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New film details wrenching impact of illegal rhino horn trade on families

by **John C. Cannon** on 27 June 2019

- *A new short film, titled [Sides of a Horn](#), looks at the impacts of the illegal trade of rhino horn on a community in South Africa.*
- *The 17-minute film follows two brothers-in-law, one who is a wildlife ranger and another who contemplates poaching as a way to pay for his ailing wife's medical care.*
- *A trip to South Africa in 2016 inspired British filmmaker Toby Woskow to write and direct the short feature, which was publicly released June 25.*

Communities around the world often pay a hidden toll in the global wildlife trade. Across its 17 minutes, [Sides of a Horn](#), a new film released June 25, aims to capture that part of the illegal trade.

The story takes place in South Africa. No country, we are reminded, has a larger rhino population — or a greater gap between the wealthy and poor. When a rhino approaches the national park boundary near an impoverished township, the stark choice it presents threatens to tear a family apart.

Dumi, played by South African actor Welile Nzuzi, is a wildlife ranger in the park, and he's waiting for his salary to pay for medical treatment that his ailing sister, Lindiwe, played by Dimpho Motloutsi, desperately needs. But her husband, Sello, played by Sherlton Marema, is sure that a week will be too long, and he wants to go after the rhino. Its horn could fetch \$3,000, setting up a confrontation between the two men.

"I know the lives of my people are more valuable than the lives of wild animals," Sello tells Dumi in Zulu, the language spoken throughout much of the film.

But Dumi reminds Sello that the loss of another rhino means more resources flowing out of their country. On the international market, the filmmakers point out, the horn might be worth \$300,000.



Sello must decide whether to pursue the rhino that has approached the national park boundary near the township where he lives with his family. Image © Whirlow Park Pictures.

“They are stealing from our land to make the criminals a world away richer,” Dumi says.

A 2016 trip to South Africa inspired British filmmaker Toby Woskowiak to understand the decisions local community members must make, often between crippling poverty and hunting valuable endangered species like South Africa’s rhinos, with life-or-death consequences.

“A nonsensical demand for rhino horn in parts of Asia is fueling a poaching war across Africa,” Woskowiak said in a [statement](#). “International crime syndicates are preying on desperate people living near protected areas, and offering them a fraction of the overseas profits to poach from their own wildlife. Meanwhile, proud anti-poaching rangers are putting their lives on the line to protect the animals.”



The protagonist in the film, Dumi, is a wildlife ranger in the national park. Image © Whirlow Park Pictures.

In 2018, poachers killed 769 rhinos in South Africa, according to [Stop Rhino Poaching](#), a nonprofit group. Those statistics don't measure the damage to communities, however. Woskow and the film's backers, including Virgin Group founder Richard Branson, see addressing the issues that these communities face as critical to staving off the extinction of Africa's rhinos in the next decade.

"The most common mentality in fighting this crisis is 'buy more guns, kill more poachers,'" Woskow said. "By humanizing the men and women on the ground, and showing the complexities of their situation, I hope our film makes people consider more sustainable solutions."



The short film, written and directed by Toby Woskow, from executive producer Richard Branson, was an international co-production between U.S. companies Broad River Productions, Whirlow Park Pictures and Frame 48, alongside South Africa's The Televisionaries and YKMD Productions. Image and caption © Whirlow Park Pictures.

Banner image from the film of a rhino in South Africa © Whirlow Park Pictures.

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