

SADC REGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR RHINO CONSERVATION

**SADC Regional Rhino Conservation Strategy
2005-2010**

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SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION
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ABOUT the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation:

The Programme is funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate General for Development Cooperation (Project AID 5064).

The Programme is contracted to CESVI and implemented through a regional consortium which comprises:

- The Secretariat of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)
- IUCN-ROSA (The World Conservation Union - Regional Office for Southern Africa)
- The IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group
- WWF-SARPO - (World Wide Fund for Nature - Southern Africa Regional Programme Office)
- CESVI (Cooperazione e Sviluppo)

The **Programme goal** is to contribute to maintain viable and well distributed metapopulations of Southern African rhino taxa as flagship species for biodiversity conservation within the SADC region.

The **Programme objective** is to implement a pragmatic regional rhino strategy within the SADC region following the acquisition of sound information on, firstly, the constraints and opportunities for rhino conservation within each range state and secondly, the constraints and opportunities for rhino metapopulation management at the regional level.

DISCLAIMER

The information, opinions and materials presented herewith do not necessarily reflect the official views of any of the organisations involved, including the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, SADC, CESVI, IUCN-ROSA, WWF-SARPO, AfRSG or governments of SADC member countries.

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SADC REGIONAL RHINO CONSERVATION STRATEGY 2005-2010

GOAL

Southern African rhinos maintained as flagship species for biodiversity conservation and wildlife-based economic development, within viable and well distributed populations.

OBJECTIVE (for five-year time horizon)

By 2010, regional populations of each subspecies increased by 25% above their levels in 2005 and showing significantly wider distribution within the region as well as significantly greater economic relevance to the people of the region.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

SADC commitments and instruments

The implementation of the strategy must be guided by, and must reinforce, SADC policies and initiatives with particular reference to the following:

- SADC Treaty and Declaration (Chapter 3, Article 5);
- SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement (and the Implementation Plan for this Protocol);
- the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP).

The regional strategy for rhino conservation should not stand alone; it should serve as precursor to, and ideally be integrated with, other such strategies that involve regional collaboration in the protection and sustainable use of key species and ecosystems.

Sustainable use

Within the SADC region, rhinos are respected as charismatic and ecologically important elements of global biodiversity, justifying the attachment of high moral importance to their conservation. In addition, the legitimate commercial value of rhinos must be maximized within the region. This can be achieved through their sustainable use, both non-consumptively (through ecotourism) and consumptively (through trade in live animals and limited safari hunting).

Any new or contentious initiatives involving consumptive use or trade in rhinos or their products should be sensitive to the views of the various rhino management authorities and key stakeholders within the region. The SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation (SADC RPRC) is a framework within which intraregional debate on any such policy issues can be facilitated and condensed into regional perspectives.

All sustainable-use approaches for rhinos must clearly demonstrate that they are to the advantage of the species and of biodiversity in general, and are also to the advantage of the communities and local institutions that are actively conserving rhinos. This requires transparency in the derivation and management of financial profits from economic activities that involve rhinos. Strong control mechanisms must be established to prevent over-exploitation or illegitimate activities.

Sustainable use options exist within the private sector and the public sector, as well as within community-based resource management programmes. Stakeholders from this full spectrum have to be given roles in rhino conservation, with the allocation of rights and benefits from sustainable use being directly related to the conservation responsibilities, costs and achievements that pertain to each group of stakeholders.

International support

Opportunities for commercial wildlife ventures do not exist, to an extent sufficient to meet all rhino conservation costs, within the full range of rhino conservation situations within the region. Therefore, international support for rhino conservation remains crucial. While retaining their right to make management

decisions that reflect their national aspirations as well as the regional policy consensus, the SADC range states recognize the fact that rhinos are global assets.

The balance between local and international rights and responsibilities in rhino conservation must be reflected in businesslike arrangements for international support. In particular, the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation must explore innovative, incentives-based funding mechanisms that will encourage local stakeholders to participate in rhino breeding projects.

Principles of conservation biology

Notwithstanding the need to ensure a return of economic benefits to the people who conserve rhinos, biological management considerations must be paramount in decisions that pertain to rhino re-distributions, utilisation options, etc.

The following subspecies are recognized in different ranges within the SADC region (unless further reputable research indicates otherwise) and should not be interbred:

Black rhinos: *Diceros bicornis bicornis* (south-western, or “desert” subspecies), *Diceros bicornis minor* (south-central subspecies), *Diceros bicornis michaeli* (eastern subspecies).

White rhinos: *Ceratotherium simum simum* (southern subspecies), *Ceratotherium simum cottoni* (northern subspecies).

These subspecies should not be redistributed beyond their natural, historical ranges unless compelling conservation reasons to do so are demonstrated.

Each species will need to be managed as a metapopulation, i.e. with some deliberate management to exchange rhinos between the various sub-populations as required to avoid loss of genetic diversity (through inbreeding and genetic drift) and to avoid small-population demographic problems (skewed age/sex ratios, etc.).

Every introduction process should follow “best practice” as recommended by the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group.

- New breeding groups should be established with at least 20 founders in each (i.e. animals that are, as far as is known, unrelated and capable of breeding).
- Areas for rhino breeding should, whenever possible, be selected on the basis of their potential to support populations of over 100 rhinos in each area.
- Where this is not possible, realistic plans must be considered in advance of restocking, and implemented thereafter, to prevent inbreeding and overstocking, through translocations and exchanges of rhinos.
- For each subspecies, regional metapopulation sizes of over 2,000 animals are ultimately intended and the various sub-populations must be managed as elements of these regional metapopulations (i.e. breeding animals should periodically be exchanged between the sub-populations in order to ensure gene flow within the regional metapopulation of each subspecies).
- A population growth rate of at least 5% per annum will be expected for each population, failing which the reasons for inadequate breeding must be professionally investigated. If this professional assessment identifies feasible measures to overcome breeding constraints, such as translocating rhinos elsewhere, then such measures should be firmly implemented in the interests of the species.
- The population growth rate will inevitably fall as a population approaches the ecological carrying capacity of the area that it occupies. Therefore the objective of increasing rhino numbers at the maximum growth rate can only be achieved through pro-active management that keeps the population density consistently below ecological carrying capacity.
- Captive or semi-captive breeding of rhinos has nowhere achieved the reproductive rate of well-managed wild populations. Because this approach has not proven to be cost-effective, it should not

be given precedence over any opportunities for free-range breeding within the region that could be developed with the same breeding stock and resources.

OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES

Output 1: Mechanisms maintained and enhanced for regional collaboration in rhino conservation.

Activity 1.1: Streamlining regional coordination mechanisms within the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation, under the auspices of the SADC Directorate for Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR).

This entails the facilitation (by SADC FANR, by rhino management authorities in each range state, by donors and by other stakeholders) of the functioning of the SADC RPRC coordination office, of the Rhino Management Group (encompassing the major range states), of the Rhino Recovery Group (made up of the minor range states), of the Rhino and Elephant Security Group and of any other relevant regional groupings or initiatives. The SADC RPRC coordination office must act as an “honest broker”, if so requested, in any bilateral arrangements between range states (e.g. involving the allocation of rhinos from one state to another).

Activity 1.2: Advising on and facilitating national coordination mechanisms.

Each range state requires a clear policy framework integrated with a national rhino strategy (generally with a five-year period of implementation, outlining the key policies, goal and intended outputs of the national rhino conservation effort), and annual rhino action plans (allocating stakeholder roles, responsibilities and resources to agreed rhino management activities within a defined time frame). These policies and plans will need to be reviewed by stakeholder committees under the overall supervision of each national rhino management authority. In some situations, there may be more than one rhino management authority (e.g. South Africa), or the strategies may involve more than one range state (e.g. the Rhino Management Group). Thus some variation of coordination mechanisms will be necessitated by the different circumstances within the region. The SADC RPRC must be geared to provide technical support, as required, via the various coordination mechanisms. To maintain continuity and technical capacity, the appointment of national rhino co-ordinators (also known as focal points or range states representatives) should be on a consistent basis. The SADC RPRC can provide guidelines for their roles.

Activity 1.3: Networking existing and new rhino conservation projects.

A variety of rhino conservation projects are underway within the region, or will be initiated before 2010, in a number of sites and with a number of support agencies and stakeholders. Synergy must be created between these projects by sharing their expertise and other resources, and by spreading innovations and experiences between them. Some projects or programmes constitute “centres of excellence” for certain skills or approaches and the SADC RPRC can facilitate the transfer of these abilities to other sites.

Activity 1.4: Linking the Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation with other regional conservation and development initiatives.

The establishment of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) within the SADC region provides some specific sites for bilateral or trilateral cooperation between countries. This cooperation can be highly conducive to rhino conservation (e.g. where one of the countries is in a position to facilitate a rhino re-introduction project within an adjoining park in another country) and the rhinos can in turn enhance a TFCA, as tourism assets. The SADC RPRC is a model that can be promoted for other regions, notably East Africa.

Output 2: Innovative approaches to rhino conservation identified and encouraged within the region.

A particular emphasis must be placed on maximizing the relevance of rhinos (as flagship species that thrive in semi-arid habitats) to economic development in agro-ecological settings that are more conducive to wildlife production than to other forms of livelihood.

Activity 2.1: Identifying and encouraging opportunities for commercial and community-based wildlife production systems that sustainably integrate rhinos, to the economic benefit of the stakeholders in those systems.

Rhino conservation under poaching pressure has conventionally involved a sanctuary approach (preserving small populations in fortified, state-managed enclaves with high dependency on donor funds). However, the diversity of commercial and community-based approaches to wildlife production that has arisen in southern Africa creates the challenge and the opportunity to integrate rhinos more widely and more sustainably within these production systems.

Assessment of the current and potential economic value of rhinos within these varied production systems is a complicated issue that requires ongoing investigation.

Custodianship schemes, whereby rhinos are allocated to private operations in order to spread the economic burden of their conservation without transferring any ownership rights, have proven successful in parts of the region. The constraints and opportunities that are inherent in these private custodianship schemes must be demonstrated for consideration elsewhere in the region.

Community-based custodianship schemes are also appropriate in some areas but require further socio-economic analysis, elaboration of relevant policy, capacity-building, development of appropriate management structures, and incentives-based funding (Activity 2.2).

Since rhinos require large areas, production systems into which they can be integrated will be of a spatial scale that will often necessitate broad land-use planning and advocacy of biosphere reserves, conservancies, etc.

Activity 2.2: Identifying and encouraging innovative mechanisms for the transfer of international support to rhino conservation (and to biodiversity conservation in general) according to criteria and conditions that induce local stakeholders to maximize rhino population growth.

Internationally, there has been growing interest in incentives-driven conservation approaches involving local stakeholders, instead of using international conservation funds merely for direct species management interventions or for supporting government conservation agencies. The opportunities for commercial and community-based schemes for rhino management (Activity 2.1) must be reinforced by external funding support, but along businesslike lines rather than as unleveraged grants.

Activity 2.3: Promoting co-management arrangements that constitute “win-win” partnerships between different stakeholders in rhino conservation.

As rhino “intensive protection zones”, sanctuaries and rhino re-introduction projects are developed in state-protected areas, the substantial support that is required from international NGOs and other partners must be meshed with the control mechanisms and manpower of the official wildlife management agency for each area. Supporting agencies are not always willing to merely hand over funds, equipment, etc., without being granted opportunity to play some ongoing role in the management of the project. On the other hand, an official wildlife management agency does not wish to see its functions taken over or excessively diluted by an external agency. Some regional examples of projects that have achieved the appropriate balance can be identified and considered as models for other projects, albeit requiring local adaptation.

Custodianship arrangements that constitute joint ventures between state agencies and landholders in rhino breeding are relevant to Activity 2.1. In addition, joint ventures between established commercial operators and inexperienced or under-resourced land occupiers can also be important for rhino conservation. With several land reform programmes underway in the region, involving some major rhino breeding areas, the SADC RPRC must be a source of advice on appropriate mechanisms for co-management of rhinos and other wildlife resources. Such mechanisms may also become relevant in state areas that include substantial human populations (notably wildlife reserves in Mozambique and Angola).

Output 3: Biological management of rhinos facilitated at a regional level.

Limitations of capacity within the SADC RPRC preclude the involvement of this programme in all aspects and in all sites of rhino conservation within the SADC region. Thus an emphasis must be placed on activities that have significant regional dimensions, such as allocations of rhinos from one range state to another, and the sharing of relevant expertise, equipment and information within the region.

Activity 3.1: Supporting viable projects for rhino re-introduction or for the consolidation of relict populations.

The SADC RPRC must continue to facilitate rhino re-introduction or consolidation projects by providing technical support to plan and implement such projects and by helping to broker agreements under which rhinos can be allocated.

Activity 3.2: Mobilizing key elements of technical support for rhino monitoring and management.

Some highly specialized requirements for rhino conservation expertise and equipment arise and cannot always be met at a national level, especially in range states that have just begun to initiate rhino population recovery projects. These requirements range from informally acquired rhino tracking and bushcraft skills, to “high-tech” skills (such as veterinary inputs, experience in radiotelemetry devices, piloting of aircraft used in low-level rhino surveillance, database management, design of rhino surveys, habitat assessments, etc). The SADC RPRC must act as a coordinating mechanism to identify and mobilize the required expertise on an intraregional basis, within the financial constraints of the programme.

Activity 3.3: Facilitating standardized reporting on the status of rhino populations and ensuring professional review of such information, to guide management decisions.

The gathering and analysis of demographic data and other information relevant to rhino management is a specialized activity, especially for the larger populations. Without appropriate indicators of population performance, validly compared between different areas, it will be impossible to implement the adaptive management that is necessary to attain the objective of this strategy. Adequate confidentiality must be ensured for rhino population data.

Output 4: Capacity for rhino conservation retained and enhanced.

Activity 4.1: Promoting the roles of individuals who have informally-acquired bushcraft skills (including tracking abilities) for rhino conservation.

Professional rhino conservation involves a harmonization of varied expertise ranging from “low-tech” to “high-tech”. Some forms of expertise (notably bushcraft skills) are commonly overlooked during staff recruitment in preference to formal schooling and other experience. To undertake Activity 3.2, the SADC RPRC will need to build up a network of individuals who can provide this bushcraft expertise in the context of rhino management. Such individuals will require additional experience in relevant modern methods (e.g. radiotracking, patrol reporting, use of GPS devices, capture of rhinos) that must be integrated with their existing skills. This network must be available not only to provide inputs to field operations (Activity 3.2) but to also undertake training and mentoring of relevant field personnel.

Activity 4.2: Networking professionals in spheres of rhino conservation (in addition to biological management).

The central thrust of sound biological management gives rise to requirements for the mobilization of relevant regional expertise as envisaged under Activity 3.2. In addition to those forms of expertise, the holistic SADC RPRC regional strategy for rhino conservation requires professional inputs to activities as diverse as community awareness programmes and law-enforcement intelligence. Some of these inputs can be provided by the NGOs that are associated with the SADC RPRC, or by the programme’s subsidiary groups (Rhino Management Group and Rhino and Elephant Security Group). Other inputs must be derived from “centres of excellence” in the form of existing projects within the region that have developed areas of speciality in rhino conservation.

Activity 4.3: Maintaining, updating, expanding and disseminating the range of tools for rhino conservation that have been developed within the SADC RPRC.

During the pre-2005 phase of the SADC RPRC, a range of technological tools (software and hardware) was developed and a number of manuals were written for these tools, as well as for other aspects of rhino monitoring and protection. To maximize the relevance of these tools and training materials within regional rhino conservation, they have to be kept updated and available for rhino managers who require them. While updating and refinements will be required, such activities should not be allowed to become never-ending reasons to delay the cost-effective delivery of functional tools. Tools that have not proven to be cost-effective, practical and in significant demand by rhino managers will not receive ongoing support from the SADC RPRC. Wherever possible, proven tools and materials must be mainstreamed within staff training curricula or integrated within the less formal field training that is envisaged within Activity 4.1.

Output 5: Awareness of rhino conservation increased within the region.

Activity 5.1: Promoting awareness of rhino conservation at a local community level.

For communities living with or adjacent to rhino populations, community awareness can be tackled particularly effectively via schools programmes, especially at primary schools where the largest (and most impressionable) sector of the population can be accessed. In community-based schemes, local employment must be maximized within the structures that are established for monitoring, protecting and managing the rhinos.

Activity 5.2: Undertaking awareness programmes at national and regional level.

The principles of this regional rhino strategy must be articulated to a broad audience, particularly at a political level, through judicious use of the media and through presentations at relevant meetings, conferences, etc.