



Conservancy Rhino Ranger Incentive Program in Namibia

Save the Rhino Trust, Minnesota Zoo, Integrated Rural
Development & Nature Conservation, Namibian Nature Foundation

Summary

The sharp increase in rhino poaching since 2008 has pushed rhino populations to a path towards extinction. The global response has largely focused upon strengthening enforcement through military-style policing methods. However, effective solutions require a context-specific, stakeholder-driven mix of top-down and bottom-up strategies. The Conservancy Rhino Ranger Incentive Program seeks to demonstrate how partnerships that explicitly incorporate local values and institutions are a foundation for combating poaching. This case study illustrates how coupling a locally devised rhino monitoring system with tourism partnerships can increase the value local people attach to saving rhinos, resulting in both formal and informal community enforcement.

Learning Question Addressed:

What are some successful examples of partnerships used to deliver competency-building activities, and what made them work?

USAID's Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) program supported and strengthened Namibia's community conservancy program. LIFE promoted sustainable natural resource management on communal land by supporting the devolution of rights over wildlife and tourism to local communities. Today, 83 community-led conservancies encompass nearly 20% of Namibia's landmass and generate income and in-kind benefits for rural communities totaling more than \$8.5 million per year. Economic benefits, coupled with conservation and anti-poaching measures implemented by conservancies, have been successful in decreasing poaching and increasing the population of numerous key species, such as springbok, lion, and black rhino.

Problem

Rhino poaching incidents have increased at an alarming rate in the last two decades. In 2017, three rhinos were killed every day in South Africa alone. There are significant shortages in trained, equipped, and motivated 'boots on the ground' rangers to patrol vast areas, and very few communities have been actively participating in rhino protection. Very few communities have been actively participating in rhino protection. Other hurdles are a stagnant conventional donor funding base and rising operational costs. Conventional approaches to combat these problems focus on a "war against criminals" with tactics aimed primarily at catching poachers. These approaches often overlook, and in some cases work against, the possible contributions community-based solutions may provide.

Approach

The [Conservancy Rhino Ranger Incentive Program](#) used a community-based approach. Fundamentally, the program sought to move the focus away from criminals to an approach designed to deliver strategies that increase the value local people attach to saving rhinos



The logo for the Rhino Ranger program cultivates a sense of unity and pride.

in order to help stop poaching from becoming a normal, tolerated behavior. The first step was to design and implement a program to strengthen and expand the capacity of local communities to monitor the rhinos on their lands. It used specialists from a group of dedicated field-based organizations – Save the Rhino Trust, Minnesota Zoo, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation, and Namibia Nature Foundation – to train a new generation of “rhino rangers.”

These are highly talented groups

of local people, chosen by and accountable to their conservancies, who conduct rhino monitoring, rhino tourism, and more recently, targeted outreach and awareness activities in their communities. The program provided an enhanced training curriculum, state-of-the-art rhino monitoring and field patrol equipment, and performance-based rewards that enable and incentivize rhino ranger teams to complete quality patrols. Once rhino ranger teams acquired the basic skills needed to effectively monitor the rhino on their land, training in rhino tourism and the development of community-led rhino tourism activities occurred. This helped generate critical finances needed to sustain rhino monitoring and [enhances the value local people place on keeping rhino alive](#).

Results

Since the program's inception in 2012, a five- and tenfold increase in verified rhino sighting and patrol efforts, respectively, has occurred on conservancy lands now linked to a specific team of local Conservancy Rhino Rangers. In just two years, one-third of the rangers are now leading their own rhino tourism activities on behalf of their conservancies, in partnership with private sector tourism. This has generated over \$250,000 in annual net income for communities living on conservancy lands. In 2017, local farmers living within rhino conservancies foiled potential poachers on six separate occasions by voluntarily alerting law enforcement after observing suspicious activity near their farms. This has led to ten arrests. Most importantly, poaching rates have dropped by 80% since 2014, with only three cases in 2016 and four cases in 2017 recorded on conservancy lands in north-west Namibia.

About this case study series: In 2017, USAID collected [case studies](#) addressing the questions posed in the [Combating Wildlife Trafficking Learning Agenda](#). The finalists represent both USAID-funded and non-USAID-funded activities from around the world. The information provided in the case study series does not necessarily represent the views or positions of USAID or the U.S. Government.

Lessons

- **Context is key.** It is essential to understand the social context before designing any community-based intervention. Extensive discussions with focus groups and/or individuals help capture local perspectives and values concerning the problem. Before starting, the program met with local game scouts to understand why they were not patrolling. They also met with local leaders to establish how best to harness the values of the community that would be good for the people they represented and the rhinos.
- **Providing a mix of monetary and non-monetary incentives can reward fair and measurable performance.** For any monetary incentives, programs should clearly differentiate between long- and short-term payments and be sure to avoid a “money for nothing” scenario. Structuring non-monetary rewards creates healthy competition between the rangers while improving their status among their peers and within their community. The Conservancy Rhino Ranger Incentive Program achieved this by exploring various methods used in sports such as varsity jackets, achievement certificates, and regular posting of patrol performance.
- **Cultivate local pride.** A logo or motto used from the onset creates a sense of unity. The logo for the Rhino Ranger program depicts a rhino inside the pupil of a human eye with the slogan “keeping an eye on our rhino.” This helps to reinforce local ownership and generate momentum and pride around a clear cause.
- **Let locals lead.** It takes patience and persistence to ensure ownership over the program is maintained at the community level. When the local community leaders select their own rangers, who will be employed by and accountable to their community, it empowers ownership. The Conservancy Rhino Ranger Incentive Program sometimes failed to communicate effectively with local leadership when conducting training or joint patrols with their appointed rangers, which created some confusion over who actually managed the rangers and owns the program.
- **Outside support from law enforcement is also necessary.** Community-led efforts (particularly community-based tourism) are not sufficient on their own to combat poaching, especially with the new, more sophisticated criminal syndicates. Efforts supported by strong law enforcement are made more effective with pro-rhino community support.

To learn more about Conservancy Rhino Ranger Incentive Program, visit: <https://communitiesforwildlife.iied.org/rhino-rangers-incentive-programme>