

Darwin Newsletter 2018

Protecting wildlife by linking communities and conservation in Mozambique

Work with communities in southern Africa has shown that when people have positive attitudes towards wildlife it can have positive impacts on wildlife populations. However, positive attitudes alone are not enough - the various costs of living with wildlife must not exceed the range of benefits received.

Addressing illegal wildlife trade is particularly challenging in protected areas around National borders, this is true of Kruger National Park in South Africa bordering Mozambique where approximately two rhinos a day have been lost in recent years. Many of the incursions resulting in loss of rhinos are known to originate from Mozambique and cross-border trafficking is recognised as a significant threat.

WWF South Africa, funded by the UK Government through the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund has created a project with the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC), the privately owned Sabie Game Park (SGP) and the Mangalane community to 1) expand local economies and improve livelihoods as an alternative to engaging in illegal behaviour; 2) improve accountable and democratic governance institutions for equitable benefit sharing and 3) raise awareness on the New Conservation Area Laws and empower the community to protect their natural resources.

The Mangalane community successfully contributed to reducing the number of illegally killed rhinoceroses within SGP from 15 animals in 2015 to zero by the end of February 2017. This achievement has been largely a result of the positive relationship forged between SGP and community to engage on issues affecting both parties.

Mozambiquan conservation area laws allow communities to benefit at least 20% of wildlife fees paid annual by game reserves to the government. The funds have been paid annually into village accounts and have been set to accumulate to establish a community project. The community has also received an annual subsistence meat quota from SGP to support household food needs.

Our project has helped to increase household income by initiating a small grants project that focuses on developing community small business enterprises namely; goat rearing, small Paõ bread baking, steelworks and vegetable gardens. The businesses are positively impacting 50 households from the five villages of Mangalane. About 60% of the participants are women headed households allowing them to earn extra income by trading their existing skills.

To enhance knowledge and build skills in small business and land use planning, ten community-elected delegates participated in mentorship field trip to visit community owned, joint ventures and co-managed businesses in South Africa. The sites visited include; a commercial community maize farm who export some of their produce to Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland; a herding-for-health project to learn how to manage livestock while managing the environment, develop grazing plans, and manage mobile abattoir and cattle auctions. The community participants also experienced wildlife-based tourism through a visit to the Sabi Sands Wildtuin, a high-end tourism facility that sources eco-tourism skills from the local community; and the Kruger National Park which invoked great enthusiasm for investment in wildlife economy.

Strengthening governance to ensure democratic, transparent and equitable benefit sharing and decision-making is a fundamental component of our project. Following a learning-by-doing approach, the community elected village committees from the five villages are instrumental in liaising with SGP and negotiating the needs of the community, in particular issues relating to access to water and human-wildlife conflict. Subsequently, SGP agreed to facilitate water access for cattle inside SGP and support the construction of a water trough for the cattle in the community. We further supported the upgrading of community cattle kraals (enclosures) after a tropical cyclone that destroyed reserve fencing allowing predators to escape into the community.

While increasing benefits from wildlife, the cost of living with wildlife must be reduced. A total of 21 community-selected individuals from the five villages participate in the village police programme. Their main responsibility is to reduce the costs of living with wildlife, support community safety and fostering positive attitudes towards wildlife. Through the village police, we learnt that if we want communities to help protect wildlife, community assets, like livestock also require protection from roaming wildlife.

Led by our WWF Mozambique office, workshops were held with government to recognise the illegal wildlife trade as an offense punishable by law. This resulted in the revision of the Conservation Area Laws with participants from Attorney-General, Customs and Administração Nacional das Áreas de Conservação (ANAC) and the subsequent development of awareness raising materials placed at airports and ports in Mozambique. In June 2017, the project witnessed an effective implementation of the New Conservation Area Laws where one person was apprehended and prosecuted to 12 years imprisonment, while two are awaiting trial.

None of the work and the achievements made would have been possible without the daily support of WWF's community champion, Yvonne Ubissi. As a young woman, Yvonne is a strong voice for the community, participating in the development of the Greater Kruger Management Plan, raising awareness about how illegal wildlife trade affects rural communities and advocating the need for partnerships with communities, in particular the Mangalane community to address illegal wildlife trade or poaching.