

# Preparing for rhino relocations **by supporting local communities**

Rhino translocations may seem easy, having been done successfully many times with standard protocols in place and increasingly safer drugs used for tranquilizing rhinos. But there is one component in particular that is essential for successful translocations: support from the people who will be living locally to the rhino recipient sites.

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In 2008, as part of the Indian Rhino Vision (IRV) programme (which began in 2005), it was decided that rhinos would be translocated into Manas National Park from Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaziranga National Park in Assam. To support these efforts, awareness campaigns were launched in the fringe villages of Manas National Park, providing information about the translocation project for the people living in the local communities. These campaigns proved successful. For one rhino in particular, the impact was obvious.

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After being relocated into Manas National Park, the rhino had strayed out almost 50 to 60 km east, leaving the sanctuary of the Park for more than two weeks. Recapture was difficult, taking several weeks to organise logistics and security. However, many local people around supported the capture team with food, water, and reports on which direction the rhino was moving. Local villagers also offered temporary shelter to the team, which ultimately enabled them to rescue the rhino and return him to the National Park. Without the assistance and collaboration of people living around Manas, it would have been much harder to bring this rhino home.



In our new phase of the IRV programme (which kicked off in 2022), we aim to translocate at least 30-40 rhinos to the vast, connected habitats of the Laokhowa and Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuaries. Our team, in partnership with Aaranyak, an Assam-based NGO, has initiated community outreach and support activities, to help communicate the project to people surrounding the sanctuaries. The projects aim to ensure local people benefit from rhino conservation, and empower them to be a vital line of defence in safeguarding the released rhinos from poaching.

So far, following consultation with local people and forest and police officials, we have provided communities with solar street lights along the boundary of the Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary. This not only provides additional light for people's everyday lives, but also helps them to more easily see any wild animals (including rhinos) that might stray into the village. To further garner community support, we have been working with young people living in the communities, offering training on organic compost-making and lemon cultivation. Interestingly, the planting of lemon trees provides an additional benefit, in that they reduce human-wildlife conflict by deterring animals such as elephants from entering villages.

These programmes take time, funding and knowledge to achieve success. But the results are well worth it: communities with different livelihood options, engaged in local wildlife conservation projects, and able to live alongside healthy, thriving rhino populations.

