## Buffer Zones Management

### Project background

**Species of focus:**  
- Rhinoceros

**Country/Countries:**  
- Nepal

**Site(s):**

Buffer zones of Chitwan National Park and Bardia National Park and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve

**GPS coordinates:**

No data

**Project web site:**

No data

### Summary description:

The Buffer Zone concept was promulgated by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in Nepal in 1993 for certain protected areas to encourage the local communities to be more reliant on economic activities within such a zone rather than illegally exploiting the resources inside National Parks. The second purpose was to make the communities more aware of wildlife conservation since it is in their best economic interests to reduce poaching of rhinos and tigers which can make tourism profitable.

At Chitwan National Park, home to approximately 300,000 people, a Buffer Zone Management Committee was established as well as 21 User Committees and 1,700 User Groups. At Bardia National Park, a Buffer Zone Management Committee was established as well as 15 User Committees and at least 226 User Groups. Some 50 % of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation's (DNPWC's) protected area gross revenue from tourism is distributed to the local communities through these committees and groups. In mid-2012 the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation substantially increased the entry fees to those visiting Chitwan National Park, Bardia National Park and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, increasing revenue partly to enable a larger amount to be paid to the local...
One way that the communities around Bardia National Park help to protect rhinos is to contribute voluntarily over 100 youths to patrol the borders of Bardia National Park and this has become more efficient due to the better coordination between the park and the community. In Chitwan National Park, 22 user committees provide voluntary anti-poaching units of between 9 and 13 people for each unit. In 2011 and 2012 local farmers and villagers became more experienced and committed, spotting outsiders coming into the area possibly attempting to find out about rhinos to poach.

There has been a large amount of support from NGOs. One of the largest Nepalese NGOs, the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), has been instrumental in their support including efforts to improve people’s livelihoods, safeguard people and crops from wild animals and investment to protect rhinos that wander into the Buffer Zone. NTNC also plays an important role in funding informants in the Buffer Zone to help catch rhino poachers and traders. NTNC set up a fund in 2005 and 2006 of NPR 5,000,000 (then worth US$ 69,444), the interest on which is used to pay informers to patrol outside the Park boundary and to help maintain anti-poaching vehicles. For example, in the north of Badia's National Park's Babai Valley NTNC and the DNPWC have set up anti-poaching units from the local communities. In one month alone, October 2012, these units helped to confiscate 41 guns from poachers in this area. Families who give up guns were supported with alternative livelihoods.

NTNC has additionally put considerable effort into educating the community on the importance of wildlife to their future wellbeing and encouraging those people living close to the Park boundary to plant crops unpalatable to rhinos and other wildlife (such as mint, citronella and camomile) as a deterrent to the farmers’ fields.

**Land management type:**

State managed land outside protected area

**Product(s) in trade:**

- Horn

**Product value at site level:**

Poachers and middlemen who had been arrested in 2008 and 2009 gave information on prices. There was one exceptionally high price, when in the latter part of 2009 a gang of about seven poachers killed a rhino with a .303 rifle. The gang removed the 1kg horn and sold it to a trader in Kathmandu supposedly for 1,400,000 Nepalese rupees (US$ 19,178). A businessman from Kathmandu paid NPR 200,000 (US$ 3091) to the poachers for a horn in 2008.

**Types of poachers:**

Gangs from local community
Gangs from outside
Details of 'other' poacher type:

Army and ex-army individuals, and gangs of tribal people (such as the Soncha people) contracted by external traders.

Is the project implemented by an external party?

Yes

Implementing organisation:

Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation but with significant support from international and national NGOs.

Name of funding organisation(s):

Income generated from tourism and support from NGOs.

Community organisation(s) involved:

Not specified.

Was the project established specifically to engage communities in combatting IWT?

Partly (one of a number of objectives)

Year the IWT project or component started:

1996

Project status is currently:

Ongoing

Case study information is up to date as of:

2012

Approach taken to community engagement and its
Community members benefit from tourism as a conservation incentive
Community members are provided with livelihood alternatives in lieu of wildlife use
Human wildlife conflict addressed as a way to decrease incentive for revenge killing of wildlife

**Details of 'other' community involvement approach type:**

No data

**Financial:**

Chitwan Park revenue rose from NPR 30,831,199 (US$ 398,885) in the financial year 2002/3 to NPR 58,793,101 (US$ 871,655) in 2007/8 (DNPWC 2004, DNPWC 2008) with tourist numbers rising from 57,033 in 2005 to 113,486 in 2008 (DNPWC 2006, DNPWC 2009). Half of this Park revenue was allocated to the Buffer Zone Committee and the associated user committees and groups.

Communities are also benefiting indirectly. For several years some of the local communities in the buffer zones, such as those around Chitwan’s tourist hub of Sauraha, have been increasing their own tourist enterprises and thus receiving more direct tourist revenue. Often they present evening entertainment of traditional music and dancing, and they also give walking tours of their villages. Next to Bardia National Park, in the southwest buffer zone, some of the people living quite close to the headquarters have set up homestays where visitors, mainly from nearby India, can come and stay in their homes inexpensively, enjoying a rural setting and a peaceful atmosphere. The homestay owners have developed their skills in cooking, housekeeping and hospitality, with training from NGOs such as NTNC. They are thus receiving increased income from tourism, enabling them to improve their standard of living, buying more bicycles and building houses with more modern materials.

**Non-financial:**

The Buffer Zone Management Committee for Chitwan allocates 30 % of its revenues for conservation projects to protect wildlife, 30 % for building schools and roads, 20 % for income-generating projects such as poultry and pig farming, handicrafts, and tailoring enterprises, and 10 % for education (also 10 % for committee administration). The money allocated for education is often spent on projects to instruct the communities about the importance of protecting wildlife, especially rhinos. One strong argument is that if rhinos and other endangered animals are poached, then fewer tourists will visit the Park, reducing Park revenue for the Buffer Zone. Community instructors visit schools to teach the youth the importance of conservation and also to recruit youth into anti-poaching units for patrolling the Buffer Zone. Ecoclubs are also encouraged in the schools. In 2008 and 2009, the major conservation projects included erecting fences to protect crops from wild
animals that stray out of Chitwan NP and improving the management of grasslands for rhinos. Other projects support the youths who voluntarily patrol in the Buffer Zone to arrest poachers and to report illegal weapons.

**The community engagement project is:**

No data, possible values:
- Stand alone initiative
- Part of a wider effort to combat wildlife crime in the area

**Details of wider response:**

No data

**Do community guards carry firearms?:**

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

**Do community guards conduct joint patrols with formal guards?:**

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

**Are community guards unarmed, without armed backup?:**

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

**Do community guards have rights of arrest?:**

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
Do community guards have specialist training:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

Are community guards covered by military law in the case of someone being killed or wounded?:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

The community has traditional authority to sanction poachers from within their community?:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

What “rules of engagement” for working with communities does the case study address?

Include local people in wildlife monitoring and enforcement networks
Ensure wildlife generate benefits, both tangible and intangible, for local people

Other key principles for engaging communities emerging from this case study:

No data

What has been the impact on poaching/IWT?

Poaching levels have decreased

What has been the impact on wildlife populations?
What has been the impact on wildlife populations?

Not known/not documented

Further detail about the impact on poaching:

In 2008 there were about 400 rhinos in and around Chitwan NP of which 7 rhinos were shot. All except one were killed inside the Park. In 2009 10 rhinos were poached, 7 inside the Park and 3 in the Buffer Zone. Official figures of 17 rhinos poached in 2008 and 2009 are considerably lower than those from the previous seven years when the official average number killed per year was just over 17.

What worked and why?; What didn’t work and why?

What worked about the community engagement approach and why?

All the factors responsible for improving rhino protection are directly related to general improved communication and cooperation among the work of the NGOs, Army, Parks Department, tour operators and the Buffer Zone User Groups.

It is imperative that the communities living around Chitwan and Bardia National Parks continue to receive significant benefits, for which they are accountable from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and NGOs to sustain their motivation and efforts towards protecting rhinos. In 2008 and 2009 the Buffer Zone Management Committees and the poor people they represented received more benefits to put greater efforts into wildlife conservation than in earlier years, especially around Bardia National Park, resulting in a significant decline in the number of rhinos illegally killed in Nepal. However, if close cooperation and transparency amongst the stakeholders does not continue and the competency of the anti-poaching activities in and around the two Parks falters, then rhino poaching will increase due to the high value of the horns in the East Asian markets.

What did not work and why?

In the initial years from 2001 - 2006, the Buffer Zone concept was not successful as it was not effective in distributing benefits particularly to the poor. Buffer Zone Management Committees received little revenue due to declines in tourism and committees were dominated by the relatively wealthy and well-educated. Problems were linked to wider challenges in this time period including a breakdown in law and order throughout Nepal. Importantly, in the initial phase of the project, the local communities were not particularly helpful in preventing poachers and traders from moving in and out of the Buffer Zone areas contiguous to the two Parks.

One problem that still needs to be resolved is that of hand-outs. There has been a tendency amongst Park and NGO staff to give the communities handouts without enough


accountability for conservation action. Some are now realizing that a more organized approach to conservation and development as opposed to revenue hand-outs would improve co-operation and success further.

Further comments or additional information about community engagement:

No data
Year of publication: 2013

Journal/Book/Series details:
Panchyderm

Download/Access URL:

Additional source(s) of information:
No data

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Links