

# LEARNING BY DOING AND EXPERIMENTALIST GOVERNANCE WITH COMMUNITIES AND RHINO POACHING

BRIAN CHILD



Over the past four years, Brian Child and a number of graduate students from the University of Florida have been working with the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) to develop field based training in community conservation in South Africa and Mozambique. In 2013, Leandra Clough from the MDP programme pioneered a community situation analysis in Mozambique using participatory mapping as well as governance and livelihood surveys. In 2014, Alexandra Sprague and Antonieta Eguren consolidated these methods using tablet computers and ODK software in the well-known Makuleke community, while Dave Pittman developed a module for civic training of youth and Jessica Mortimer tested the reliability of community environmental monitoring.

During this process, we have partnered with a private reserve in Mozambique (Sabie Game Reserve) and the neighbouring Mangalana community to provide a pilot training site for community governance. Following Leandra's description of the community and its challenges, we worked with and trained trainers (i.e. the new SAWC CBNRM team) to organize the community into five villages. These villages all received money from trophy hunting on Sabie Game ranch, and we are designing systems for the participatory and

transparent governance and use of these benefits.

In a partnership with WWF-South Africa, and with funds from the UK government, we have been able to employ and train twenty young men and women as "community police". We are using this experience to develop management systems for the community to monitor and protect its wildlife and trees, livestock and water sources. With destitution and hunger prevalent in

this post-conflict community, we are also encouraging the community police to check up on at-risk households on a regular basis. Obviously, we are monitoring the impacts of benefits, participation, governance, policing and so on, as we use this experiential learning process to develop a series of courses that the SAWC team can use to train the many park managers that pass through their classrooms each year. This last year saw a terrible drought in southern Africa, which placed the people of Mangalana under severe stress. With the help of WWF and the UK government, we implemented a food-for-conservation programme in which people cleared firebreaks and built cattle kraals to protect against lions in exchange for food packs. Many of these people are surviving by making and selling charcoal, but we still need to address this problem.

Our data shows that the majority of people in the five villages like the new programme, trust their leaders with money, have benefitted from this money, have a positive attitude towards their community police and a much improving appreciation of wildlife. It is intriguing that over 90% of the people we surveyed do not like rhino poaching, given that the area was a major conduit for the poaching of rhino in the nearby Kruger National Park. In 2013, over 600 rhinos were poached in Kruger, with over 80% of the incursions being from

Mozambique including his area. In 2015, some 12 rhinos were poached in Sabie Game Park, and the horns of another 12 or so transited through the area, with traders arriving in pickup trucks with bags of money to collect them. However, in 2016, only three rhino have been lost, and since June there has only been one rhino incident, which was a group of poachers exiting Kruger through the community. In other words, the amount of rhino poaching in the area has declined dramatically.

There is never one silver bullet to such successes. Much credit goes to the determination of the private sector wildlife managers on Sabie Game Park, and the boots-on-the ground and air cover provided by an international NGO. However, there is also no doubt that the community is playing a significant role in reducing rhino poaching because of benefits and improving relationships with the private game ranch. We are rapidly learning that the perception that local people are the perpetrators of rhino poaching is false. Our surveys indicate that local people do not like rhino poachers. Certainly, mothers do not like their sons being criminalized, locked into alcohol or drugs, or shot by game rangers. However, the rhino poaching gangs are well-organized and, like criminal gangs in many inner cities, are powerful and disruptive. Boots and guns are unlikely to stop illegal wildlife trade. Our experience suggests that providing members of the local community with security and alternative livelihood options might be more effective and less prone to human rights abuses.

These are fascinating questions that can only be answered by tracking this experiment in local empowerment and governance. Fortunately, funding will allow three members of the SAWC/WWF training to begin to address these by taking up Masters programmes through Stellenbosch University.

Brian Child is associate professor of Geography.