

## The LOCAL Initiative A new direction for rhino conservation

Rhino conservation efforts in the Lowveld link the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority with private sector wildlife operations and NGOs operating in the Lowveld. This linkage must be extended to include community components under partnership arrangements that help to ameliorate political tensions over land-use, and which promote sustainable rural development.

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The South East Lowveld (SEL) of Zimbabwe comprises about one-fifth of the country. The large SEL conservancies were established, using rhinos as 'flagship species', to convert these areas from cattle ranching into wildlife production. Over the past decade, the SEL has undergone significant land-use changes due to socio-political transformations. Today, it is a mosaic of land uses including communal areas (mainly used for subsistence cropping and livestock rearing), resettlement areas, cattle ranches, large conservancies, irrigated small- and large-scale commercial agriculture and state protected areas.

These transformations make it essential that conservation strategies for the SEL be re-designed in recognition of the new socio-political realities. An innovative approach is urgently required to build stronger partnerships and to achieve better coordination between all stakeholders. The coordination

effort must range from immediate anti-poaching efforts to longer term socio-economic approaches to convert rhinos into economic assets for new public-private-community projects, and to deliver tangible benefits to these 'producer' communities.

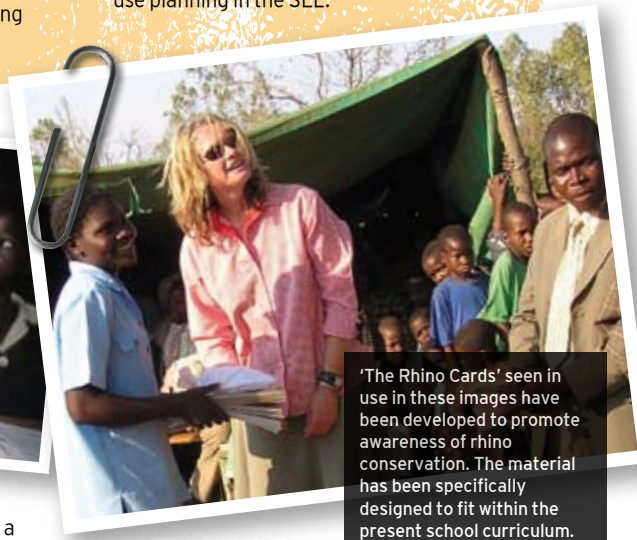
Within these objectives, rhinos will continually be emphasized as flagship species for new partnership arrangements that demonstrate an incentivised approach to the conservation of ecosystem goods and services. These objectives are ambitious and will require substantial funding. To achieve this, the strategic approach being taken by the LRT is to

The **Lowveld Conservation And Livelihoods (LOCAL)** Initiative is an institutional framework proposed by the Lowveld Rhino Trust (LRT) to tackle these priorities, through five main objectives:

- 1 To establish a broad stakeholder-based forum for discussion and planning of natural resource management in the SEL. The proposed LOCAL Forum would have a similar rationale to the Laikipia Wildlife Forum in Kenya.
- 2 To facilitate new private-community partnerships at the interface between rhino conservancies and their neighbouring communities, to promote diversified livelihoods that are anchored in sound business principles.
- 3 To initiate a Public-Private-Community Partnership for community involvement in a National Park (Gonarezhou N.P.). This would facilitate the re-introduction of rhinos into this area, where rhino distribution would be increased while concurrently satisfying local community interests.
- 4 To establish a rhino production incentive scheme for defined communities adjacent to rhino areas. Under this scheme, the production of rhino calves will be directly linked to the level of assistance provided to these communities in the form of school support projects. The communities' obligation in this business-like approach will be to demonstrate efforts in rhino conservation awareness programmes and in revealing poaching risks.
- 5 To enhance spatial planning of the Lowveld, to avoid unnecessary loss of rhino range through misguided land allocation decisions. The focus here will be on developing a locally maintained Geographical Information System (GIS) that will organise spatial data relevant to land-use planning in the SEL.



ALL IMAGES: LOWVELD RHINO TRUST



'The Rhino Cards' seen in use in these images have been developed to promote awareness of rhino conservation. The material has been specifically designed to fit within the present school curriculum.

emphasise the validity of wildlife-based land-uses in a rural development context. This focus will become particularly relevant as global climate change is predicted to reduce the agricultural production potential of the SEL.

A funding proposal for the LOCAL Initiative has been submitted to a major international development agency. While a response is awaited, the LRT is undertaking preparatory work within the limits of the funding that is currently available for this work.

### Grants

Since March 2010, Save the Rhino has given £16,722 to the LRT: £10,000 from our core funds, €5,000 from Dublin Zoo, £2,000 from the Mackintosh Foundation, and £523 from the Crisis Zimbabwe appeal. Our thanks to everyone who made this possible.