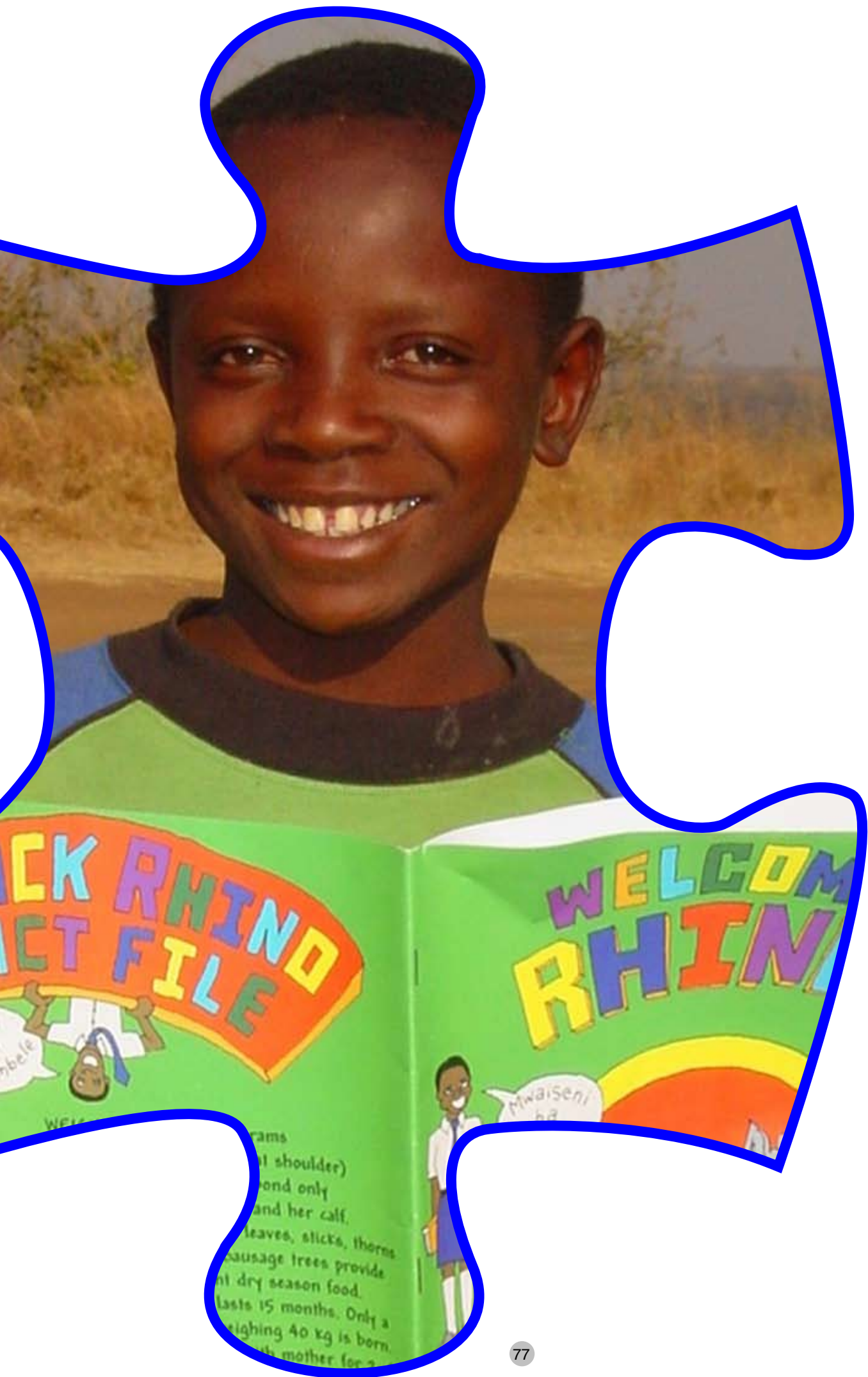


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DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF
RHINO CONSERVATION ISSUES

SUMMARY OF GUIDELINES FOR: DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF RHINO CONSERVATION ISSUES

G. Daconto and R. du Toit

Local communities often have limited or negative perspectives on rhino conservation which need to be improved through awareness programmes, as an essential part of pro-active measures to prevent poaching and, in some cases, to maintain space for rhinos. School awareness programmes near rhino areas can be very effective in imparting better understanding of, and sympathy towards, the conservation needs of the species.

For the general public, a special effort needs to be made within each national rhino conservation strategy to overcome misunderstandings, which often encourage poaching. Misunderstandings that are typically perpetuated by the media are that rhino horn is far more valuable than it actually is within Africa, and that it is used as an aphrodisiac.

Tackling these misunderstandings, and developing national prestige in the conservation of rhinos as “flagship species”, requires careful awareness campaigns that are directed towards specific audiences and which take account of local sensitivities. Media materials that are produced elsewhere will not necessarily achieve the desired effect within a range state.

The national rhino conservation strategy should tackle specific needs to sensitize officials who play roles that are directly or indirectly influential in rhino conservation. Such officials include senior policy-makers, land-use planners, and members of the judiciary. Also, international development and funding agencies need to be made aware of the risk that their large-scale programmes (which are often agriculturally orientated) may unnecessarily foreclose options for species such as rhinos to enhance rural development through compatible, wildlife-based operations.

8.1 Why public awareness is important for rhino conservation

As explained in Section 2.1.1, the rationale for rhino conservation goes beyond mere environmental or ethical considerations. Rhinos can become tangible economic assets and their conservation can become a catalyst for rational and sustainable use of large areas and their natural resources. At the same time, rhino conservation often requires complex technical and societal choices which bring into focus not only the core tenets of biodiversity conservation, but also issues of land use, the structure of the wildlife and tourism industry, the cooperation amongst a wide section of national stakeholders (government, local authorities, communal farmers, private land owners, technical experts, etc.) and, increasingly, international cooperation.

Invariably, public perceptions strongly influence these choices. Rhino conservation managers therefore need to be increasingly responsive to and able to influence the wider attitudinal context within which they operate. Awareness and communication activities can pursue a range of goals and targets: long term behavioural and attitude change, knowledge dissemination, augmenting public dialogue and participation in choices at local and policy levels, development of skills, etc. A similar wide range of means to deliver communication and awareness messages exists (Table 3).

Table 3: Types of environmental education activities (after Foster-Turley, 1996)

Setting	Means of delivery	Rationale and implications
Formal	Formal education system and school curricula, teachers' training and extra-curricular activities.	Long-term behaviour change and awareness-raising.
Non-formal	Organised groups like youth groups and clubs, extension systems, churches and other community associations.	Can link to area-based conservation and development programmes. Can be delivered through government extension or park outreach services. Amenable to train-the-trainers design.
Informal	News media, community theatre, internet.	Influence general public perceptions. Need specific target identification.

8.2 Developing awareness at a local community level through formal and non-formal systems

The development of proactive rather than purely reactive measures to protect rhinos from poaching activities depends heavily upon community attitudes towards their conservation. Communities surrounding wildlife areas generally have limited access to educational resources, so opportunities for them to educate themselves on conservation issues are minimal to non-existent. Providing these communities with relevant information, in an appropriate and accessible form, is a powerful conservation tool.

School children, who make up a large proportion of rural communities, are particularly open to new ideas and different ways of looking at their environment and so make a good target audience for the rhino conservation message. Targeting school children in effect targets all households as it is rare to find a rural home without a school-age child. Children take home the lessons they learn at school and can stimulate interest in the broader community. The implementation of an awareness programme in schools shows support and recognition for the education efforts already being made within the community, so the personnel involved in rhino conservation are seen as being helpful to the community rather than merely having an unpopular policing role.

The materials provided need to be made durable, practical and as relevant as possible to the target audience bearing in mind that teachers will be more likely to use these materials consistently if they fit the school curriculum. Imaginative design of the materials can make them useful for teaching several subjects, thereby reinforcing rhino conservation messages. For instance, rhino population growth rates can be explained in a way that is relevant to arithmetic classes, and rhino myths and legends can be present in a way that is relevant to English comprehension. A pictorial style, using photos for realism and cartoons for amusement, will help make the materials engaging to young and non-English reading students. A set of rhino awareness materials (known as “The Rhino Cards”) was developed under the SADC RPRC for use in primary schools (Anderson, 2003), and a more advanced booklet was also developed for secondary schools (Anderson, 2004).

Schemes for creating an economic stake for communities in rhino conservation (see Section 3.9) constitute obvious platforms to raise awareness, with opportunities for community meetings, hand-over ceremonies, and visits by VIPs to promote these schemes. Even where a direct economic linkage is not established, projects to re-stock rhinos should not be hidden from local communities but should instead be fully explained to them. For instance, in the first phase of the black re-introduction project in North Luangwa (Zambia) local traditional leaders were brought to see the rhinos in their pens before release, and were invited to give names to them. If stray rhinos have to be captured in farming areas adjacent to rhino reserves, the capture operations will usually attract local residents. These gatherings provide opportunities to inform the people of the reasons for the operations, the facts of dehorning, horn transmitter implantation, rewards for information on poachers, etc.

8.3. Rhinos and the media

Rhinos have always attracted considerable media and public attention, especially in developed countries where media systems are pervasive. Media attention to charismatic, endangered species such as rhinos has certainly helped to shape international perceptions of conservation issues. However, the products of the international media are sometimes based on perceptions and value systems which may not be directly relevant to the local context of conservation efforts and to the critical choices that stakeholders need to face in their immediate circumstances. Thus there is a risk that some of these products (films, articles, books, etc.) will aggravate local sensitivities and misinform, rather than enlighten, stakeholders on pertinent issues. Stereotypic or clichéd media interpretations include the frequent exaggeration of the value of rhino horn (which can be high in pharmacies of the Far East, when dispensed in minute quantities in traditional medicines, but does not have even a tenth of this value within trading networks in Africa).

Thus, when developing public awareness programmes of relevance to rhino conservation within the SADC region, crucial requirements are:

- to identify the specific target audience(s);

- to carefully sift through the large body of existing media products to find those rhino-related materials that are accurate and appropriate to the target audience(s), rather than unquestioningly using what is readily available;
- if necessary, to produce new materials that have relevance and impacts within the local audience(s). The SADC RPRC took a step towards this objective by producing a TV documentary entitled “Rhinos for Africa”, which is available in VHS and DVD formats for non-formal awareness activities.
- **Development and aid agencies.** The fact that rhinos can act as “flagship species” for conservation programmes and for wildlife-based rural development may be overlooked by agencies that are funding large rural programmes in the SADC region. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs showed, in funding the first phase of the SADC RPRC, that rhino conservation can be logically incorporated in development support programmes. A development programme, such as one designed to impose veterinary disease controls (notably for foot-and-mouth disease) or one to expand conventional agriculture, may unnecessarily foreclose options for rhino conservation so those options have to be communicated to the programme’s designers and promoters. Sometimes a development or aid programme may be neutral for rhinos but, with better understanding of how that programme should be designed or implemented, can become strongly positive for rhinos with no greater effort or expenditure. For instance, educational aid programmes can incorporate rhino awareness materials such as those that were designed within the SADC RPRC to facilitate the teaching of school curricula. Thus it will often be appropriate for the regional rhino conservation community to make special efforts to liaise with the representatives and consultants within development/aid programmes, even if those individuals and their agencies are not directly involved in wildlife issues.

8.4. Raising awareness within special target groups

Metapopulation management strategies, the design, negotiation and implementation of regional collaboration and rhino exchange programmes, and the promotion of a conducive policy framework within which to harmonize conservation and land-use increasingly bring national and international dimensions to the forefront of rhino conservation. These processes require the involvement of a wide cross-section of key stakeholders in government and public service. Therefore, rhino conservation managers should pay special attention to raising awareness of the policy dimensions of rhino conservation amongst these critical audiences. Special target groups include the following.

- **Policy makers and senior personnel in key ministries (environment, agriculture, land, etc.).** Since this group sets the agenda in the crucial policy areas of biodiversity conservation, land-use, rural development, and tourism, a specific effort needs to be made by the rhino conservation community and by rhino management authorities to inform these politicians and senior officials of some of the strategic issues that are outlined in this manual. For this audience, rhino issues should not be presented within a narrow conservation context, but should rather be discussed in the wider context of resource use and development implications. The presentation of the key messages to this group might be via SADC fora and sub-regional groupings, national rhino conservation conferences and targeted media products.
- **Prosecutors and magistrates.** Lenient sentences for rhino poachers undermine the effectiveness of conservation and law enforcement agencies (Section 6.8). Since the leniency sometimes arises from lack of appreciation of damage caused by poachers, magistrates and public prosecutors should be targeted in awareness-raising campaigns, such as workshops and specific communication products, focussing on the rationale (including economic factors) and goals of rhino conservation.