



B2Gold project steps in to save rhinos

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SAFE: A black rhino in Namibia. Photo: HUGH LIPPE

ELLANIE SMIT

WINDHOEK

Local organisations supporting conservation in Namibia have seen their budgets slashed by up to 30%, as the coronavirus pandemic significantly impacts the world's economy.

Among these organisations are Save the Rhino Trust Namibia (SRT), Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) and the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF), which provide critical field-based support to trackers and rhino rangers. Through the B2Gold Rhino Gold Bar project, critical crisis support has been provided to community-backed rhino conservation efforts in northwest Namibia.

According to a statement issued by the B2Gold Rhino Gold Bar advisory committee, the knock-on effect on job security, provisions for families and the protection of Namibia's critically endangered black rhinos is potentially devastating for communities in the region that have worked hard to develop a rhino-based economy.

It said that tourism, which is the primary economic force in rural Namibia and contributes significantly to the cost of conservation, has also been severely impacted.

Vicious cycle

"There are also significant job losses in urban areas and large numbers of unemployed (people) are migrating back to their extended families in rural areas. This has created a vicious cycle of increased need, dwindling income and increased pressure on natural resources, ultimately resulting in an escalation of poaching."

According to the committee, a number of areas in the northwest Namibia rhino range have been left exposed by the lack of tourists, requiring extra patrolling efforts by the SRT, IRDNC and conservancy rhino rangers, together with the tourism ministry, law enforcement officials and private sector partners.

Therefore, the committee has provided funding through the B2Gold Rhino Gold Bar project, launched in January.

With a groundbreaking donation of 1 000 ounces of Namibian gold, B2Gold is producing 1 000 limited-edition Rhino gold bars.

N\$3 million disbursed

The committee said within four months of its launch the project has already disbursed N\$3 million to community-backed rhino conservation efforts.

According to the committee, salaries and support were provided to keep rangers from all 13 rhino range communal conservancies in the field for the next 12 months. This includes the Anabeb, Otjikondavirongo, Ehrovipuka, Omatendeka, Sesfontein, Puros, //Huab, Doro !Nawas, Tsiseb, Sorris Sorris, Uibasen and #Khoadi //Hoas conservancies.

Salaries and support have also been provided for field staff from the SRT and IRDNC to ensure adequate patrol levels are maintained to keep the pressure of poaching at bay and sustain population growth.

The funds will also ensure at least one field trip with regional traditional authorities this year to raise awareness on the importance of black rhino conservation and will also be used to upgrade the communication system that links field teams and base camps.