

THE PROBLEM WITH MOZAMBIQUE



Up to the 1970s, large numbers of black and white rhino roamed throughout Mozambique; today only the few occasionally crossing the country's border with South Africa's Kruger National Park remain.

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Rhino populations in Mozambique became extinct due to poaching, and now South Africa's rhinos face the same fate. According to the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) and the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), Mozambican nationals have slaughtered up to 1,862 rhinos in South Africa since 2010, as well as thousands of elephants in Tanzania and Mozambique.

Last year, 1,004 rhinos were poached in South Africa, with 606 of these killings taking place in Kruger National Park, which shares a long (356km) shared border with Mozambique and the country's Limpopo National Park. According to the IRF and EIA, Mozambican poachers are thought to be involved in 80–90% of rhino poaching incidents in the Kruger-Limpopo National Parks. Despite over 125 Mozambican poachers having been arrested in South Africa's Kruger National Park in recent years, the pace of rhino poaching shows no sign of declining.

The rapid escalation in the black-market price of rhino horn has led to the involvement of well-organised criminal syndicates, involved in trafficking other illicit

commodities. The huge sums of money involved facilitate corruption and entice young unemployed Mozambicans into criminal activities.

According to a report produced by WWF Mozambique to develop a strategy to combat rhino horn trafficking, the main causes leading to the increase of elephant and rhino poaching and illegal trafficking are complex and interlinked. Some of the main factors include:

- Poor capacity of state law enforcement
- Low appreciation of nature in Mozambique and lack of funding for conservation
- Vulnerable borders
- Lack of institutional co-ordination
- Loopholes in the current legal and judicial framework
- Increased connectivity and ease of communication
- Human population growth within the parks and reserves

At an international level, Mozambique is a signatory to CITES and the Convention for Biological Diversity and the country also made commitments at the recent London Declaration on Illegal Wildlife Trade. At a regional level, Mozambique and South Africa signed a Memorandum of Understanding in April 2014 aimed at strengthening the co-operation between the two countries in matters regarding the protection and enforcement of biodiversity.

Also in April, the Mozambican parliament adopted a new law regarding the management of conservation areas. When this new Conservation Areas Act comes into effect, persons convicted of illegally killing protected species will face prison sentences of 8–12 years.

However, at present there is not enough capacity within the judicial system to deal with wildlife crime. In reality, prosecutors lack the necessary expertise in environmental issues. On the ground, ranger numbers in national parks are incredibly low. There is also a lack of infrastructure and equipment needed to deal with poaching incidents. Detecting and seizing illegally trafficked goods at border points are generally conducted by the customs authorities; however current technology is insufficient to detect products such as ivory and rhino horns.

A wide range of interventions are needed to tackle Mozambique's role in the poaching crisis. Along with high-level government involvement, support is needed from the private sector, NGOs, donors and civil society. Going forward, the strategy produced by WWF Mozambique has a number of recommendations including:

- Reinforcing law enforcement in conservation areas, ports and airports with improved training, equipment and technology
- Introducing a special police force that deals with the protection of natural resources
- Improving legislation and the judicial system, including training court officials so they can appropriately sentence wildlife crime
- Raising awareness at political level, with public statements emphasising the negative impacts of poaching on the country's international reputation, economic development, national security and biodiversity. Also targeting awareness campaigns in priority areas where poaching incidents are frequent
- Introduction of community-based initiatives, to allow local people to be involved in and benefit from managing wildlife

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IMAGE SARAH NELSON

