



IRDNC STRATEGY

2019 – 2024

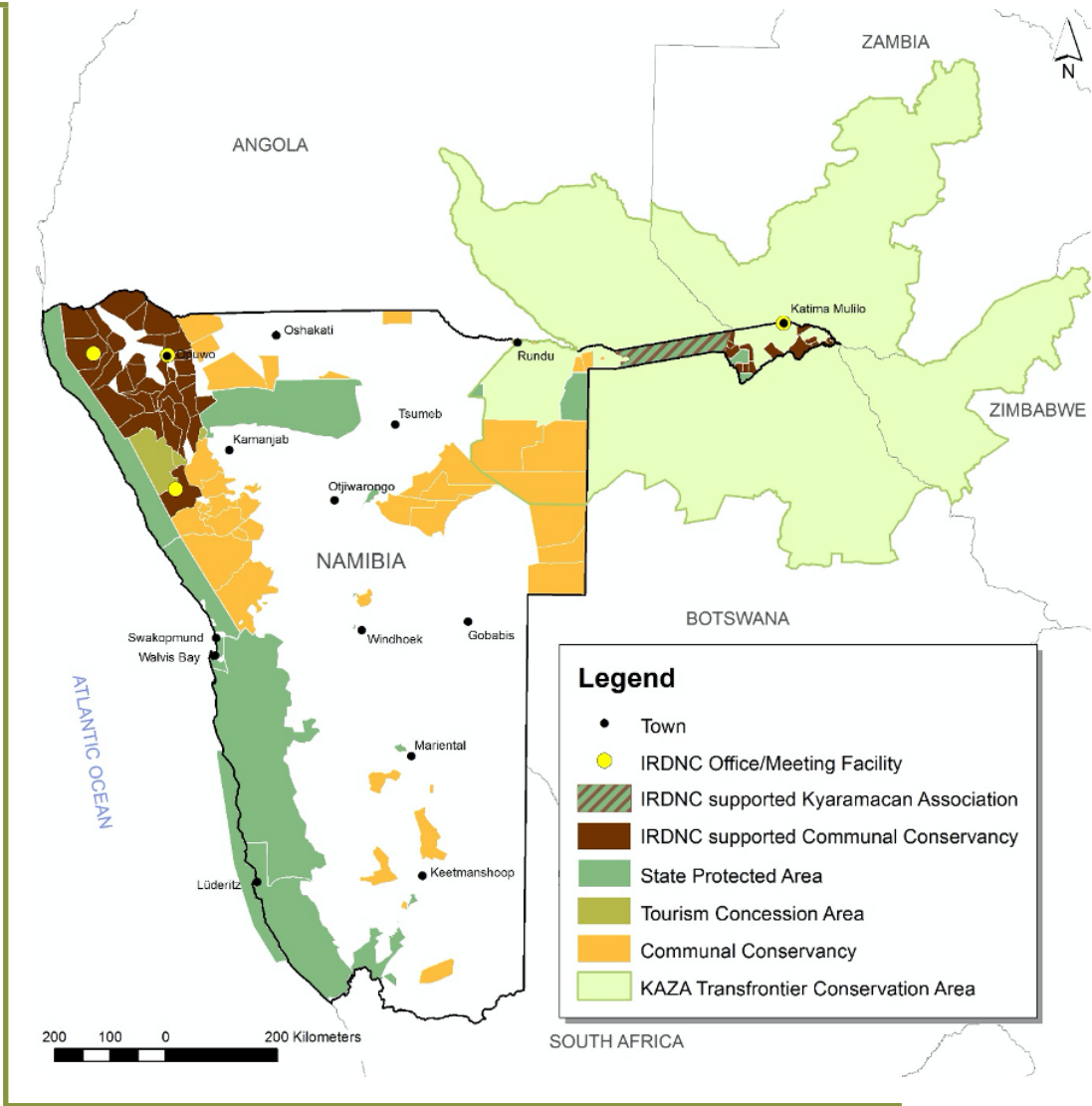
Our Impact

IRDNC is pioneering an African approach to community-based natural resource management (CBNRM)

IRDNC exists to facilitate and empower rural communities in Namibia and adjacent countries to manage and utilize wildlife and other natural resources sustainably, as the foundation of rural economies, biodiversity conservation, and strong local governance institutions. This has been done primarily through community conservancies, a unique Namibian system that grants communities legal rights over wildlife, including all revenues generated by tourism and sustainable utilization. Today IRDNC is increasingly focused on integrating community wildlife management with other key resources such as rangelands, forests, indigenous plants and fisheries.

Since our earliest days, IRDNC’s purpose has been to link conservation to the social and economic development of the people who live with wildlife and other valuable resources. We have come to see how building local capacity and growing a strong civil society also advances conservation outcomes.

Today, Namibia and our neighbors, face new challenges, such as increased pressures on land, corruption and rapacious external markets for ivory, rhino horn, lion parts, pangolin skins and timber. IRDNC has never been more relevant. We are adapting our own approach and priorities to respond to these new challenges.



46
conservancies

93,846
residents

43,309
km2

We believe that a healthy natural resource base lays a foundation for rural development.

What makes IRDNC’s approach special?

Our people say that IRDNC is close to their hearts. Since its work begun more than 30 years ago, this organization has always been close to the people, always there, whether there are problems or not. My region experienced a difficult period of instability when almost all NGOs left the Zambezi Region, but even then IRDNC remained. (Beaven Munalu, former IRDNC Assistant Director, and currently district councilor and chairperson of the Zambezi Region Council)

IRDNC’s predominantly field-based team supports more conservancies than any other organization in the country. Our long-term commitment to the communities that we serve and our homegrown approach to finding local solutions, has led to immense trust, respect and decades-long relationships with local people at all levels. The value of our strong field presence and level of involvement with communities and the relationships and collaborations that our dedicated team have nurtured over the years, has benefitted the entire Namibian Conservancy Program. Our diverse and multi-skilled team has been referred to as a human library of community conservation knowledge and experience.

Decades since its establishment, IRDNC has held fast to its core purpose that rests on three fundamental pillars:

1

Natural resource
conservation

2

Livelihood
& enterprise
development

3

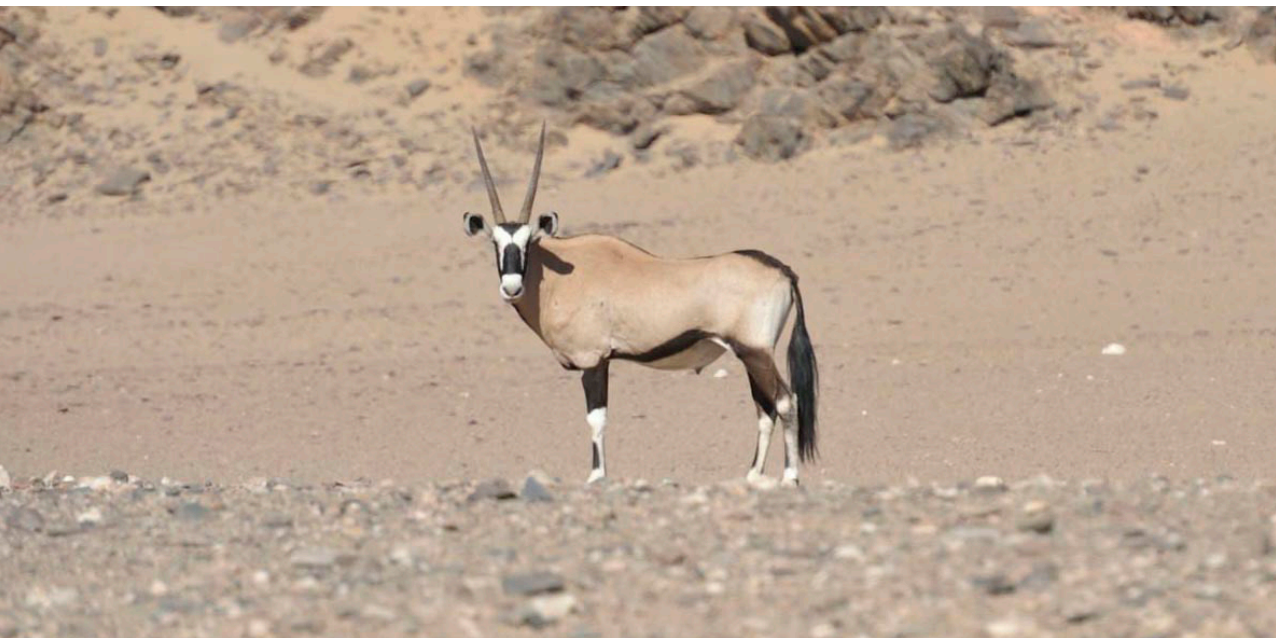
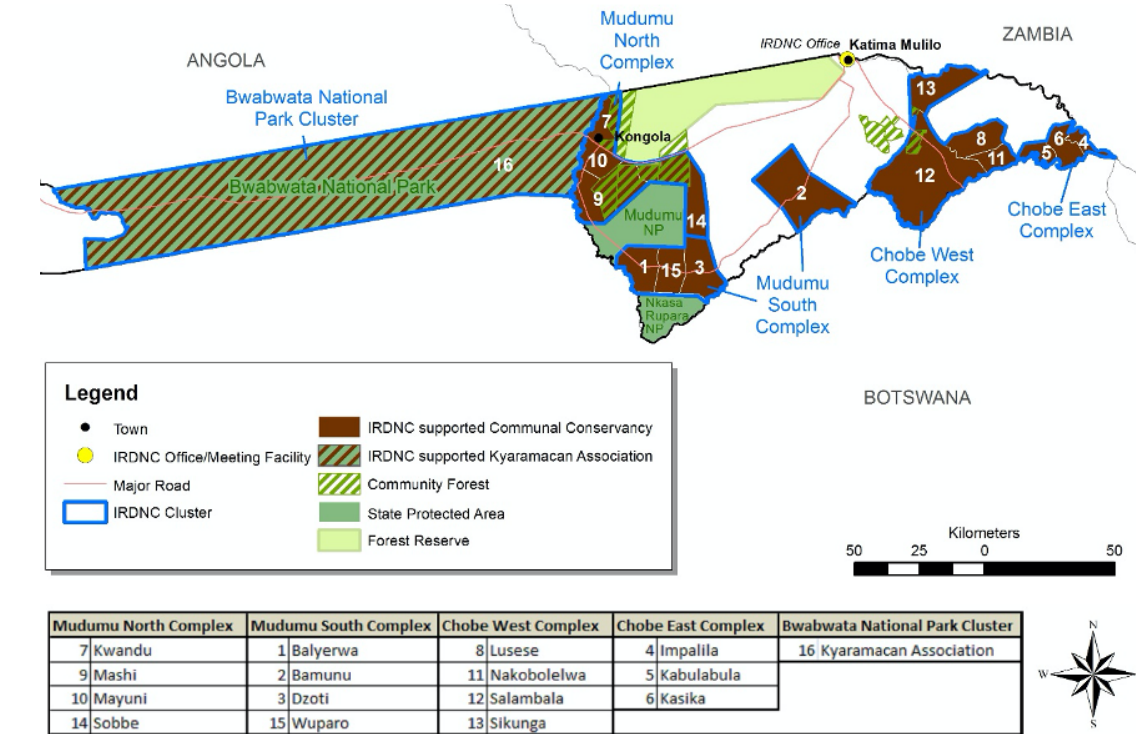
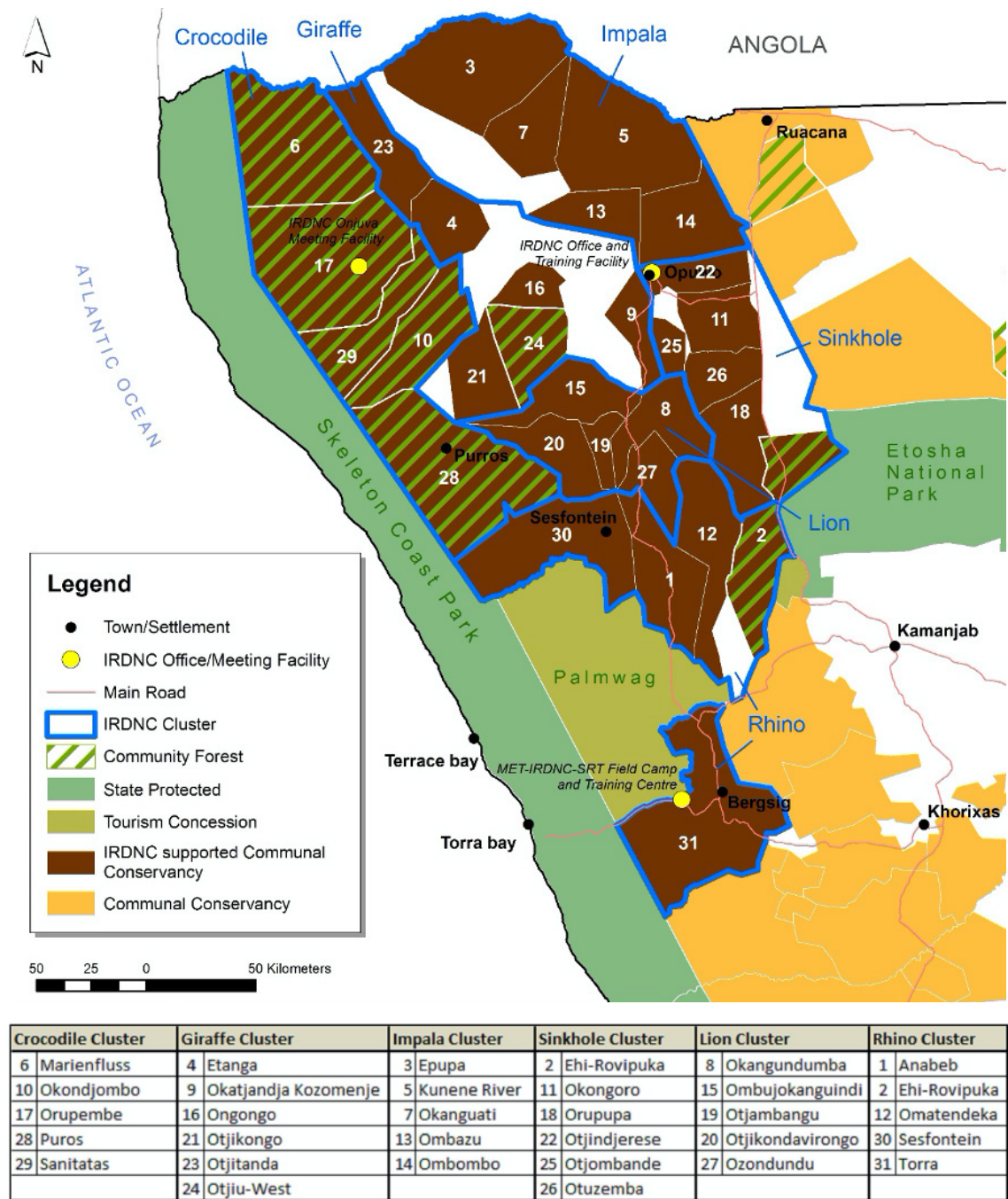
Strong local
governance



IRDNC’s ability to convene multiple stakeholders - including government, traditional authorities and private sector - at landscape and regional levels has prompted collaboration and the development of a unified conservation vision in the regions where we work. We are known for our strong partnership culture – and we have seen how our impact is increased by working with key partners that help us to deliver on our work.

During a period of drastic constriction of donor funding to Namibia, IRDNC has been able to maintain funding for its core work, though we have not tapped into endowment fund mechanisms and large multi-year funds, and our array of small grants have major administrative challenges. The need to gradually build up a reserve or trust fund for IRDNC has become clear, especially since changing times have not reduced the importance of the work IRDNC delivers. It is important that we find ways to remain flexible enough to respond to constantly changing needs in the field whilst honoring increasingly rigid donor requirements. The role of our board in working with our leadership to develop sustainable financing mechanisms is becoming increasingly critical.

Aside from the obvious impacts of our work, our ability to maintain funding despite the reduction in donor investments in Namibia can also be ascribed to our tight financial management and planning systems, and the accountability that we have demonstrated over time. We value our donors and their contribution to our work, and we hold ourselves to the highest standards in managing our funds responsibly. We constantly test new approaches to improve our effectiveness and efficiency, such as the introduction of a cluster approach to delivering services to conservancies.



Challenges facing community conservation in Namibia

Namibia’s agricultural sector has been crippled by the most extreme drought in living memory, and this, combined with a floundering economy, has compounded challenges – there has been an increase in human wildlife conflict and more pressures on land and grazing as livestock and wildlife compete for dwindling resources. In some areas, communities from other areas moving in search for pasture have invaded land that had been set aside for wildlife by local residents. Land registration by individuals and groups, especially in the Zambezi Region, have increased competition for land, compromised wildlife corridors and undermined tourism joint ventures by landholders, and reduced the commonage. On a positive note, the revenue from conservation and tourism have provided a lifeline to rural communities and brought much-needed revenue to the country.

The conservation value of conservancies is undisputed, but there has been increasing questioning of whether conservancies have really improved livelihoods and benefits, and whether conservancies can generate enough resources not only for their management and employment costs but also for social investments and distribution to members. Inadequate benefits reaching members, coupled with some conservancies lacking accountability in managing their revenue, have led to a loss of member confidence in conservancies. Anti-hunting movements, the ban on import of hunting products by certain countries, and an increase in wildlife crime has exacerbated pressures on conservancies.

In these places...

Income generated by IRDNC-supported conservancies has increased from N\$ 407,874 in 2000 to N\$ 42,397,992 in 2019

Plains animals have increased by 10X since 1980

1,313 people employed by IRDNC-supported conservancies

Elephants have increased by 8X since 1980



Areas where we can improve

In our work...

We recognize that conservation outcomes, such as managing and benefiting from elephants, will benefit from operating at a landscape approach. We are exploring ways to maximise the benefits of scale, for example, by working with conservancies to establish Namibia's first People's Park, by catalyzing tourism investments in marginal areas through the Elephant Highlands initiative and by encouraging smaller conservancies to combine their hunting concessions.

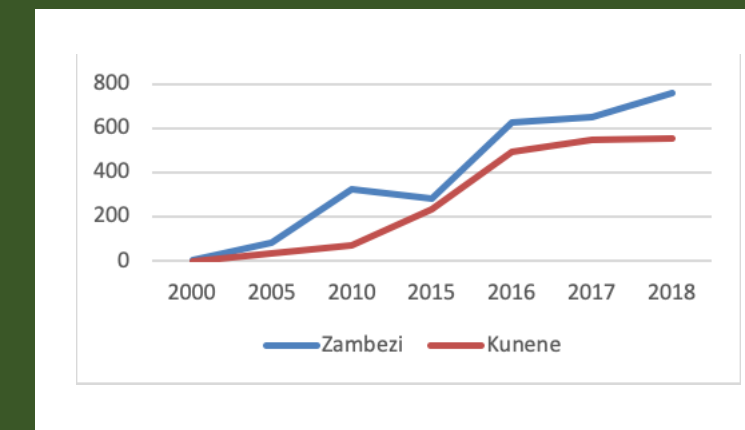
We remain committed to our purpose and goals but recognize that we also need to expand some of our focal areas whilst being cautious not to spread ourselves out too thin.

We need to get better at getting the good news of our impacts and conservation successes to the world. We pride ourselves on being field-based and community-centric, but we have been so focused on our work on the ground that we have not developed the skills to communicate our successes and challenges to the broader Namibian public and the international community. We need a bigger voice, and to get better at communicating to inspire, motivate and influence public opinion.

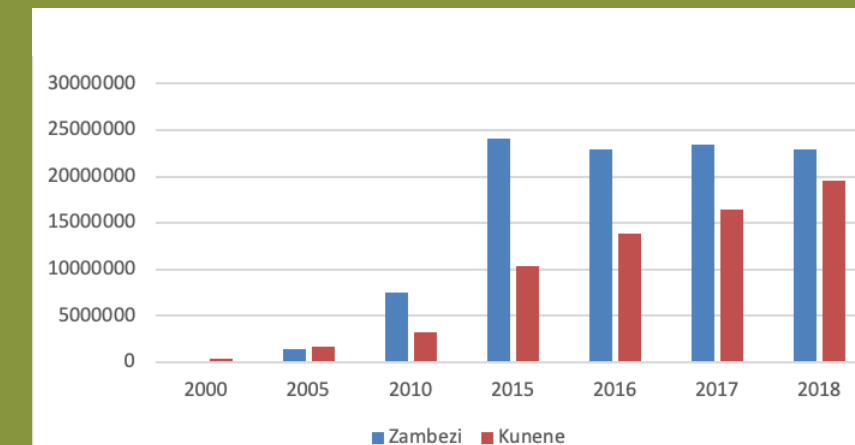
Communication is a priority both externally, i.e. sharing our philosophy and achievements with influential Namibians, and internally by improving communication between our teams working in different regions. We also need to be more proactive at sharing our experience and the lessons we have learned over so many years with our partners in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) and the Skeleton Coast / Iona TFCA (Sciona).

The floodplains of the Chobe River have the potential to become a tourism mecca – and if well facilitated, this could lead to phenomenal income opportunities for conservancies. We need to provide excellent facilitation that will work towards maximizing opportunities for conservancies along the wildlife-rich Chobe.

Number of people employed in IRDNC-supported conservancies (2000-2018)



Conservancy income (N\$) in IRDNC-supported conservancies (2000-2018)



Areas where we can improve

Inside our organization...

Our staff are highly dedicated and loyal. However, many of them are ageing and they have not had opportunities to develop skills outside of their core functions at IRDNC. The demands placed on our team are higher than our capacity to provide services. Our dependency on a small core group of key staff makes us very vulnerable. We need to improve our staff capacity to meet complex and changing needs on the ground. In order to do this, we need to invest in staff development (including our facilitation skills), build strong leadership at field level, and create space for the next generation by attracting and retaining young talent and then making focused efforts to nurture emerging leaders.

As we work to improve the capacity of our field teams and bring in different skill sets, we would like to unlock our team's potential, and to see ideas and innovation to tackle our challenges being increasingly driven from the field. We are aware that our greatest strength – being deeply entrenched in rural communities – may also be an Achilles heel, as we have not invested in building the capacity to expand the impact of our work beyond field level, and we need to revive our pioneering spirit. We aim for IRDNC to be at the cutting edge of testing and spearheading new ways of doing things, and to communicate these approaches more broadly.

The number of conservancies and demands for support services have increased making it increasingly challenging to reach

individual conservancies with ample services. As a result, IRDNC adopted a cluster support system in 2017, grouping geographically adjacent conservancies into support units each served by an IRDNC coordinator. Coordinators are responsible for on-the-job support, mentoring and provision of a cross-section of services to their conservancy clusters. This system has successfully reduced costs, increased our ability to mentor conservancies, and challenged staff to expand their competencies, but we need to further refine the approach so that conservancies, which are becoming more sophisticated and complex, are able to access specialized support that generalist staff may not be able to provide.

We have been asked by partners to take on projects outside our focused geographical and thematic areas. This is both an opportunity (to expand the range of staff skills and to generate much-needed income) but also a threat (in that it will increase pressures on already stretched key staff and could lead to mission creep) and needs to be handled very cautiously.

Currently our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) is centered on our donor reporting. IRDNC's scope has remained focused but we need to also develop a consistent organization-wide MEL system that would provide IRDNC management and donors with up-to-date information on programmatic and project progress and impacts.

Emerging opportunities

IRDNC recognizes that we have a number of emerging opportunities that we should be focusing on:

- Capitalizing on the trust we have built up with our partners and using our convening power to gather, and influence, a broader set of stakeholders
- Addressing challenges relating to land claims, and being more proactive in working with agencies to address land issues
- Expanding CBNRM outside conservancies
- Influencing countries to adopt CBNRM through KAZA and other transboundary initiatives, such as the emerging links with Iona National Park in Angola
- Our team is already skilled - and could refine its approaches to gain new opportunities rooted in areas where we already excel, e.g.:
 - Implementing and expanding community-based approaches to mitigate wildlife crime
 - Spearheading innovative approaches such as early warning systems for mitigating human wildlife conflict, integrating wildlife and livestock management and adding value to INPs such as the Opuwo Processing Facility
 - Member engagement programs to increase involvement and decision-making of ordinary people in natural resource governance
 - Diversifying income streams in conservancies
- Implementing a communications strategy to get better at communicating, influencing and capturing new opportunities from what we already do



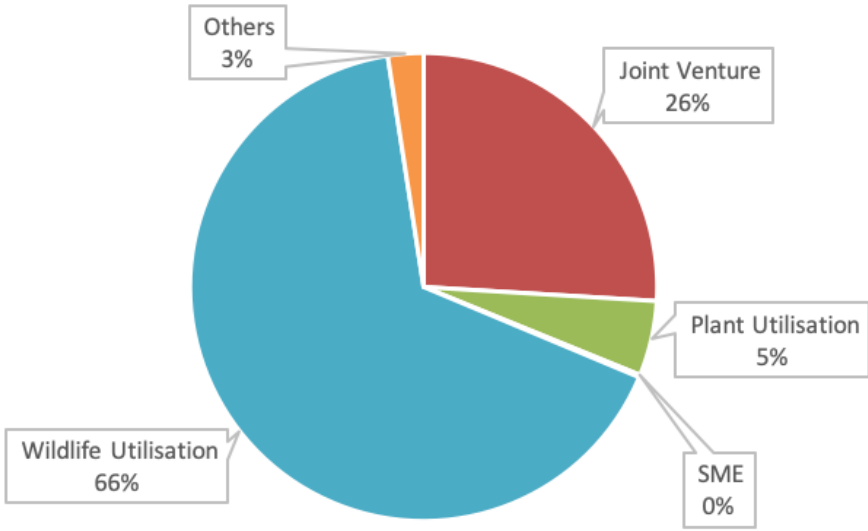


Our priorities – what we do

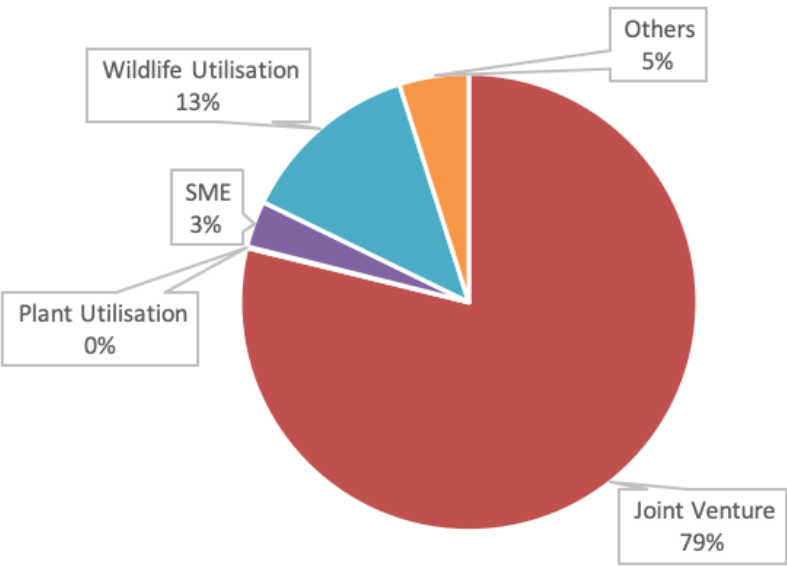
Our Priority targets (2019-2023)

1. Diversifying and integrating Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) - enabling communities to integrate the management of land, wildlife, forests and indigenous natural products, rangelands, cropping, fisheries and other natural resource management and resource-based economic activities and facilitating landscape-level approaches to maximize natural resource-based opportunities for rural communities.
2. Increasing benefits to households and individuals - working to ensure that the growing revenue and natural resource-based opportunities in conservancies and the wider rural landscape benefit conservancy members and other individuals directly, with a particular focus on developing tourism and/or other income opportunities in conservancies that do not yet earn income. As wildlife numbers increase, ensuring that the costs of human wildlife conflict do not outweigh the benefits of living with wildlife for conservancy members.
3. Revitalizing community governance- with a particular focus of strengthening and mobilizing the membership of conservancies to play a greater role in the oversight and leadership of their areas and holding their elected committee members and staff accountable.
4. Strengthening the constituency for CBNRM- revitalising and better communicating the narrative around CBNRM both inside and outside of Namibia, including key actors in Namibia such as traditional authorities, politicians, and government agencies, as well as global audiences and decision-makers that influence the ability of Namibian communities to generate benefits from wildlife and other resources through trade and enterprise.
5. Supporting transboundary natural resource management - with a focus on Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, achieve tangible progress in community-based natural resource management in communal lands in neighboring countries, particularly Zambia and Angola, and strengthening ties between communities in those countries and those in Zambezi Region.

Zambezi Income by Category 2018



Kunene Income by Category 2018



How we plan to strengthen our organization...

- We will prioritize sites for investment and support new groundbreaking African conservation approaches at a landscape level, such as the Kunene People’s Park and planning and promoting landscape level tourism.
- We will continue to monitor the impact of staff being assigned to support conservancy clusters and to explore ways to professionalize the management of conservancies, including outsourcing support services.
- We will focus on building capacity and leadership in our field teams, working towards increasing the autonomy of each of our regional teams and implement a succession plan that target and prepare young Namibians for future management positions.
- We will work with our board to secure the financial sustainability of IRDNC by securing new kinds of funding (endowments, corporates, species-focused funding) that will allow us to focus on emerging priorities.
- Our focus on having close, long-term trusted relationships with communities makes us unique. We will continue to sustain and enhance relationships with communities whilst building collaborations and partnerships with other stakeholders.

