

Mkomazi's mechanics of rhino conservation

In July 2015, the Vocational Training Centre opened for its first intake of pupils, near Mkomazi National Park. The Centre is a collaboration between Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary, and a wide range of charitable trusts, foundations, and other civil society organisations working in Tanzania.

Lucy Fitzjohn | Project Administrator, Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary

To find out more about how education is helping local people in the area through wildlife-based job opportunities, I caught up with current student, Julius Nicodemo. Julius grew up in Tanzania's Arusha region in Northern Tanzania. When he was 17 years old, he joined the Vocational Training Centre with hopes to train to become a mechanic and machine operator. I asked Julius about daily life at the mixed school.

"I board at the school so we all wake up at 6.30 in the morning and we do a morning run for about half an hour around the school. Afterwards we go back to the dormitories to shower, change into school clothes and get ready for the day ahead. For breakfast we drink tea at around 7.30 with

all the other students in the dining area. We start lessons at 8 o'clock.

"On Monday my first lesson is mathematics, which I study for around an hour and a half. Next we study computers. This normally is learning how to use a computer and the learning

programmes of Excel, PowerPoint, and Microsoft Word. Lunch break normally lasts for an hour and then we return to the classroom until 3.30. We start sport at 4 o'clock. Supper is at 7 o'clock and we normally do our homework. Everyone then goes to bed at 10pm."

Julius believes his classmates are inspired to protect rhinos as a result of Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary's involvement in the Centre. "They understand now the risks of the rhino numbers dropping and that we need to preserve them. Breeding the rhinos is an important part of this. The rhinos bring this attention to this area and then, because of them, we have this college."

BUS IMAGE MATT BROOKER



Left: Julius helps look after the tractors, motorbikes, and the camp's bus used for tours by school children (below)

Alongside providing vocational education, Mkomazi National Park also has an environmental education programme, called Rafiki Wa Faru (or "Friend of the Rhino" in Swahili) teaching young children living in the area about rhinos and the threat of poaching. Julius tells me: "Most kids in the villages haven't ever seen a black rhino or wild dogs. By giving them all this opportunity to see these animals up-close, they inspire the children to help."

Long-term, Julius sees the future of the region's economy tied to the black rhinos: "Without black rhinos in Tanzania, the tourists wouldn't want to come and visit. And Mkomazi's rhinos are being protected and because of this, they are protecting us!"

He is optimistic that he and his peers will find employment when he completes his course. "The teachers and mechanics provide a very good education on how machinery works. So one day we can get jobs. The school has provided a higher level of education than other schools in Tanzania, and so it has given me more practical skills that will help with finding work."

Julius, like other classmates, has also had the option of taking up work experience within Mkomazi National Park, putting his new knowledge to practical use in mechanic workshops. "I also am able to help in the holidays with working in Mkomazi at the workshops there. This has given me the chance to improve my skills by working in the Kisima Workshop to fix cars, motorbikes and tractors."

In the future Julius says "I would still like to be working in mechanics; hopefully I would have started my own business by then."

Mkomazi National Park's rhino population was severely hit by poaching in the 1970s and 80s, but with the help of translocating rhinos – including zoo-bred animals – we're slowly but surely building the population up. The habitat here has the right vegetation and space for a much larger population. Our hope is that with continued support and hard work, both Tanzania's rhinos and people living in the region, like Julius, continue to thrive.



Julius, like other classmates, has also had the option of taking up work experience within Mkomazi National Park, putting his new knowledge to practical use in mechanic workshops

