



Pupkewitz Foundation – Conservancy Support Project

by Willem Odendaal

For over three decades, Namibia has been one of the leading examples the implementation of a successful Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) programme. This is largely credited to the enduring commitment of the Namibian Government, its Business Sector, its Non-Governmental Sector and most importantly, its people to conserve Namibia's unique wildlife.

With the enactment of the Nature Conservation Amendment Act in 1996, rural communities living in Namibia's communal areas were given the opportunity to establish communal conservancies. In short, the Act permits communal conservancies certain user rights over wildlife in their areas. With a sense of ownership over the utilisation of wildlife, conservancy communities are motivated to conserve the wildlife in their areas, because of the increased financial benefits that this brings to their communities in the form of increased tourism and hunting income.

The Legal Assistance Centre's Land, Environment and Development Project has a long and proud history of supporting Namibia's communal conservancies through providing them with legal advice and legal representation.

In recent years, the conservation of Africa's wildlife, especially its Rhino and Elephant populations, has come under renewed pressure due to the increase of poaching. Over the last year or so, it has become apparent that Namibia's wildlife populations are not exempted from this new onslaught. For example, in the last year and a half, at least 6 black rhinos have been poached in the Palmwag Concession Area. This is reason for concern since poaching in this Palmwag area has been virtually unknown for nearly two decades.

The Legal Assistance Centre's approach to all of this has been to invite a number of stakeholders in the conservation of Namibia's wildlife to attend a workshop in May 2014. One of the key recommendations of the workshop was that coordination and support at community based level in raising awareness of the serious effect that poaching will have on community income should be improved.

Following this recommendation, the Legal Assistance Centre has embarked on a community advocacy campaign entitled "Conservation Support Project". The purpose of this campaign is to focus our actions specifically on the Palmwag Concession Area where we work closely together with the conservancies that are mostly affected by the escalation of black rhino poaching. The Palmwag Concession is the last vicinity in the world where a significant black rhino population roams freely. With community support, we would like to keep it that way. But, we need the support from the local communities. The LAC is in a unique position in that we have been working with the affected communities for years. However, a stronger presence is needed in the area to not only improve communications with the communities, but to also strengthen information networking with the Police, the Prosecution and other government institutions. As the LAC, we are prepared to take on this role of advocacy campaigners and network coordinators.

But we acknowledge that with initiatives such as these, resources are needed to make the implementation successful. It is against this reality that we have approached the Pupkewitz Foundation to support our initiative.

We greatly acknowledge and appreciated the Pupkewitz Foundation's answer to our call to donate an all terrain vehicle that will be exclusively used to further our project goals in the Palmwag Concession Area. Without their timely response to our call, our aspirations to contribute to the saving of Namibia's last free roaming black rhinos would not have become a reality.

