

Empowering people to engage in conservation

To build knowledge and positive attitudes about our shared ecosystem, one approach is to invest in community conservation outreach that links to specific conservation outcomes. This type of outreach plays a vital role in fostering environmental stewardship and sustainable practices at a grassroots level.

Stephen Gachagua | Conservation Education Officer, Mazingira Yetu, Borana Conservancy

It involves actively engaging with the people living in nearby communities, empowering individuals to become active participants in conservation efforts. In turn, community-outreach initiatives help to create a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the environment.

By organising nature walks, local dialogues and education activities in schools, participants can develop a first-hand understanding of their local ecosystem's value and vulnerability.

A key aspect of community conservation outreach is raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity, ecosystem services and the impacts of human activities on the environment. Through outreach educational programmes, workshops, and interactive events, community members gain knowledge about conservation principles and the need

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for sustainable practices. This awareness helps individuals make informed decisions and adopt behaviours that minimise their ecological footprint.

Moreover, community outreach programmes foster a sense of connection and belonging to the environment. By organising nature walks, local dialogues and education activities in schools, participants can develop first-hand an understanding of their local ecosystem's value and vulnerability. Bringing these experiential learning opportunities into our strategy for the Mazingira Yetu Education Programme has, so far, helped us engage more deeply with learners, cultivating a strong appreciation for the environment and motivating individuals to protect it.

Engaging communities in conservation efforts also involves collaborative problem-solving and decision-making. By facilitating and encouraging community dialogues, participatory workshops, and partnerships with local organisations, we can empower individuals to contribute their knowledge, perspectives, and traditional wisdom towards conservation initiatives. This inclusive approach ensures that local communities are actively involved in shaping and implementing sustainable solutions that are culturally appropriate and effective.

In conclusion, community conservation outreach is a powerful and necessary tool for engaging and empowering local communities in environmental stewardship. By raising awareness, fostering a sense of connection, facilitating collaboration and offering skills-development opportunities, programmes can create a foundation for sustainable practices and the protection of natural resources.

Ultimately, these initiatives help build resilient communities that value and actively contribute to the conservation of our shared environment. At Mazingira Yetu, this is what we aim to do.





Establishing elephant exclusion zones for rhinos

Elephants are a keystone species, playing a crucial role in maintaining an ecosystem's health and functioning. Their presence contributes to seed dispersal, vegetation management, and overall biodiversity.

Dr Dominic Maringa | Head of Conservation and Wildlife
Lewa Wildlife Conservancy

However, as Lewa's elephant population has increased (a result of increased insecurity in northern Kenya since the 1980s and land fragmentation in southern and eastern Kenya), they are rapidly changing Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's plant life. In turn, this is impacting the food available for species like black rhinos.

Since 1995, to reduce the impact of the increasing elephant pressure, Lewa has created 'exclusion zones'. The zones are relatively small areas that are separated from the wider landscape using electric fences. They prevent access to elephants (which can freely migrate to find forage elsewhere) and provide an environment where woody vegetation can grow and recover. Importantly, these zones have become areas of high productivity for black rhino food.

The black rhino is an iconic species for Lewa and their seasonal dietary responses are complex. They are mixed feeders throughout the year with no preference for acacia, especially during the wet season. Exclusion zones not only provide black rhinos with various types of woody vegetation, but harbour herbaceous layers, a vital black rhino dietary component.

To maximise wildlife dynamics and maintain ecological balance, it is important to ensure that the exclusion zones are interconnected in a fair distribution across the landscape. This helps facilitate the movement of animals around the Conservancy, preventing species from concentrating in specific areas, which could lead to intra-species fighting and ecosystem degradation. By avoiding wildlife hotspots, conservation efforts can be spread more evenly to support a healthy diversity of species across the landscape.



Beyond acting as a food source for black rhinos, exclusion zones bring other benefits. As a diverse, unique and protected area within a much larger landscape, the zones can act as carbon sinks, reduce habitat degradation and attract other endangered species, including leopards and lions.

Whilst the creation of zones is important, carefully managing them is also essential. Rotating exclusion zones can be a useful approach to dealing with elephant pressure, allowing new areas to recover and regrow, and supporting the needs of elephants too.

Of course, elephants are an iconic species and across the African continent, they remain endangered. Conserving their population remains important, and strategies like the creation of exclusion zones are vital to enable successful coexistence with elephants, while still achieving the desired vegetation and biodiversity across a landscape to sustain other species.

To date, Lewa has created 42 exclusion zones, covering 10,152 acres (approximately 11% of the Lewa-Borana Landscape).