 4: Legalizing rhino horn, and community-based rhino conservation initiatives: Balepye and Selwane

The domestic trade of rhino horn was unregulated in South Africa until 2009 and presented a regulatory loophole that criminal actors were readily exploiting. In 2009, the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs then imposed a moratorium on the trade of rhinoceros horns and any derivatives or products of the horns within South Africa.¹⁶⁸ Later, citing a lack of public consultation, the North Gauteng Division of the High Court¹⁶⁹ lifted the domestic trade moratorium in 2015.

This was in response to two private rhino breeders instituting a lawsuit against the Department of Environmental Affairs. Private owners/breeders, who form a powerful interest group, had been lobbying for the lifting of the trade ban. Beyond income generation through the sale of live rhinos, ecotourism and trophy hunting, the trade in rhino horn may provide additional income to private rhino owners and breeders who struggle to pay the rising security costs associated with poaching risks. Given that there is no known domestic market for rhino horn in South Africa, however, the purpose of the lawsuit was unclear at the time of initiation.¹⁷⁰ In April 2017, South Africa's Constitutional Court lifted the moratorium. The domestic trade in rhino horn is therefore legal on paper.

After the lifting of the ban, John Hume – one of the litigants and the world's biggest rhino breeder with a herd of more than 1 500 rhinos – announced a public auction on the internet of half a ton of his stockpile of rhino horn.¹⁷¹ It is unclear who would be buying Hume's stock, as the international trade remains banned.¹⁷² Yet the auction announcement was translated into Vietnamese and Mandarin, suggesting that an international clientele was targeted.

But the legalization of domestic or international trade in rhino horn has been of little consequence to local communities. Beyond WWF's Black Rhino Range Expansion Project and the land restitution of a few private rhino reserves, local communities do not own or breed rhinos. Without broad-based transformation of land and rhino ownership in South Africa, the lifting of trade bans – domestic or international – favours a small group of affluent rhino owners who would be the main beneficiaries of trade liberalization.



A notable exception is the Balepye and Selwane Community Rhino Conservation and Sustainable Game Ranching Project. These communities in South Africa's Limpopo province participated in the Rhino Issue Manager process¹⁷³ and have called for the legalization of trade in rhino horn. Representatives of the two communities argued during public hearings that trade legalization would lead to broad-based community benefits derived from rhino ranching. The two communities reclaimed ownership and user rights over land that they had lost during colonial times near the KNP. In partnership with the private sector and government, the communities plan to develop the communal land now known as the Greater Balepye Nature Reserve into viable income streams from rhino ranching for the community. The secretary of the Balepye community, Dipati Benjamin Maenetja, explains:

Communities that are invested in the survival of the species will be less likely to offer support to poachers in exchange for money. In fact, if similar projects are allowed to flourish in the country, we will be able to push back against rhino poaching and actually take the fight to the poacher. The wealth generated by the sale of the legal horn will go back to the communities for capacity building and revenues in the form of taxes will be paid to government.¹⁷⁴

Community members have called for rhino horn legalization on various national and international platforms, including at the public hearings of the Committee of Inquiry into the possibility of proposing legal international trade in rhino horn to the CITES CoP 17 in Johannesburg.

By July 2017, there were seven communities living adjacent to the KNP that expressed interest in rhino farms and breeding operations.¹⁷⁵ The idea of participating in legal rather than illegal rhino-horn transactions also appealed to a prominent rhino-horn trafficker in the Mozambican border town of Massingir, who said: 'As a person who used to do [poaching], I will love to be part of solution to this problem. I am one of those who wish to farm my own rhinos. If you want to stop this, speak to me.'¹⁷⁶

Case study 5: The Black Mambas: Women empowerment or more of the same?

By bestowing its Champions of the Earth award to the Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit, the UN Environment Programme catapulted this unconventional anti-poaching initiative into the international limelight.¹⁷⁷ With young rural women making up the vast majority of team members, the Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit is the first of its kind.

The brainchild of Craig Spencer, chief warden of Balule Nature Reserve, the initiative was born out of the need to engage impoverished communities in and around the reserve. Although the unit's members wear camouflage uniforms, they do not carry weapons. Their weapons of choice are notepads and pencils, which they use to document suspicious vehicles, people or activities.¹⁷⁸ The primary function of the Black Mambas is therefore visible policing, as well as outreach and awareness-raising in their communities. The Black Mambas' vision is to encourage communities to understand that their benefits will be greater through rhino conservation than through poaching.¹⁷⁹

The Black Mambas form part of a broader anti-poaching strategy deployed by the 40 000-hectare nature reserve in the Limpopo province of South Africa. As a member of the Associated Private Nature Reserves, Balule is part of the Greater Kruger National Park, with more than 3 million hectares of unfenced savannah and other habitats allowing wild animals, including rhinos, to cross unhindered between private reserves and the KNP. Nineteen black rhinos were relocated to Balule Reserve as part of the Black Rhino Expansion Programme.



Black Mambas: Members of the female Black Mamba anti-poaching unit, Balule, South Africa



Photo: Jeffrey Barbee, Alliance Earth

Although Balule Nature Reserve has not achieved a zero rhino poaching rate, the Black Mambas have been successful. For example, they have identified and demolished several poachers' camps and kitchens for preparing bush meat, and reduced snaring and poisoning activities substantially. Members of the unit also teach primary-school children about the environment and conservation through an environmental education programme. The Mambas' pay is subsidized by the South African government's Extended Public Works Programme; the reserve carries all additional costs and relies heavily on donations.¹⁸⁰

This anti-poaching unit has received its fair share of criticism. For one, there have been concerns over 'unarmed women facing dangerous animals and poachers'.¹⁸¹ Then there is the fact that the unit is said to be 'undermining the role of women in rural communities'.¹⁸² The functions of the Black Mambas are not confrontational, as the armed response element of the reserve's anti-poaching operations is contracted to a private security company. The Black Mambas do, however, receive training in paramilitary anti-poaching methods, self-defence and arrest procedures.

Inspired by the Black Mambas, the International Anti-Poaching Foundation is testing a new community-driven conservation model called 'Akashinga' (Shona for the 'brave ones') in Zimbabwe. Although the model aims to build an alternative approach to fortress conservation and militarized anti-poaching responses, the women-only team receive the same law-enforcement training as male rangers. The model aims to replace income from trophy hunting to communities by empowering marginalized rural women through employment and direct benefits from conservation areas. The thinking is that trophy hunting is becoming less economically viable due to public perception, activism, constraints on hunting specific iconic species, import restrictions and reduced wildlife populations. This may mean fewer economic benefits from hunting accruing to communities. Unemployed single

mothers, abandoned wives, sex workers, survivors of sexual and physical abuse, wives of imprisoned poachers, widows and orphans were selected into the initial team of 26 women. Akashinga's objective is 'working with rather than against the local population'.¹⁸³

What is remarkable about these models is the identification of women as a powerful and influential force within local communities. Although customary rules and traditional patriarchal cultural values in some communities may not advance women's rights, rural women in southern Africa are inherently active citizens with clout and influence. And, as shown earlier, in some cases women may encourage conservation transgressions; alternatively, they may call poachers to order. Either way, acknowledging the power of women and harnessing it for the purposes of combating wildlife crime and supporting conservation endeavours is shrewd thinking.

Although the Black Mambas model may have led to direct and indirect community benefits for some community members, only a broad-based, socially and financially inclusive model will make wildlife conservation a viable project in the long term.¹⁸⁴ Despite its successes, the model does not cater for bottom-up, broad-based economic empowerment that renders a live rhino more valuable than a dead one to local communities. It is too early to tell whether the Akashinga model provides a viable alternative.

Akashinga: A female-led conservation model in Zimbabwe



Photo: Adrian Steirn for Alliance Earth

Factors that facilitate or prevent community participation in illegal wildlife economies

The table below summarizes factors that influence community participation in both legal and illegal wildlife economies. It is important to note that these are not generalizable – some factors are likely to have a greater bearing in specific contexts and communities. The legacy of apartheid and colonial policies, for example, is likely to have a greater impact on conservation outcomes in South Africa and Namibia than in countries that gained independence earlier.

Table 1: Factors that influence community participation in legal and illegal wildlife economies

Factors that encourage participation in illegal wildlife economies	Factors that encourage participation in legal wildlife economies
1. Regulatory framework and governance	
Conservation laws and regulations reinforce apartheid and colonial boundaries, mentalities and governance systems.	Land claims are settled, land and natural-resource user rights are restored or negotiated, and access to cultural and natural heritage sites, especially ancestral sites, is restored.
Top-down conservation processes: fortress conservation, control-command, and fences and fines methodologies.	Participatory and community-led conservation processes and protected area management lead to fair and equitable natural-resource management and the benefits are shared.
Assumption of the universal application of Western 'best practice' models.	Local communities have ownership over programming that affects their social worlds. ¹⁸⁵
Conservation strategies and plans are developed with limited or no inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge systems and values.	Indigenous and local knowledge systems are used, acknowledged and paid for (not appropriated).
Lack of transformation in conservation authorities and associated entities (e.g. tourism and hunting).	'Learning by doing' approach to encourage community ownership, management or co-management, and social and economic upward mobility.
Community empowerment and benefits are devolved to elites.	Community structures are accountable, equitable and participatory, and the benefits are direct.
Local elites who had benefited from colonial or apartheid dispensations see their old patronage networks threatened by new community projects.	The voices of the most marginalized community members – women and youths – are amplified and listened to.
Distrust of the state, park authorities and external actors.	High levels of trust in governance structures, park authorities and external actors.
Political interference and patronage networks.	Decentralized decision making that matches local contexts.



2. Socio-economic factors	
Intra- and inter-community conflicts.	Inclusive broad-based economic transformation and community empowerment, including women and youths. ¹⁸⁶
High levels of socio-economic differentiation at community level.	Low levels of socio-economic differentiation and high levels of entrepreneurship (no elite capture).
Poor resource to population ratios lead to competition and conflict over access to land, resources and benefits.	Living standards and levels of inclusive economic transformation are at similar levels in the neighbourhood/at district level.
Perception that conservation areas and wildlife serve the interests of the rich.	Flow of benefits from conservation are directed and channelled to communities.
Human–wildlife conflict is not addressed.	Coexistence is achieved: Protected areas, wildlife and conservation authorities benefit communities. Compensation is paid for losses and remedial responses are implemented.

How to prevent wildlife poaching: Eight design principles for community-orientated pro-poor conservation outcomes

Conservation actors, policymakers, donors and communities should move beyond the premise of the fortress conservation paradigm, which assumes conflictual relationships between rural communities and wildlife. Millions of local people live near or in conservation areas. Africans have lost their land, access to natural resources and cultural sites. With the exception of a small number of initiatives, local communities do not have proprietorship over protected areas or wildlife, and are seldom enrolled in conservation management. Often the only benefits accruing to communities from the wildlife economy are profits they can make from poaching.

Harmonious relationships between local communities and parks are a basic point of departure. Conservation authorities and protected areas are notoriously underfunded across Africa. Since the latest escalation of rhino poaching, most conservation funding has been diverted to anti-poaching initiatives and the project administration costs of international NGOs and conservation authorities. And the international community has called for more helicopter gunships and boots on the ground in response to wildlife crime.

However, such conventional anti-poaching operations are not the only solution for tackling escalating wildlife crime. The increasing militarization of anti-poaching measures has led to unintended consequences that impede community-orientated conservation initiatives and broad-based economic transformation. Respondents interviewed for this report said that government, conservation authorities and NGOs valued the lives of wild animals more highly than those of black rural people.

There is hence a need to critically engage with these kinds of anti-poaching measures and explore different kinds of interventions. Community members were appalled that rhinos are better cared for than they are. The South



African National Defence Force is involved in the fight to save the rhino; wildlife veterinarians look after the rhino's health; rhino breeders and conservation authorities provide supplementary food and/or water. By contrast, very few communities visited during the course of this research even had a permanent police presence, basic healthcare facilities, schools or shops. In the end, the good fortunes of a wildlife species are intimately tied to those of the communities living adjacent to them.

Hotspot policing and law enforcement are necessary in protected areas and the communities nearby. However, instead of investing solely in military-type approaches, donor funding that is ring-fenced for law enforcement should be used to 'follow the money' and dismantle trafficking networks. More boots on the ground will not disrupt the supply chain or demand for illicit wildlife products. This can only be achieved through in-depth financial and criminal investigations and intelligence gathering designed to follow criminal actors and wildlife contraband along the entire supply chain. Community policing projects – such as the community guards system or an adaption of the Zwelethemba model of peacemaking¹⁸⁷ – are likely to achieve better results than private security companies fighting a war against poachers in the bush.

The good fortunes of a wildlife species are intimately tied to those of the communities living adjacent to them.

The model was developed in the township of Zwelethemba near Worcester in the Western Cape. Like many other communities in apartheid South Africa, the people of Zwelethemba rendered their township ungovernable during the final years of apartheid. After South Africa's transition to democracy, the community no longer wanted ungovernability and sought out governance structures that could assist in matters such as policing, rubbish removal and the provision of basic infrastructure and services. The community came up with remedial strategies that involved them as key decision-makers and implementers. The Zwelethemba model created a locally led and participatory set of arrangements for community security and policing, and accords poor communities a greater voice in their own governance.

The current rhino control paradigm and associated conservation policies are aimed at controlling poachers and advancing security and other anti-poaching measures to disrupt wildlife trafficking networks. Securitization and militarization, however, close down pathways for community empowerment. Violence not only begets violence, as suggested by Lunstrum when she talks about an arms race between poachers and wildlife guardians,¹⁸⁸ but it also precludes opportunities for inclusive protected area management, benefit sharing and parks that locals can be proud of and would want to be associated with. As long as conservation continues to benefit elite interests, protected areas and the wildlife contained within them will be subject to contestation and conflict.

The underlying assumptions of the control paradigm are incorrect. The map of power does not lie behind the barrel of a gun but in the goodwill of local people living with and near wildlife. One of the key findings of this report is the significant role of women in mediating positive conservation outcomes. Women command considerable power and influence in the communities in question. In light of the patriarchal structure of many rural African communities, this suggestion may appear counter-intuitive. However, there are countless examples that demonstrate that women can exert a strong influence on conservation outcomes (as evidenced by the earlier case study on the success of the Black Mamba initiative). It was suggested that if conservation agencies and others want to save rhinos, they should mobilize the power of women and include them in community conservation negotiations, transforming the current whole-of-government responses to whole-of-society responses.

A different way of addressing the problem is needed if we are to make a live rhino more valuable to rural communities than a dead one. For example, many communities may prefer alternative land use options (such as livestock farming or agri-businesses) instead of conservation-orientated endeavours.



By closing down pathways that provide economic incentives to communities (such as banning trophy hunting or trading in live animals or animal parts), authorities and private entities limit the ability to generate income and support benefit sharing. The ensuing economic fallout could be mitigated if the international community, NGOs and others were prepared to assist with shortfalls. Maintaining the moral high ground will not resolve the crisis facing the rhino. If trophy hunting or sustainable trade is unpalatable to animal lovers and conservationists, then they need to provide financial support where it matters most. They need to support rural communities, so that they, in turn, support wildlife and build resilience against transnational criminal networks.

There are limits to what conservation authorities can do to uplift communities that live near national parks. But it is important to explore other forms of rural employment, resource sharing and income generation beyond hunting, anti-poaching and tourism. Local needs and services should be provided through community empowerment projects. Instead of bringing in experts to deliver services, teachers and trainers should be hired to teach community members the skills needed to build, develop and maintain their own projects, including infrastructure development. Indigenous knowledge systems and values should be harnessed for such community projects.

What we can learn from initiatives such as the case studies discussed in this report – and the Zwelethemba model – is that a future-orientated process is crucial. We should be asking, what can we do now to prevent poaching and wildlife crime in the future? How can we bring communities into the conservation game before it is too late? We need to create happy, sustainable rural communities that benefit from and live in harmony with ecosystems.

With this in mind, policymakers, donors, NGOs and civil society should consider the following eight design principles¹⁸⁹ when assessing measures and financial pledges to fight poaching and wildlife trafficking.

1. Communities are fulcrum institutions

Local communities are the most crucial change agents in conservation and wildlife protection on the supply side. Decision-makers ignore local people, and their needs and aspirations, at their own peril. Communities are both the problem and the solution to the wildlife conservation conundrum. When it comes to reining in wildlife poaching, the real challenge is not how to bring poachers to book but how to garner broad-based, inclusive community support for wildlife conservation. As long as local communities remain on the margins of protected areas and their benefit schemes, we should not be surprised when they do not support the conservation enterprise and resort to supporting illegal wildlife economies. Shift local communities from backstage to centre stage.

2. Render live rhinos more valuable than dead ones to local communities

There are many barriers to entry in the legal wildlife economies that disadvantage or prevent local communities from assuming an active role in conservation management. They have limited or no access to land, social and financial capital or trade networks. Often, the most expedient way for rural communities to benefit from wildlife and conservation is through participation in illegal wildlife economies. And there are structural incentives to do so: after all, natural-resource benefits were transferred from these communities to colonial and postcolonial elites. Poaching solves problems in the present. However, once the incentive structures are turned in favour of community participation in legal wildlife economies, community members will support conservation. Making a live animal more valuable than a dead one to communities entails the restitution of property and land, and rights to cultural and natural resources, as well as conferring upon them active citizenship, agency and benefits.



3. Change the way we think about poaching and anti-poaching strategies

Encourage best-thinking rather than best-practice approaches. Although law-enforcement responses are important, whole-of-society responses to poaching and wildlife crime should not be aimed at controlling the problem but should seek to address the underlying structural causes and factors that lead to poaching and trafficking. It is crucial that rural women and young people are included in formulating and implementing strategies to target wildlife crime and encourage conservation. Consultations should be conducted in a participatory, inclusive manner and draw on indigenous knowledge and value systems.

4. Establish inclusive, not exclusive, institutions

The way in which conservation institutions have often been ‘captured’ by elite interests is visible at the international and local level, while the voices of other potential players in the conservation economy – such as those of rural dwellers – are drowned out. Conservation institutions should aim to become inclusive institutions. New conservation models, approaches and ideas should be embraced with a view to providing a platform for indigenous knowledge systems and cultural values. Devolve authority to local communities, so that they can make their own decisions, and manage and benefit from wildlife conservation. The voices of local communities should not only be amplified but also heard ‘glocally’, so that their interests will inform the kinds of international institutions that deal with the management of protected areas and endangered wildlife.

5. Regulatory interventions should entail positive outcomes for local communities

Although regulatory interventions should be aimed at protecting wildlife and achieving positive conservation outcomes, they should be pro-community. Instead of building physical and proverbial fences between local people and national parks, we need to dismantle barriers and encourage harmonious relationships. To achieve this, the interests and aspirations of those previously deprived of their land and access to natural resources need to be honoured, mainstreamed and prioritized.

6. Change the flow of money from interventions that support anti-poaching to interventions that support communities

Instead of investing in a militarized response to poaching, financial disbursements should be rechannelled to uplift the livelihoods of local people. Communities hold the power to influence positive conservation outcomes, which could include community policing, and deploying guards and rangers. Make people who live in or near conservation areas a central element of the response to poaching. Once conservation is seen to benefit local communities, protected areas will lose the stigma of being socially constructed wild ‘Edens of Africa’.



7. Conservation institutions should be accountable to local people, and vice versa

The practice of holding community meetings as an accountability mechanism should be extended to local governance structures and institutions in the conservation arena. Instead of restricting attendance to local elites, everyone – and especially women and youths – should be encouraged to attend. Such meetings can be used to gain access to information, establish lines of communication and to hold conservation authorities accountable. The converse applies too: accountability mechanisms should be multi-directional, with local communities also being held accountable for their role in conservation outcomes.

8. Harness the spirit of ubuntu¹⁹⁰

The African concept of ubuntu¹⁹¹ refers to collective values that represent personhood, humanity and morality. Solidarity is central to the survival of communities with a scarcity of resources. Within such communities, an individual's existence is relative to that of the group.¹⁹² In developing community resilience to organized environmental crimes, acknowledgment of the importance of the spirit of ubuntu is tantamount. Many responses focus on individuals (such as the recruitment of informers or rangers); however, community goodwill hinges not on the advancement of a few but of the many.

About the author

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Notes

1. Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, Rhino and elephant poaching on the decrease in 2017, 30 August 2017, <http://www.nbc.na/news/rhino-and-elephant-poaching-decrease-2017.10197>.
2. IUCN, IUCN reports deepening rhino poaching crisis, news release, 9 March 2016, <http://www.iucn.org/?22519/IUCN-reports-deepening-rhino-poaching-crisis-in-Africa>.
3. Personal communication with senior South African National Parks officials, June 2017 and April 2018.
4. Most white rhino populations in Africa originate from the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park in KwaZulu-Natal. Many white rhinos were donated or sold from the park to protected areas elsewhere in South Africa and on the continent to private owners and zoos, and breeding facilities outside Africa. The park experienced a massive increase in rhino poaching from 2014 to 2017. See RK Purdon and Edna Molewa, Question No. 1050 for written reply: National Assembly, National Assembly of South Africa, https://pmg.org.za/question_replies/?filter%5Bcommittee%5D=108: Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2017.
5. Michael J Chase et al, Continent-wide survey reveals massive decline in African savannah elephants. *PeerJ* 4:e2354, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.2354>.
6. Daniel Martin Varisco, Beyond rhino horn – wildlife conservation for north Yemen. *Oryx*, 23, 4, 1989, 215–219.
7. Interviews with convicted poachers and environmental-crime investigators revealed huge discrepancies in what rhino traffickers were prepared to pay for horn, ranging from provision of basic foodstuffs to substantial remuneration based on weight.
8. For example, the white rhino provides 'grazing lawns' for smaller herbivores (its wide mouth and lips have lawnmower-like qualities) and all rhino species help spread the seeds and seedlings of many plants.
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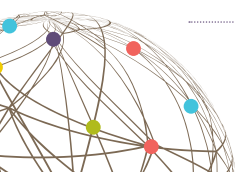
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66. All land in Mozambique belongs to the state and therefore cannot be owned or sold. However, the 'right of use' of the land title can be acquired for 50 years and is renewable for another 50. The infrastructure and buildings hence can be owned and resold. Most foreign investors seek local partnerships or register a local company in Mozambique. The game reserves located along the KNP–Mozambican border are predominantly owned by South African corporates or shareholdings in partnership with Mozambican citizens. These politically connected generals and politicians assert their influence in Maputo should conflict arise between the concession holders and local communities (interviews, 2013).
67. The private concession holders, NGOs and international donors are providing money and expertise for socio-economic upliftment projects.
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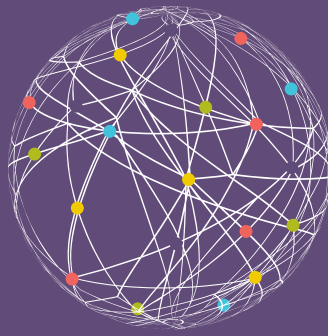


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183. International Anti-Poaching Foundation, Akashinga (The Brave Ones) Female Anti-Poaching Unit, <https://www.iapf.org/akashinga/>.
184. Greta Francesca Iori, An analysis of the political ecology of enforced conservation and wildlife crime: A case of the Balule Nature Reserve, South Africa, MA thesis in tourism, environment and development, King's College, London, August 2015, 23.
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190. Community members emphasized the importance of acknowledging the spirit of Ubuntu when asked about how community–park relations could be improved.
191. Yvonne Mokgoro, Ubuntu and the law in South Africa, Paper delivered at the first Colloquium, Constitution and the Law, Potchefstroom, 1997, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26633677_UBuntu_and_the_law_in_South_Africa.
192. The fundamental belief is that a person can only be a person through others.





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