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conservancies in  
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## NO RHINO CONSERVANCY IS AN ISLAND

By taking a collaborative approach through Kenya's Association of Private Land Sanctuaries (APLRS), we can maximize our collective capacity across a landscape, and in doing so be more efficient, both in terms of budgets, but also—and most importantly—in terms of our operational capability.

**Sam Taylor** | Chief Conservation Officer, Borana Conservancy

**F**undamentally, from a conservation perspective, those who have taken on the responsibility of protecting rhino in Kenya are working towards achieving the goals laid out by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in the national strategy. Black rhinos in Kenya are all state-owned, so the private sector lends support as 'custodians' or 'guardians' of the national population.

It is the meta-population of Kenya that is important here—in the private, community and public sectors. If one sanctuary is experiencing net losses in its rhino (be it for biological or poaching reasons) then the conservation objective is jeopardised for everyone.

The APLRS was formed in 1990, at the behest of the KWS. It serves as a liaison between the private and public sectors and its mandate is to ensure that the national strategy is being followed in the private sector.

Recently, thanks to grants from Save the Rhino, Chester Zoo and USFWS, we have employed a full-time Administrator, who is based in the rhino office in KWS headquarters and ensures that the private sector is meeting its obligations towards rhino conservation in Kenya.

More than that, the APLRS is a forum; an opportunity for rhino conservationists to get their heads together to discuss the challenges and successes they are having. With this increased contact with each other comes a spirit of collaboration and a greater understanding of the issues as a whole.

Increasingly, members are discovering that they possess assets that complement the shortfalls of their counterparts, and vice versa. As such an attitude of collaboration has begun to prevail, where the collective conservation assets of the group maximises each individual's capacity.

Of course, this collaboration means that we must all retain similar operating standards, and this is not always easy, with different conservancies having different

resources, capabilities or focuses. This is where communication is essential—and a thorough understanding of what we are all trying to achieve collectively is necessary. Ultimately, this means we are one entity in the fight to save rhino, and as such should be more formidable for it.

The greatest form of collaboration has come in the form of intelligence analysis, mentorship, and joint tactical training and operations that APLRS members have received through security experts 51 Degrees. Until recently, intelligence networks and information gathering was informal and not strategically applied. However, with funding from Save the Rhino, Chester Zoo, USFWS and the Anna Merz Rhino Trust, in the past two years APLRS members have invested in training on how to work with intelligence sources, build networks, analyse information from across the region with the authorities and manage a central database.

This information complements KWS's established intelligence network and is playing a significant role in addressing the poaching crisis in the Laikipia and northern Kenya landscape, and at a national level. Vital information on movements of known poachers, dealers and traffickers is gathered and analysed, enabling conservancies to proactively put in place the necessary security measures. Continued investment in intelligence gathering and analysis is needed to assist conservancies and the police in predicting poaching outbreaks before they occur, and in apprehending poachers and dealers. Every interception means one fewer dead rhino.

When intelligence we can act on is received, thanks to improved training, our rangers are all now at the same standard, are compatible in terms of skillset and equipment, and can operate together in a consolidated operation, sharing assets. Together we have seen a marked drop in poaching over the last few years as teams operate better together—sharing experiences, expertise and assets. We are no longer islands and, despite the varying conservation models within the APLRS, we can now operate together, and meet the challenges we face as one.