

# Lessons learned in the implementation of endangered species specific strategies: Midterm Review of the Kenya Black Rhino Strategy (2012–2016)

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## Abstract

A Midterm Review of the implementation of the “Conservation and Management Strategy for the Black Rhino in Kenya (2012–2016)” was undertaken between December 2014 and January 2015. This was prompted by serious concerns on its implementation and escalating cases of poaching in the first two years. The review was done through a combination of standard project review methods, visits undertaken in all rhino sanctuaries, and 62 persons interviewed. The Midterm Review report and draft action plans were later subjected to a stakeholder’s workshop where a final action plan was developed and adopted. The Midterm Review indicates there has been average to good progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the current Kenya black rhino Strategy although most were undertaken in an uncoordinated manner. Further the Review indicates that efforts to halt the escalation in poaching have been fairly successful in 2014 compared to 2012 and 2013 thus resulting into an increase in black rhino number over the same periods. Given that the Strategy still enjoys support of all the stakeholders including major funding institutions interviewed, it means an opportunity to reinvigorate the remaining period of the strategy implementation exists.

## Résumé

Un examen à mi-parcours de la mise en œuvre de la «\*Stratégie de conservation et de gestion du rhinocéros noir au Kenya (2012–2016) \* » était entrepris entre décembre 2014 et janvier 2015. Cela a été provoqué par de graves préoccupations sur sa mise en œuvre et l’intensification des cas de braconnage pendant les deux premières années. L’examen a été effectué grâce à une combinaison des méthodes standards d’évaluation de projet, des visites réalisées dans tous les sanctuaires de rhinocéros, ainsi que 62 personnes interviewées. Le rapport d’examen à mi-parcours et le projet du plan d’action en ten suite été soumis à un atelier des parties prenantes où un plan d’action final a été élaboré et adopté. L’examen à mi-parcours indique qu’il y avait eu des progrès moyens à bons envers la réalisation des objectifs énoncés dans la stratégie actuelle du rhinocéros noir du Kenya bien que la plupart aient été entrepris de manière non coordonnées. En outre, l’examen indique que les efforts de mettre un terme à l’intensification du braconnage ont eu du succès en 2014 par rapport à 2012 et 2013, ce qui s’est traduit par une augmentation du nombre de rhinocéros noirs sur la même période. Étant donné que la stratégie bénéficie toujours du soutien de toutes les parties prenantes, y compris les grandes institutions de financement interviewées, cela signifie qu’il existe une possibilité de revigorer la période restante de la mise en œuvre de la stratégie.

## Background

Kenya holds the third largest black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) population in Africa and is the stronghold for the eastern subspecies (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*) currently conserving just over three quarters (76.7%) of this subspecies. The Kenyan metapopulation currently has one *Key 1* population, four *Key 2* populations and four *Important 1* populations meaning that its conservation is of continental significance to the IUCN AfRSG. The population suffered a drastic decline in the early 1970s to mid-1980s mainly due to poaching that was followed by a period of stability and slow growth rate in the early 1990s to 2000 mainly due to biological management issues. The 2001 revised Strategic plan recognised the need to boost biological management and enhanced efforts in this bore fruit with numbers increasing more rapidly at a national level as a result between 2001 to 2012. Although poaching picked up again in 2009 (Fig 1), its impact on the net growth rate in Kenya was not obvious until 2013 when stagnation due to poaching was recorded for the first time in 15

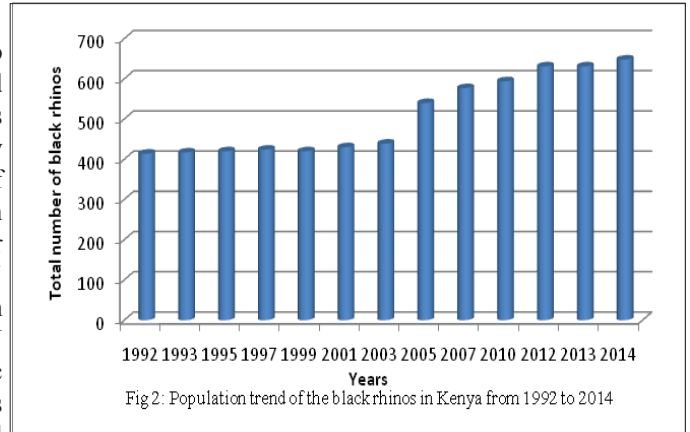


Fig 2: Population trend of the black rhinos in Kenya from 1992 to 2014

Protection Zones (IPZ's) such as one outside Ngulia rhino sanctuary enabled surplus rhinos in sanctuaries above their carrying capacity to be moved into the Tsavo West IPZ. However, inadequate dedicated rhino monitoring staff resulted in an increase of rhinos in the speculative guess category from 38% in 2013 to 48% in 2014. Rhino conservation in Kenya is guided by national strategies, with the current efforts being consolidated in the "Conservation and Management Strategy for the Black Rhino in Kenya (2012–2016)" (Kenya Wildlife Service 2012). The framework of the Strategy is summarized below:

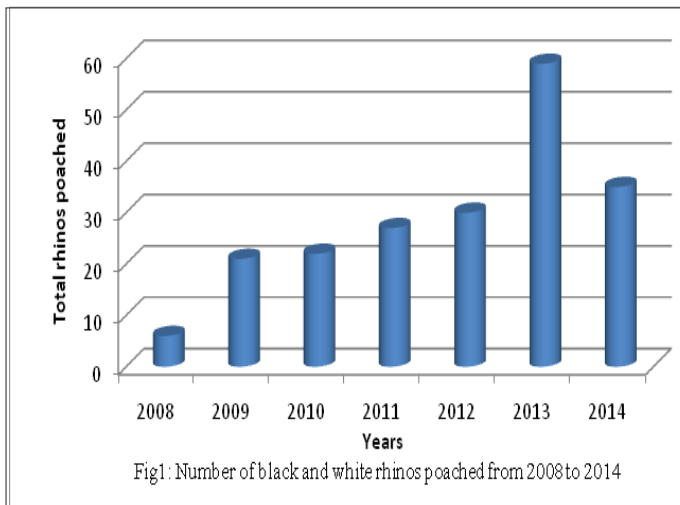


Fig 1: Number of black and white rhinos poached from 2008 to 2014

years in 2013 due to the renewed demand in rhino horn especially in South East Asia countries like Vietnam. However, by the end of 2014, an increase was recorded again (Fig 2).

One of the current challenges in Kenya is to find suitable secure areas of habitat to invest surplus rhinos that should be removed to keep established populations productive. Efforts in establishing specific Intensive

**Overall Goal:** To increase the black rhino numbers by at least 5% per annum with poaching reduced significantly and additional areas secured for population expansion to reach a confirmed total of 750 rhinos by the end of 2016.

The Strategy's overall goal is to be achieved through the following six Strategic Objectives (SO):

1. Reduce illegal killing of rhinos to less than 1% per annum and significantly reduce illegal trade in rhino horn and derivatives;
2. Maintain a standardized monitoring and reporting protocol to provide information for efficient protection, meta-population management and programme implementation;
3. Achieve and maintain a 6% per annum growth rate in well-established sanctuaries and a minimum of 5% per annum at national level to attain 750 black rhinos by 2016;

4. Secure new areas and make policy interventions for rhino population expansion;
5. Raise awareness on the plight of the rhino to gain public and corporate support globally;
6. Establish a coordination framework and enhance capacity for effective implementation of this Strategic Plan.

The principle behind the 2012–2016 Strategy is to minimize poaching, enhance awareness in the rhino horn consumer countries, establish new rhino areas and ensure effective implementation of the Strategy by involving all stakeholders in the newly established Rhino Steering Committee (RSC), while sustaining monitoring for both security and biological management. Previous black rhino strategies in Kenya have only been reviewed at the end of the plan period and have not been reviewed midway. Given the overwhelming backing the current Strategy received from stakeholders, and the formation of a RSC to oversee the implementation of the Strategy, this has created a shared responsibility for the success or failure of the Strategy. Following the successful launch of the Strategy there have been serious concerns on its implementation together with escalating levels of poaching in the first two years, prompting the RSC to commission this Review.

The main purpose of the Midterm Review was to evaluate progress towards the goal and objectives for the period 2012–2014 and use the evidence collated from the various stakeholders to provide recommendations for the remaining period (2015–2016) of the Strategy implementation. A combination of standard project review methods, such as goal-based, decision-making, goal-free and expert judgment were used to generate information for the Review. This was complimented with the basic process of gathering information such as desk-top review, field visits and interviews (either directly or indirectly) with specific focus on the indicators of the Strategy outputs (targets). The target audience that generated information used in the Review was from various stakeholders in rhino conservation who included but were not limited to AfRSG, KWS, Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries, Narok County Government, local communities and the partner/funding institutions based in and out of Kenya. The draft Midterm Review report was then subjected to a review by a four-member select team of the RSC and finally presented to the full RSC for comments and adoption as it was commissioned by the RSC.

## *Key outcomes of the Review*

Field visits were made to all rhino sanctuaries in Kenya between 8 December 2014 and 20 January 2015 where a total 62 persons were interviewed. Efforts to halt the escalation in poaching have been fairly successful. This was achieved with the commendable support from the Kenyan Government to KWS in accessing the relevant intelligence information through synergies with other law enforcement agencies at the start of 2014. This resulted in a drop in poaching from losing 4.8% of Kenya's rhinos the previous year to 3.2% in 2014, despite both years recording higher than the targeted 'less than 1%' in SO1. The net result of this was a net 2.7% growth rate in 2014 compared to nil in 2013, again despite both years recording lower than the targeted 5%-6% in SO3. Consequently the confirmed national black rhino population as at the end of 2014 was 648 as opposed to the projected number of 721 by 2014. Good progress was recorded on SO2 where 71% of the rhino areas maintained a GIS database; 86% submitted monthly reports as well as maintained a master ID file; 79% had at least 60% individual rhinos in their respective population with identifiable records, while all rhino areas submitted annual status reports. However, in 64% of the rhino areas the rhino monitoring staff were inexperienced due to the high number of rangers recruited in 2013–2014 as a direct response to the poaching crisis. The rangers were recruited from the National Youth Service and trained for a relatively shorter period as an urgent measure to get them in the field. Four new technologies (InstantWILD Satellite camera and ground sensors, digital radio, infrared lighting and a drone) were tested out of which three were implemented in six areas (Gell 2013; Gordon 2014). The drone was tested in three areas but not implemented due to national security concerns.

Progress on SO4 was mixed with two Intensive Protection Zones (IPZs) being strengthened with increased staff and one of the two being operationalized (Wandera and Khayale 2009). Similarly, two new rhino areas were set up while one was delayed due to administrative logistics (Tsavo East National Park Research Center 2011), and another two stalled due to raising insecurity and technicalities of the fence alignment respectively (Annon undated). However, the development of a community rhino sanctuary as envisaged in the Strategy was on schedule. The Task Force to identify suitable habitats over the long term had

not been established and no progress had been made on the formation of the East African Rhino Management Group (EA-RMG) since its inaugural meeting of 2009. However there are plans to have a meeting to try to get this going later in 2015. The Strategy launched in 2012 was attended by representatives of local rhino stakeholders and a soft copy of the meeting was uploaded on the KWS website for wider accessibility, however, not so much progress has been recorded under SO5. While locally, three significantly important achievements were recorded i.e. a summit on “Comprehensive Response to Rhino Poaching Crisis” that was hosted by AWF; a high profile visit by Yao Ming, a retired Chinese basketball celebrity, hosted by APLRS/KWS and the New Wildlife Act (2013) was enacted. The new wildlife Act increased the fine upon conviction of rhino related offenses from a maximum of KES 40,000 to a minimum of KES 20 million or life imprisonment or both. This enactment of this Act was as a result of sustained lobbying of the relevant Kenyan Ministries and Foreign Embassies. The enactment of the Wildlife Act (2013) was followed almost immediately by a judicial dialogue to sensitize the judiciary on the need to implement the new Act to the fullest. Progress on SO6 was below par as out of the four committees namely Area Rhino Management Committee (ARMC), Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS), RSC and Rhino Executive Committee (REC) only one was fully functional, another 25% functional, with the remaining two being non-functional. This was largely due to the fact that the Secretariat has not been formed to direct the activities of the RSC.

### *Lessons learnt and recommended way forward*

The importance of a midterm review cannot be underestimated as it provides an opportunity to get the project back on track, where it was deemed to be going off track. This Midterm Review indicated there was average to good progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the current Kenya Black Rhino Strategy although most were undertaken in an uncoordinated manner. While the Strategy and its guiding principle of minimizing poaching, establishing new rhino areas and ensuring a functional coordination mechanism was still viable, the Review has highlighted areas and activities that require jump-starting and fast-tracking during

the remaining period of the Strategy implementation. Clearly the growth rate and the absolute number of black rhino, however; is not yet on track to achieve the targeted goal of 750 black rhinos by end of 2016. While this can be attributed largely to the increased poaching pressure that rhino conservation in Kenya and Africa as a whole is facing, the fact that the rhino fraternity in Kenya is not working as a unit under the Rhino Steering Committee umbrella should not be overlooked.

The suggestion to revise the Strategy goal was considered but eventually not upheld as part of the Review. Instead two recommendations were made in light of upholding the current overall goal. The first is the need for concerted efforts to be set up to sustain the various anti-poaching measures notably creating synergies with other law enforcing agencies thus improving the intelligence network; improving infield supervision of rhino monitoring and protection staff; improved reward systems; improve vetting of staff recruited/deployed in rhino monitoring and protection units; and deployment of sniffer dogs to major entry/exit ports in Kenya put in place in 2014. The second recommendation is to enhance the 2014 growth rate to at least 5% per annum for the remaining period.

These recommendations are based on the fact that loss of rhinos through poaching and generally through other natural causes had a direct impact on the overall goal. They are viewed as being realistic since Kenya was able to reduce loss through poaching from 4.8% in 2013 to 3.2% in 2014 and improved the growth rate from nil in 2013 to 2.7% in 2014. However, these recommendations call for significant investment if they are to be achievable, and includes prioritizing activities in the SO1, SO3, and SO4 as well as completing implementation of the others activities in SO2, SO5 and SO6. Considering that the Strategy still enjoys support of all the stakeholders including major funding institutions interviewed, it means an opportunity to reinvigorate the remaining period of the Strategy implementation exists. A national stakeholder workshop was held in May 2015 where the participants ratified all the recommendations of the Midterm Review save for the one calling for a replacement of the REC and the ARMC with KWS Executive Committee (ECom) and Area Conservation Committee (ACC) respectively. The participants also revised the draft action plans of the Midterm Review and prioritized them; identified resources needed to ensure implementation of the agreed action plan;



identified thematic areas overlap by donors, as well as identified and agreed on a mechanism by which progress in the remaining period of the strategy can be closely monitored.

**The following is a summary of the recommendation under each SO:**

*SO1: Reduce illegal killing of rhinos to less than 1% per annum and significantly reduce illegal trade in rhino horn and derivatives:*

Sustain the government support and goodwill to ensure backing from all the security agencies involved in the various high impact law enforcement activities implemented in early 2014 into the long term to bring the poaching levels to less than 1% per annum from the current 3.2%.

*SO2: Maintain a standardized monitoring and reporting protocol to provide information for efficient protection, meta-population management and programme implementation:*

Develop capacity in areas without a database as well as undertake a comprehensive training for rhino monitoring instructors using the latest version of the Africa Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) training course.

*SO3: Achieve and maintain a 6% per annum growth rate in well-established sanctuaries and a minimum of 5% per annum at national level to attain 750 black rhinos by 2016:*

Address issues of high density of herbivores and predators in rhino areas by assessing the rhino habitat with the aim of reviewing the ecological carrying capacity. Likewise, a review of actual offtake levels from established rhino populations whose densities have built up e.g. translocating an average of 5–6% annually, should be undertaken.

*SO4: Secure new areas and make policy interventions for rhino population expansion:*

Deal with the administrative and technical issues surrounding the delayed and stalled IPZ projects as well as establish a task force to start looking into the availability of additional new areas.

*SO5: Raise awareness on the plight of the rhino to gain public and corporate support globally:*

Establish a team of experts to develop an awareness and campaign strategy that will direct this objective. This team should work with County Government, Central Government and the international community closely to ensure there is a common message on the

plight of the rhinos, delivered at relevant meetings to the media and elsewhere.

*SO6: Establish a coordination framework and enhance capacity for effective implementation of this Strategy:*

Strengthen the oversight capabilities of the RSC by creating a functional Secretariat and co-opting someone with advocacy skills to form the RSC.

## Acknowledgment

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