



IRDNC

Strategic Plan

2026–2031



List of Acronyms

CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CBO	Community Based Organization
CGG	Community Game Guards
KA	Kyramacan Association
KAZA TFCA	Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area
KPP	Kunene People's Park
MEFT	Ministry of Environment Forestry and Tourism
NACSO	Namibia Association of CBNRM Support Organizations
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
TA	Traditional Authorities
TBNRM	Transboundary Boundary Natural Resource Management
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Contents

Message from the Executive Director 4

About IRDNC 6

Philosophy	9
Our History	10
Key milestones in IRDNC's history	11
Story of Impact	14

What We Do 17

Flagship Initiatives	18
----------------------	----

Where We Work 24

Lessons From The Field 26

Diversity and Growth	27
Putting Policy into Practice	27
Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC) Mitigation	28
Community-Based Approaches for Managing Biodiversity	29
Transforming Tourism in Communal Areas	29

Situational Analysis 31

Achievements and Organizational Strengths	31
Organizational Challenges	34
Organizational Opportunities	36
Programmatic Threats	38

Strategic Framework 40

Our values & principles	40
Problem statement	41
Vision	41
Value Proposition	41
Mission	41

Theory of Change 42

Strategic Goals and Objectives 44

Goal 1: Strengthening Community Governance, Accountability, and Inclusivity	45
Goal 2: Integrated Management for Sustainable Resource Use at Landscape Level	47
Goal 3: Resilient Local Economies and Diversified Livelihoods	49

Strategic Implementation Approach 52

1. People and Organizational Capacity	53
2. Leadership Development and Organizational Management	53
3. Financial Sustainability and Fundraising	54
4. Communications and Stakeholder Engagement	54
5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)	55

Join us in Securing Namibia's Future 56

Acknowledgments 58



Message from the Executive Director



Dear Partners, Stakeholders, and Supporters,

It is with great enthusiasm and optimism that I present the IRDNC Strategic Plan for 2026–2031. This plan serves as our roadmap for advancing community-driven conservation and sustainable development in Namibia. Over the past decades, IRDNC has been at the forefront of empowering local communities to manage and benefit from their natural resources through innovative approaches. This strategic plan builds on our past achievements while embracing the emerging challenges and opportunities that shape the future of conservation and rural development.

Our vision for the next five years is bold, yet firmly rooted in our guiding principles: **strengthening community governance, enhancing biodiversity conservation, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and building resilience to climate change.** Through collaborative partnerships, adaptive strategies, and staying true to our commitment to conservation, we aim to create lasting benefits for both people and the environment.

I invite you to engage with this strategic plan and to join us in shaping a future where Namibia’s rural communities thrive in harmony with their rich natural heritage. Together, we can continue to champion meaningful change and demonstrate how conservation can be a powerful driver of sustainable development.

Thank you for your continued support and shared dedication to our mission.

Sincerely,

John Kenena Kasaona

Executive Director

Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC)



About IRDNC

Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) is one of Africa's leading conservation organizations, pioneering community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) models that have made a significant impact in Namibia and beyond. Rooted in Namibia's unique conservation story, IRDNC's work has always been to link conservation efforts to the social and economic development of people living alongside wildlife and other valuable natural resources.



In the early 1980s, when what was to become IRDNC began its groundbreaking work in the Kunene region, the notion that local people could play a role in wildlife management or even make decisions about its use was revolutionary. This pioneering project challenged the conservation norms of the time, opening the door for a shift in conservation philosophy, and importantly, actually implementing it, initially through supporting Traditional Leaders to appoint community game guards. The approach recognized that the rampant poaching taking place was as a result of colonial authorities taking charge of wildlife and that local people could be motivated to protect wild animals if they regained a sense of ownership over these valuable resources. It was also recognized that people needed to benefit from living with often dangerous and destructive wild animals. In spite of the unsupportive political climate pre 1990, by Independence, illegal hunting had been stopped and wildlife numbers were soaring. There was thus clear evidence that wildlife and other valuable natural resources could thrive outside formally protected areas and that this was because of, not in spite of, local people.

IRDNC contributes to securing the future of Namibia's natural resources while enhancing livelihoods by diversifying local economies through wildlife conservation, promoting innovative partnerships, and strengthening civil society institutions. IRDNC is not just a conservation organization; it is a community development organization that demonstrates how people and nature can coexist in harmony, ensuring a sustainable future for Namibia's communities and their unique natural heritage.

At a regional level, IRDNC plays a pivotal role in the world's largest terrestrial transboundary conservation landscape, the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA). The conservancies and community forests IRDNC supports secure vital wildlife corridors that are not only critical for elephants, lions and other migratory species, but also for sustaining livelihoods and cross-border cooperation. Internationally, IRDNC's work aligns with global priorities such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Supporting IRDNC means investing in a proven, scalable approach with relevance far beyond Namibia's borders, one that directly contributes to the stewardship of ecosystems of global importance while improving the lives of those living with wildlife.

Today, operating in the rugged Kunene region and the lush Zambezi region landscapes of Namibia, as well as in part of East Kavango, IRDNC is built on decades of trust and collaboration with local communities. IRDNC strongly believes in the power of people - that those who live with wildlife are not just custodians but the rightful decision makers and beneficiaries of conservation efforts. This approach has established Namibia as a global leader in CBNRM, demonstrating that conservation is successful when local communities have the right to manage and benefit from their natural resources.

Philosophy

IRDNC is rooted in the communities we serve, working hand in hand with people to support their ownership and management of natural resources. We believe that a healthy natural resource base lays a foundation for rural development and is integral to sustainable livelihoods. Our approach is guided by the principles of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), which puts communities at the heart of conservation and sustainable development. We listen to the community's needs, respect their voices, and ensure they guide the decisions that affect their lives and environments.

For over 40 years, we have built relationships based on trust and collaboration, helping communal conservancies and community forests strengthen governance, improve benefit sharing, and create opportunities for better livelihoods. By working closely with communities, governments, and partners in conservation, we aim to protect biodiversity while improving the lives of rural Namibians.

Our History

IRDNC's journey began in the 1980s in the vast, arid landscape of northwest Namibia, at a time when poaching was widespread and wildlife populations, including black rhinos and desert-adapted elephants, were rapidly declining. Recognizing that traditional approaches to conservation were not enough, IRDNC's founders, the late Garth Owen-Smith and Dr Margaret Jacobsohn, realized that lasting conservation success could only be achieved if the people living alongside wildlife were at the forefront of conservation efforts.

By partnering with traditional authorities, who also did not want to see wildlife disappear due to drought and poaching, the concept of community game guards was introduced in 1982. These were local men chosen by their communities to protect wild animals through monitoring wildlife and outreach to their communities, thus creating a hostile environment for poachers. The aim was to stop poaching, not merely catch poachers. The first community game guards became a symbol of possibility, inspiring others to step forward to conserve wildlife. This grassroots solution strengthened the pride and a sense of responsibility that communities already had, giving them a tangible role in shaping conservation outcomes, and it began to change the narrative of conservation in Namibia.

Although this community empowerment approach went against the political status at the time, it made a major contribution to the recovery of wildlife in Namibia's northwest. IRDNC also drew inspiration from Zimbabwe's pioneering CAMPFIRE (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) initiative, which demonstrated how local communities could benefit directly from wildlife management. By Namibia's independence in 1990, IRDNC's community-based conservation model was recognized as a national priority. The new government incorporated it into policies (the Nature Conservation Amendment Act of 1996) that led to the establishment of communal conservancies, where people in communal areas can now actively manage natural resources and generate returns from them. This approach encourages wildlife recoveries and environmental restoration, and has since become a global model for community-led conservation.

What began in a remote part of Namibia has grown into a movement that empowers communities across the country and beyond. Today, IRDNC's legacy is embedded in the principles of rights, responsibilities, and benefits for those who live alongside wildlife, ensuring that communities remain at the heart of protecting and managing Namibia's extraordinary natural heritage.

Key milestones in IRDNC's history

- 1980** Namibia's wildlife suffers from severe poaching and drought, with elephants and black rhinos nearing extinction in the north-west of the country.
- 1982** IRDNC founders form partnerships with traditional leaders and communities to combat poaching, supporting the first community game guards appointed by Traditional Authorities (TAs).
- 1985** Illegal hunting has been halted, and communities see wildlife as more valuable alive.
- 1987** IRDNC founders launch the first community tourism enterprise, earning income for a community through wildlife tourism.
- 1990** Namibia's new government embraces community-based conservation, inviting IRDNC, now formally constituted as an NGO, to assist with new national conservation legislation. International funding from WWF-UK is obtained.
- 1993** The Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) programme begins, supporting IRDNC's national expansion into Caprivi, now Zambezi Region. The first community trust is established. IRDNC founders receive the Goldman Foundation's Grassroots Environmental Prize for Africa.
- 1994** IRDNC's founders receive the UNEP Global 500 Award.
- 1995** IRDNC facilitates Namibia's first community-private sector joint venture tourism partnership, and Damaraland Camp opens in what will become Torra Conservancy.
- 1996** Legislation allows for the formation of communal conservancies, with the first four registered in 1998.
- Late 1990s** IRDNC promotes transboundary resource management between communities in Zambezi region and neighbouring countries.
- 2000** The Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organizations (NACSO) is formed, with IRDNC as a founding member.
- 2001** The Forest Act is amended, enabling community forests to be registered.
- 2003** Ministers from five countries agree to develop the Kavango-Zambezi (KAZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area.
- 2004** IRDNC starts assisting communities to market indigenous plants, providing significant income to women in conservancies. The first four transboundary Natural Resource Management (TBNRM) community forums are established in Zambezi, creating the first official platforms for local communities and governments to engage about local-level conservation challenges across international boundaries in KAZA.

Kyaramacan Association (KA) is recognized in Bwabwata National Park, allowing the KA to secure hunting concessions with 50% of the fees going to KA and the balance to government;

2006 Khwe and Hambukushu members of KA are recognized as residents of a National Park, a major shift from exclusionary conservation to an inclusive model where people and wildlife can co-exist in protected areas.

2011 KAZA-TFCA is officially launched.

Rhino poaching in national parks and freehold land surges, threatening to spread to communal areas. Save the Rhino Trust partners with conservancies to deploy rhino rangers, while IRDNC re-engages veteran community game guards (CGGs) to train younger recruits.

2012 When a rhino is poached on communal land for the first time in years, conservancy members apprehend the culprits within 48 hours. Initially, police and the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) responded without community involvement - resulting in 22 rhinos being lost. Once IRDNC facilitates a multistakeholder partnership involving traditional authorities, conservancies, communities, police, MEFT, NGOs, and the private sector, poaching rates begin to decline sharply. This partnership approach rapidly starts proving effective.

2013 The Opuwo Processing Facility, which processes plant resin to produce essential oils, is officially opened.

2014 IRDNC brought together Traditional Authorities from Erongo, Kunene and Omusati Regions and conservancy members to embark on a Wildlife Crime Awareness Road show.

2015 Garth Owen-Smith receives the Prince William Life-Time Award for Conservation. By now, thanks to teamwork, rhino poaching in Kunene has been brought under control.

Kunene People's Park initiative is conceived. This would link Etosha National Park to the Skeleton Coast National Park, including concessions and core wildlife zones, and would neighbour Angola's Iona National Park across the Kunene River in the far north-west. Work begins with the first five conservancies, with 14 conservancies across Kunene now showing interest.

2016 IRDNC changes from its effective thematic team approach to a conservancy cluster approach to promote more efficiency within the NGO. Each region is divided into specific clusters, which requires each cluster coordinator to deal with all three thematic support areas - natural resource management, institutional support and enterprise development.

2019 The Women for Conservation Association is created, empowering women in communal conservancies to guide, take an active role, and participate in conservation efforts.

2013 Drought grips the north-west, with a state of emergency being declared four times. The wildlife population declined severely because of the drought; unfortunately, these are species that are adapted to recover when conditions improve quickly.

2025 Good to adequate rains fall in the 2025 wet season in Kunene Region, bringing grass back to areas that have lain bare for several years. Wildlife baby booms begin while farmers start rebuilding their decimated domestic stock.



Story of Impact

Today, IRDNC operates across two of Namibia's 14 regions - Kunene, Zambezi, and in part of a third, Kavango East - supporting 46 communal conservancies and working with nearly 126,000 people, covering more than 58,600 km².

Our work is supported by a dedicated team of 51 staff members and a strong network of collaborators, including government agencies, local communities, private sector partners, and international donors. By supporting community-led governance, biodiversity conservation, and the development of resilient local economies, we aim to enable communities to sustainably manage their natural resources, ensuring long-term ecological balance, economic well-being, and honouring cultural heritage for future generations.

Within communal conservancies, the dedicated local men and women who are committed to protecting and monitoring wildlife in their areas, including iconic species such as elephants, lions, and rhinos, are highly valued by their communities for their significant role in conservation.

- IRDNC's early efforts have grown into a dynamic national CBNRM programme, with 86 registered conservancies, two Community Associations, and 46 community forests generating over N\$186,297,066 million in income, directly benefiting rural communities.
- Income generated by IRDNC-supported conservancies, which contributes towards natural resource management, including wildlife monitoring and human wildlife conflict mitigation, as well as community benefits, has increased from N\$34,474,654 in 2015 to N\$78,252,114 in 2024, assisting communities to sustainably manage their resources and co-exist with wildlife.
- On communal land in Kunene, elephant estimates based on the full moon count increased from an estimate of 120 in 2019 to 293 in 2023. Kunene's endemic blackfaced impalas estimates in 2019 were 740, increasing to an estimated 839 in 2023, in spite of the drought.
- Conservancies are empowered to make transparent, inclusive, and accountable decisions that sustain their natural resources to secure long-term ecological, economic, and social benefits.

IRDNC's success has inspired similar community-based conservation models across Africa and the world. Through exchange visits and knowledge sharing, organizations in Kenya and Tanzania have adapted the conservancy model to their contexts. For instance, Kenya's Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association and Northern Rangelands Trust have developed conservancies that now cover over 6 million hectares, benefiting local communities and wildlife. In Tanzania, Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) have been established, drawing on lessons from Namibia's experience.

Our efforts include initiatives such as the People's Parks in the Kunene region. Launched in 2016, it represents a groundbreaking approach to community-led conservation. Spanning roughly 10,000 km² of arid, mountainous terrain, it unites 14 IRDNC-supported conservancies, two national parks, and three tourism concessions under a shared management vision. By bringing together local communities and

government agencies, the initiative strengthens conservancies' rights and coordinates conservation across vast, interconnected landscapes where people and wildlife coexist. Here, pastoralist communities farm cattle, goats, and sheep alongside desert-adapted elephants, black rhinos, lions, and giraffes. This innovative model not only secures critical habitats but also ensures that tourism and conservation revenues flow directly to local people — creating a powerful example of how collaboration can drive both ecological resilience and sustainable livelihoods in Namibia's drylands.

As we look ahead, IRDNC is committed to scaling our efforts to promote community-led conservation and sustainable resource management while remaining rooted in our founding principles. Initiatives such as the People's Park and the Women for Conservation Association are reinforcing our decades of work to empower communities and ensure that conservation benefits are equitably shared. At the same time, we are exploring new financial mechanisms to secure critical wildlife corridors, advance payment for ecosystem services such as Wildlife Credits, and build a locally driven vision for transfrontier conservation in the Zambezi region. Through this balance of tradition and innovation, IRDNC continues to lead the way in shaping a resilient and inclusive future for conservation in Namibia and across Africa.

CBNRM - Community-Based Natural Resource Management

CBNRM is a conservation and development approach that gives local communities the rights and responsibility to manage, use, and benefit from natural resources on their land. It is based on the principle of ownership - when people have rights over their wildlife, forests, and other resources, as well as a direct stake in protecting such resources, they are more likely to conserve them.

CBNRM was established in Namibia by IRDNC who persuaded the government to create a national CBNRM policy and a legal framework that devolves rights to community institutions.

In Namibia, CBNRM has empowered rural communities to form conservancies, community forests and community fish reserves, enabling them to manage their resources sustainably, generate income through tourism and other activities, and strengthen local governance. CBNRM thus has the potential to improve livelihoods, build local leadership, and ensure long-term benefits for both people and nature.



What We Do

At IRDNC, we believe that effective conservation goes beyond simply identifying what needs to be done; it's about understanding why, how, and who should lead the way.

We know that when communities actively lead decision-making, they feel ownership of the solutions and are more likely to embrace and implement conservation initiatives. This requires equal partnership and skilled facilitation, making the process truly participatory.

Building Relationships: We prioritize nurturing genuine, trust-based relationships with communities, grounded by shared values and goals. We acknowledge that conflicts may arise, particularly around ownership and benefits tied to valuable natural resources. Tackling issues such as poaching and human-wildlife conflict requires the strength of these relationships, as community-driven action is most effective when rooted in trust and respect. By ensuring that wildlife conservation brings value to local people living alongside wildlife, we deepen these bonds and build long-term partnerships for sustainable solutions.

Strengthening Local Capacity and Skills: We support communities to manage, monitor, and govern the use of natural resources in a way that is inclusive, fair, and sustainable in the long-term.

Learning and Sharing: We believe that learning is a two-way process. We work in three very culturally different regions of Namibia, and our cultural diversity adds creativity and strength to our teams. We focus on solutions rather than problems, ensuring that ideas are followed by effective implementation. We are constantly learning from the communities we work with and gain valuable insights that inform and refine our approaches. We share these learnings between regions in order to adapt successful strategies to different contexts, strengthen collaboration, and amplify the impact of community-driven conservation across Namibia.

Involving Women and Youth: Women and youth play a critical role in natural resource management. Special strategies are essential to ensure their inclusion not just as resource users, but also as decision-makers. We aim to strengthen their ability to influence and drive conservation through public speaking courses and leadership training.

Promoting Accountability: We ensure that elders are included in decision-making processes and that modern technology and language barriers do not exclude them. We work directly with conservancy committees to strengthen governance structures, train leaders in transparent management, and advocate for the devolution of rights to the lowest levels. This ensures conservancies serve their members effectively, prioritizing not only economic returns but also social benefits, equitable resource ownership, and broader community empowerment.

To further strengthen accountability and responsible implementation, IRDNC implements the Environmental and Social Safeguard Framework (ESSF) across the supported conservancies. This framework helps ensure that conservation activities are not only environmentally sound but also socially just, protecting the rights, safety, and well-being of all community members, especially the most vulnerable.

Adding Economic Value: We work to actively link conservation efforts with tangible economic benefits for local communities. We work closely with conservancies and community-based enterprises to develop sustainable income streams such as ecotourism ventures, wildlife-based products, and biodiversity credit initiatives. To help these enterprises succeed, we provide strategic support such as business development and market access. For conservation to be sustainable, valuable natural resources must contribute to the local economies of the people who live with and manage them. We work to ensure that income generation and job creation are linked to conservation and social empowerment. Our long-term commitment to community-based enterprises aims to ensure they are strategically supported to thrive and deliver lasting benefits. For example, wildlife-based economic activities include the harvesting and sale of Devil's claw, thatching grass and traditional crafts, and the harvesting of plant parts and resins for the manufacturing of perfumes. We actively support communities to establish vegetable gardens, obtain hunting quotas, and other services in demand by travellers.

Socio-economic value: Our work with communities enables them to generate significant financial resources that are e.g. invested in a wide range of social benefits by supporting education through busarries and supporting schools, supporting healthcare by transporting community members to clinics and hospitals, supporting families with funerals, supporting water infrastructure and agricultural equipment, reducing the impacts of wildlife on agriculture by establishing predator-proof livestock enclosures and fencing gardens, and electrification of villages and homesteads.

Mobilizing Resources: A large part of our work is to mobilize resources from all over the world to fund our various activities while being fully accountable to our development partners.

Flagship Initiatives

IRDNC's flagship initiatives represent pioneering models of community-based conservation that go beyond traditional projects. They showcase innovative approaches that are scalable, transformational, and aligned with Namibia's vision for conservation and sustainable development.

These initiatives embody IRDNC's core values of inclusivity, community involvement, and resilience, while setting benchmarks for governance, gender equality, and landscape-level conservation. By highlighting these flagship efforts, IRDNC demonstrates how bold ideas can deliver long-term impact for both people and nature.

People's Park

A Community-led Conservation Area

Kunene People's Park is a groundbreaking initiative that combines conservation and community development across 10,000 km² of spectacular arid landscapes including mountains, desert plains and ephemeral rivers. This proposed park will be co-managed by local communities, conservancies, and the government to safeguard critical wildlife habitats while fostering sustainable livelihoods.



What It Is:

- A large-scale, community-driven protected area that connects iconic landscapes such as Skeleton Coast Park, Etosha National Park, and potentially Iona National Park in Angola.
- Namibia's first voluntarily established park, emphasizing biodiversity conservation and leveraging local socio-economic benefits.

Key Highlights:

- Strengthens governance and local ownership of natural resources.
- Supports economic growth through tourism, benefiting communities who live alongside wildlife.
- Demonstrates a scalable African model for balancing conservation with sustainable development.



Women for Conservation

An Association of Women Driving Change in Conservancies

Women for Conservation was established in 2019 by 19 women from five conservancies in Namibia's Kunene Region, with the support of IRDNC. The group empowers women to actively participate in decision-making, leadership, conservation and sustainable development within their communities. Within a few years, Women for Conservation has become active in all Kunene conservancies and forms part of all community processes and negotiations.



What It Is:

- A platform for women in conservancies to unite, amplify their voices, and influence governance in natural resource management.
- A key initiative to address gender disparities in conservancy leadership.
- Vision: "United in One Voice, guiding and supporting each other and all women in their communities to benefit from sustainable development."

Key Highlights:

- Provides training in public speaking and leadership to strengthen women's roles in conservation.
- Encourages unity, inclusivity, and respect, as outlined in its constitution.
- Women for Conservation represents a critical step toward gender balance and empowerment in Namibia's conservation efforts, encouraging women to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of their communities and the environment.

Wildlife Monitoring

A unique achievement

A unique feature of Namibia's CBNRM system is the long-term standardized distance-based monitoring of wildlife populations and trends, documenting the status of wildlife in conservancies.



Conservancies, community game guards, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism and organizations such as IRDNC and NACSO's Natural Resources Working group cooperate to conduct annual game counts in 19 IRDNC supported conservancies in Kunene and 9 conservancies and 1 community association in Zambezi. Since 1998, in Zambezi, teams have walked an average of 12,858 km annually to record wildlife.

In Kunene, since 2001, teams have driven an average of 48,768 km per year as part of the monitoring effort. These counts track approximately 20 species in Zambezi and 17 in Kunene, generating one of the most consistent community-led wildlife datasets in Africa.

Elephant, Lion, Rhino and Game Rangers

Supporting specialization of game guards

To address specific problems in conservation and human-wildlife conflict management, IRDNC and partner organizations have supported the establishment of specialized services within conservancies, supporting conservancies to appoint, train, transport and equip community game guards to monitor black rhinos, elephants and lions to prevent illegal killing and conflict.



IRDNC has also supported the selection, appointment, training and equipping of game rangers in the Ombonde and Hoanib People's Park, who are doing routing surveillance and monitoring of wildlife in the two People's Parks. The game rangers are essential to prevent illegal killing of wildlife and illegal tourism, and to ensure the implementation of the future management plans of the two People's Parks.

Mudumu North and South Complexes

Collaboration amongst conservancies and protected areas

A remarkable development has been the establishment of the Mudumu North and Mudumu South Complexes in the Zambezi Region, comprising in both instances clusters of conservancies, community forests and protected areas, with their own dedicated management structures.

The complexes have enhanced cooperation amongst conservancies, community forests and protected areas regarding the management and monitoring of shared wildlife resources and challenges such as the management of wild fires.



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: Strengthening communities responses to human-wildlife conflict

CBNRM is a conservation and development approach that gives local communities the rights and responsibility to manage, use, and benefit from natural resources on their land.

It is based on the principle of ownership - when people have rights over their wildlife, forests, and other resources, as well as a direct stake in protecting such resources, they are more likely to conserve them.

CBNRM was established in Namibia by IRDNC who persuaded the government to create a national CBNRM policy and a legal framework that devolves rights to community institutions.

In Namibia, CBNRM has empowered rural communities to form conservancies, community forests and community fish reserves, enabling them to manage their resources sustainably, generate income through tourism and other activities, and strengthen local governance. CBNRM thus has the potential to improve livelihoods, build local leadership, and ensure long-term benefits for both people and nature.

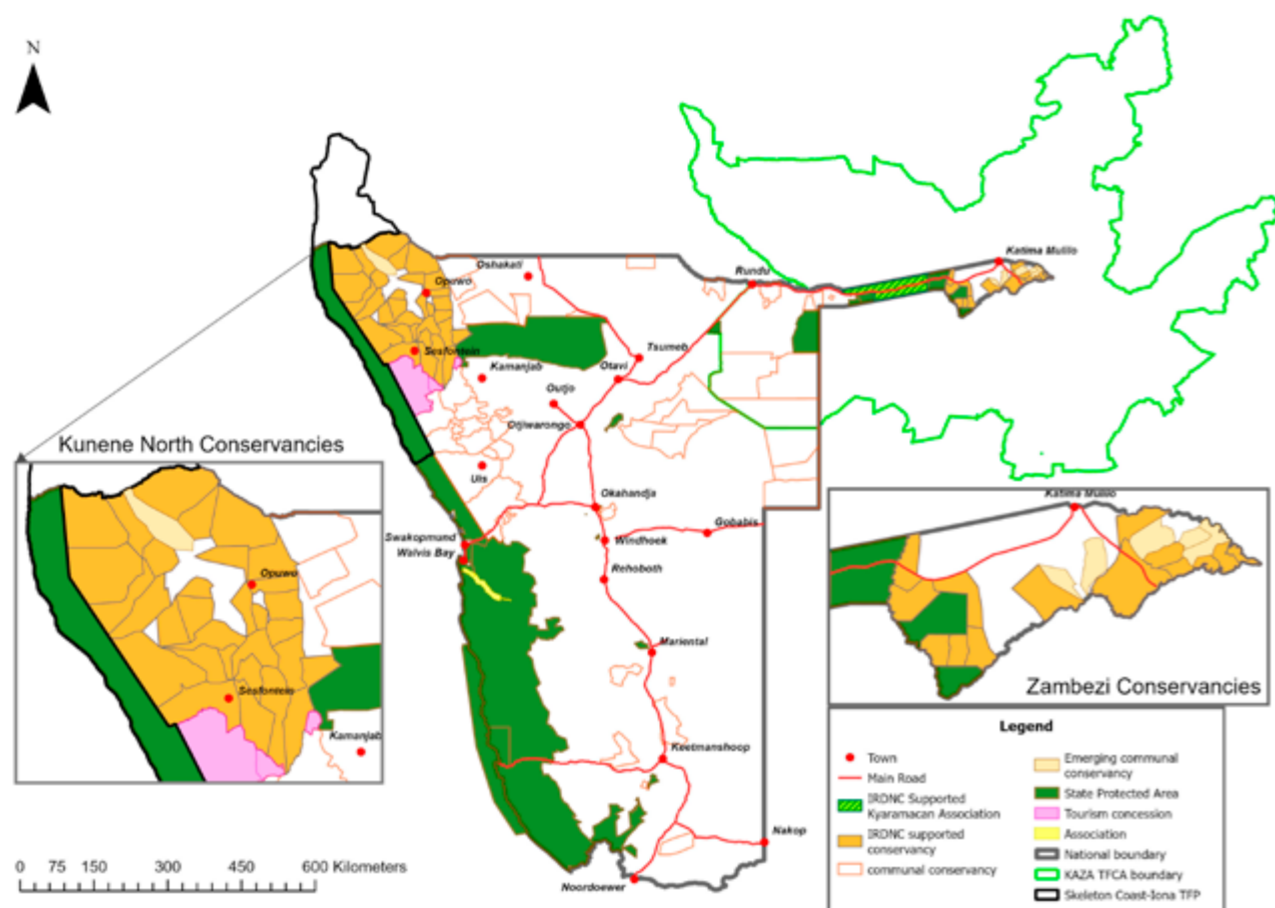
Kunene Elephant Walk (KEW) – Strengthening Human–Elephant Coexistence

The Kunene Elephant Walk (KEW) is one of IRDNC's flagship initiatives designed to address rising human-elephant conflict in northwestern Namibia. Established in 2020 and led by IRDNC Executive Director John Kasaona, the programme is rooted in deep community partnerships and works through community-appointed Elephant Rangers and Community Game Guards who monitor elephant movements, support farmers, and reduce the risks associated with living alongside elephants.

KEW operates across 18 conservancies with a growing team of 50 rangers, including women, who use early-warning systems, night patrols, and non-lethal deterrents to prevent crop damage, reduce fear, and improve safety for both people and elephants. The programme has contributed to significant improvements in coexistence, including reduced elephant-related losses and stronger collaboration between communities, traditional authorities, IRDNC, and various stakeholders.

KEW is now evolving into a broader rural development and conservation platform, linking coexistence work with livelihood opportunities, community awareness, and future tourism ventures. As it grows, KEW offers a practical, community-driven model that strengthens resilience, improves food security, and protects desert-adapted elephants, demonstrating what effective coexistence can look like in Namibia's challenging landscapes.

Where We Work



Kunene

Located in northwestern Namibia, the Kunene Region is a vast, arid, semi-desert area, with high temperatures and low rainfall, its rugged mountains and vibrant landscapes coloured by the changing light of the desert sun. The Kunene is known for its spectacular scenery and desert-adapted wildlife, including elephants, lions and black rhinos. The communities here are mainly subsistence farmers or work in the tourism sector. Kunene’s harsh environment and limited infrastructure pose challenges for agriculture, and tourism is a key economic driver. Livestock farming is significant, but overgrazing and conflicts between wildlife and livestock require on-going management. The past decade has been gripped by crushing drought that has significantly reduced livestock and wildlife, and increased predator-human conflict. The 2025 rain season has already brought about a wildlife baby boom.

Zambezi

The Zambezi Region in the northeast corner of Namibia is characterized by wetlands, rivers, and high rainfall. It provides habitat for diverse wildlife, including large elephant herds, buffalo, eland, hippo, crocodile and over 450 other animal species. The region’s rich biodiversity and riverine landscapes makes it a popular destination for wildlife and bird watching. Many residents rely on rain-fed agriculture, but frequent flooding in low areas forces communities and wildlife to compete for limited dry land, increasing human-wildlife conflict. Population growth means that moving inland during the rain season is no longer an option. The region is positioned within the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) landscape, where wildlife corridors are essential for maintaining ecosystem connectivity across borders, allowing species such as elephants, lions, buffalo, zebras, and other migratory wildlife to move freely between Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. IRDNC’s initiatives in the region support livelihoods through eco-tourism and sustainable farming practices while improving conservation outcomes.

Kavango East

Kavango East, with its blend of savannah and woodlands along the Okavango River, is a place of serene natural beauty and cultural richness. Here, IRDNC focuses its work in Bwabwata National Park, a unique multiple-use park where wildlife conservation and community livelihoods intersect. With a population of about 5,000 residents, most of them San, the park enables local communities to engage in regulated natural resource harvesting and farming. IRDNC partners with the Kyaramacan Association, which represents park residents, to enhance sustainable livelihoods through two hunting contracts, tourism, resource management, and conservation initiatives. Key achievements here include the growth of wildlife tourism and the active participation of communities in park management, fostering a model for balanced human-wildlife coexistence.



Lessons From The Field

Our work over the past years has provided invaluable insights into what works, what doesn't, and how we can continue to add impact. These lessons guide us as we strive to make Namibia's community-based conservation efforts more effective and inclusive. These are but a few lessons that highlight the importance of adaptability, inclusivity, and collaboration in achieving IRDNC's mission.



Diversity and Growth

The CBNRM program has demonstrated its ability to unite people from diverse backgrounds, strengthening a shared commitment to conservation. Key lessons include:

Broader Inclusion: Early on, men dominated CBNRM. Today, women are stepping up in significant roles - as game guards, lion rangers, elephant guards and serving on management committees, speaking out confidently and making decisions for conservation. The majority of the crafters are women, showcasing how conservation can open up livelihood opportunities. Youth are also carving out spaces, showing interest in CBNRM by forming networks such as the Youth in Conservation to amplify their voices and be recognized nationally.

Initiatives such as the People's Park and Women for Conservation demonstrate how far we've come and the progress in promoting diversity and growth within the CBNRM program.

Collaboration and Learning: Platforms such as the bi-annual meetings and cross-border TBNRM forums have become important for sharing knowledge and strengthening partnerships. Learning exchanges have increased nationally and regionally, particularly with communities in Kunene and Zambezi, who are now viewed as models of success, attracting interest from others who are eager to learn.

Putting Policy into Practice

We've seen that policies are only meaningful when translated into action, and IRDNC's work has shown significant progress in this regard:

Growth in Conservancies: Since the 1990s, the number of conservancies has increased dramatically, particularly in Kunene and Zambezi, reflecting the effective application of supportive policies. IRDNC continues to be a key player in contributing to policy formulation and mobilizing communities to contribute to policy reviews or formulations, such as the Human-wildlife conflict policy and the National elephant management policy.

Improved Compliance: The enforcement of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) together with MEFT has strengthened accountability and ensured higher standards across most conservancies.

Financial Management: With initiatives such as the Young Professional Accountants program and MEFT's involvement, conservancies now have better financial systems, reducing mismanagement and improving trust.

Challenges to Address

Despite these advances, some community members have lost interest in conservation due to a lack of tangible individual benefits at the household level, even though there are collective community benefits. More inclusive incentive structures are urgently needed.

Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC) Mitigation

Over the years, we've come to understand that addressing HWC requires patience (don't expect quick results), empathy, and a long-term community-centered approach. At the core, two things remain non-negotiable: 1) No animal's life is more important than a human life; 2) Human-wildlife conflict will always exist in some form or level of intensity. Key lessons include:

People First: The needs and realities of farmers and communities must be prioritized. Engage with empathy and respect for their losses and challenges. This builds stronger relationships and a willingness to implement mitigation strategies.

Shared Responsibility: Communities are best positioned to lead local solutions, with continuous engagement and support from stakeholders.

Monitor and Adapt: Effective strategies evolve over time; it is therefore important to continuously monitor and remain committed to the program's core mission, even with pressure from external factors.

Community-Based Approaches for Managing Biodiversity

As conservation evolves, so do the challenges and opportunities for sustainable natural resource management. Key lessons include:

Governance and Compliance: Improved policies and frameworks now guide conservancy operations, ensuring clearer roles and better accountability for NRM.

Changing Landscapes: Population growth, expanding human activities, and climate change have impacted natural resources and affected wildlife corridors and habitats. Addressing these requires innovative, landscape-based approaches such as the People's Park model to increase benefits to local communities while maintaining land for wildlife to thrive.

Collaborative Strength: Regional and cross-border efforts, supported by the growing political will, have amplified the impact of CBNRM programs.

Transforming Tourism in Communal Areas

Tourism remains a cornerstone of community income, but its potential can only be fully realized through equitable, thoughtful planning. Key lessons include:

Balancing Power: Communities often lack negotiation power in tourism partnerships, and their resources, such as land and wildlife, are often undervalued. Building this negotiation capacity and valuing local resources fairly are critical. This is a lesson we learnt during the very first community-private sector negotiations in the 90s and continues to be relevant.

Sustainable Development: The success of tourism in communal areas hinges on its ability to balance economic benefits with ecological and cultural sustainability. Tourism projects must be selected and designed, based on detailed feasibility studies that assess economic potential, environmental impacts, and community readiness. Beyond wildlife tourism, exploring cultural tourism and agrotourism creates additional revenue streams while reducing pressure on key wildlife areas.

Cultural Gaps: Bridging the divide between local communities and external stakeholders is important for successful tourism partnerships, where both parties are able to better understand each other.



Situational Analysis

Achievements and Organizational Strengths

Over the past decades, IRDNC has significantly advanced its mission of community-driven conservation and sustainable development, supporting 46 conservancies in Kunene, Kavango East, and Zambezi regions, and spanning approximately 58,600 km² of communal land.

These efforts have driven measurable conservation impacts, including an increase in black rhino populations in Kunene and a reduction in poaching incidents. Employment within IRDNC-supported conservancies has also increased between 2015 and 2024 from 512 to 1575 community members currently employed (417 in Kunene and 1103 people in Zambezi, this includes conservancy staff and lodge employees) from local communities, promoting socio-economic stability and local empowerment. A key achievement has been securing land for conservation through conservancy registration, providing a foundation for sustained community benefits and environmental stewardship.

IRDNC's strong national and global reputation as a leader and pioneer in community-based natural resource management has further strengthened its resilience and success, enabling collaboration with diverse partners and inspiring similar models worldwide.

Community Centred Conservation

IRDNC's extensive long-term field presence in the Kunene, Zambezi and East Kavango Regions, has built a reputation as Namibia's leader in community-based conservation. Its dedicated local staff maintains strong relationships with grassroots rural communities, with the majority of staff themselves local. This facilitates deep cultural understanding and commitment to conservation. IRDNC also supports conservancies to practice financial accountability, supporting them to meet the requirements of an annual audit process. Due to this governance support, there has been good compliance of supported conservancies with the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism's (MEFT) governance requirements.

Holistic CBNRM Support

IRDNC delivers comprehensive support to conservancies by strengthening governance structures, enhancing skills for effective management, and creating opportunities for livelihoods that align with conservation goals. Working with partners, IRDNC supports initiatives such as Women for Conservation, Youth in Conservation, and local job creation through conservancy game guards, lion and elephant guards, rhino guards and fish monitors. Resource and forestry guards monitor indigenous product harvesting. Together, community-led conservation enterprises in the IRDNC supported conservancies Kunene and Zambezi, generated USD 3,303,142.122 in 2024.

Programs such as the Rhino Pride campaign, established in partnership with Save the Rhino Trust and the Namibia Nature Foundation, exemplify IRDNC's commitment to combating poaching and promoting community-based surveillance networks to safeguard their natural heritage.

Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Influence

IRDNC's partnerships with regional councils, traditional authorities, and other stakeholders have enhanced its capacity to advocate for policy improvements, contributing to the 1996 Nature Conservation Amendment Act and the 2013 CBNRM policy. The organization has worked to address past gaps in government engagement, strengthening relations with the MEFT, governors, and regional councils to ensure continuous CBNRM dialogue. IRDNC's long-lasting relationships with partners in the CBNRM sector have been a key ingredient in sustaining community-based natural resource management in Namibia. These strategic alliances, particularly with other members of the Namibian Association for Community-Based Natural Resource Management Organizations (NACSO), are not based on funding coalitions but on a shared vision and joint sense of purpose.

Organizational Resilience

IRDNC's resilience and continued presence amid leadership changes, financial constraints, and national and global challenges, such as a secession attempt in the former Caprivi Region and the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates its adaptability. IRDNC's well-established reputation as a community-based conservation leader remains intact, underscoring its credibility and influence within Namibia's conservation sector.



Organizational Challenges

Organizational Capacity

IRDNC operates in a variety of complex landscapes, and the work requires a diverse set of technical skills across governance, finance, legal, and strategic management. However, IRDNC faces challenges in attracting the caliber of professionals needed to meet these demands, often due to the remote nature of work and limited incentives available in the conservation sector. This challenge directly impacts the organization's ability to build and maintain strong leadership structures and governance frameworks, which are essential for guiding strategic decision making and ensuring operational excellence. Addressing this gap remains a critical priority for the organization's growth and efficiency.

Staffing and Capacity Constraints

While IRDNC's field staff show remarkable dedication, they are often stretched thin and lack specialized skills in areas such as organizational leadership, project management, and strategic planning. The focus on ensuring funding is directed primarily towards delivering work on the ground rather than strengthening internal organizational needs. Investment in staff development has been limited, affecting retention and in some cases, performance, largely due to a lack of funding available for these institutional needs. IRDNC continues to attract young career professionals and strives to achieve gender balance.

Technical and Programmatic Limitations

As the CBNRM programme continues to grow and conservancy needs become more complex, IRDNC's technical capacity struggles to keep pace, emphasizing the need for adaptive management, stakeholder integration, and innovative solutions. Programmatically, conservancy governance remains a challenge due to a lack of participation by members in conservancy planning and decision-making and limited handover processes between successive conservancy committees. There are instances where conservancy committees absorb much of their conservancies' income, leading to limited individual benefits for conservancy community members who may feel excluded from the advantages of conservation. This has, in some cases, created frustration among community members and negatively influenced how IRDNC is perceived as the originator of CBNRM in Namibia. The most important challenge is to improve member participation in important governance processes in conservancies.

Funding and Financial Flexibility

IRDNC's heavy reliance on restricted funding limits organizational flexibility, posing challenges to strategic goal fulfillment and overall financial sustainability.

Wildlife Conservation and Livelihood Integration

While IRDNC prioritizes wildlife conservation and resource management, its capacity to promote ecologically sustainable livestock farming in conservancies outside core wildlife zones is limited. Expanding this focus is essential to improving community livelihoods and enhancing the holistic impact of conservation efforts. IRDNC has within its means supported subsistence farmers to take responsibility for their natural resources, which has contributed immensely to conservation and for rural communities to becoming a force to be reckoned with in environment and development in Namibia and beyond.



Organizational Opportunities

Innovative Financing for Conservation

Expanding innovative financing solutions, such as climate financing and biodiversity credit initiatives, offers potential revenue streams for communities. These mechanisms incentivize sustainable practices while reducing reliance on tourism and hunting revenues. By exploring and developing these options, IRDNC can help conservancies achieve greater financial stability and resilience.

Landscape-Level Conservation

Building on its experience, IRDNC can position itself as a global leader in facilitating landscape-level conservation that integrates multiple stakeholders and land designations. By better demonstrating impact in scaling community-based conservation models, IRDNC could attract more funding.

Strategic Partnerships

IRDNC has a unique opportunity to strategically leverage partnerships for innovation, financing, and technical support. Collaborating with traditional and non-traditional stakeholders, including the private sector, academic institutions, and international conservation organizations can bring in new ideas and mobilize additional sustainable resources. Regionally, IRDNC can deepen its collaboration within the KAZA TFCA and the Kunene landscape to address shared conservation challenges and amplify its impact.

Long-term Funding

The Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) - Namibia for Life, is set to secure annual funding for IRDNC to deliver essential conservancy services. Managed in part by the Community Conservation Fund of Namibia (CCFN), this funding represents an opportunity to sustain critical conservancy costs and strengthen IRDNC's ability to focus on long-term conservation goals.

Sustainable Agriculture

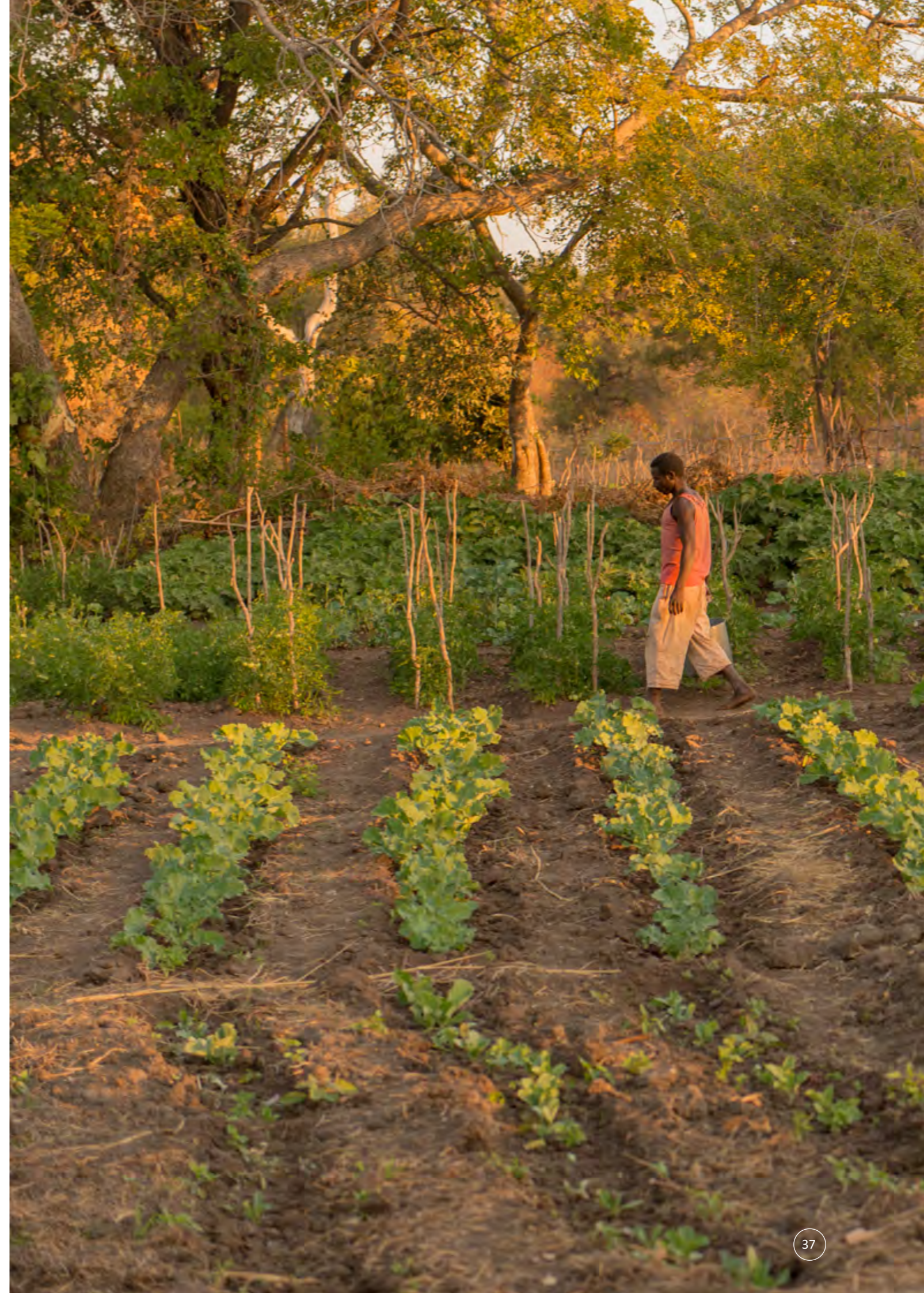
With most rural communities dependent on agriculture, IRDNC can play a vital role in addressing sustainable agriculture in drought-prone areas by forming stronger partnerships with organizations already engaged in this space or by developing its own targeted programme. IRDNC can thus help communities mitigate climate impacts and improve food security.

Expanding Regional Support

IRDNC has the opportunity to extend its expertise and engagement to conservancies in other regions that have requested assistance. By expanding its reach, IRDNC can address gaps in support and strengthen the broader CBNRM sector, fostering more inclusive and sustainable conservation practices across Namibia.

Leveraging the Biomass Energy Sector

The booming biomass energy sector in Namibia presents a significant opportunity for IRDNC to support conservancies and community forests in capitalizing on this growing market. By facilitating access to this sector, IRDNC can help communities generate income, reduce environmental degradation, and enhance their role in sustainable natural resource management.



Programmatic Threats

Emerging Complex Conservation Challenges

As IRDNC strives to expand its programmes to meet the evolving conservation landscape, limited funding and complex conservation challenges such as illegal wildlife trafficking and habitat fragmentation pose a risk to scalability and sustainability. Funding constraints can limit the resources available for critical community support, conservation interventions, and capacity-building programmes, which are essential for IRDNC's mission. As environmental threats evolve, new conservation priorities demand innovative approaches that require additional resources to implement effectively.

Conflict in Land Use Priorities

Conflicting land use plans and competing priorities in some regions create resistance to conservation initiatives. Communities often prioritize immediate economic benefits over long-term conservation goals, leading to fragmented landscapes and reduced connectivity in critical wildlife corridors. This situation undermines IRDNC's efforts to maintain interconnected ecosystems, essential for the survival of wildlife and the sustainability of community-based conservation.

Resource Competition and Environmental Pressures

Scarce resources such as water and grazing land, worsened by extreme and changing weather patterns, have intensified human-wildlife conflicts, threatening both human and wildlife populations and creating resentment toward conservation efforts as communities bear the costs of living alongside wildlife. Climate change further threatens biodiversity and increases the vulnerability of communities reliant on natural resources. In arid zones, unsustainable farming practices drive land degradation, worsening resource scarcity, and biodiversity loss. These interconnected challenges risk undermining IRDNC's conservation goals unless adaptive strategies and sustainable land-use practices are effectively implemented.

Shift in Donor Priorities

Donor funding priorities are moving away from community-based conservation initiatives toward broader issues such as health & education. This shift can strain IRDNC's funding streams and challenge its ability to maintain and expand the programme.

Lack of Financially Sustainable Conservancies

Conservancies without reliable income streams struggle to fund core operations, including wildlife protection, community support, and governance. This financial instability undermines the effectiveness of conservation initiatives and reduces the tangible benefits communities receive from participating in the CBNRM programme. For IRDNC, this represents a critical threat, as it diminishes the impact of community-based conservation and hampers the organization's ability to scale its support effectively. Unless this income gap is addressed, long-term conservation outcomes and the credibility of the CBNRM model are at risk.



Strategic Framework

Our values & principles

I

Integrity and Innovation

We uphold the highest standards of honesty and transparency, embracing forward-thinking solutions to ensure communities thrive and adapt in a changing world.

R

Respect and Relationships

We value the ideas, rights, and cultures of the communities we serve, approaching our work with empathy and deep understanding. Our relationships are built on trust. We are reliable and accountable, always prioritizing the interests and needs of the communities we work with.

D

Dedication and Teamwork

Our commitment to long-term change is reflected in persistent engagement and collaboration with communities, government, and stakeholders to achieve shared goals through collective action.

N

Nature-Based and Visionary

Conservation and natural resource stewardship are at the heart of our mission, guided by a long-term vision of ecological and community resilience.

C

Communities & Commitment

Our work is rooted in the well-being of the rural communities we serve with compassion, ensuring their voices guide the solutions we develop, their rights are upheld, and their needs remain at the heart of all we do.

Problem statement

Communities in conservancies, community forests, and community associations face challenges in sustainably managing and benefiting from natural resources (that are vulnerable to droughts and climate change) to support and enhance their livelihoods.

Vision

Rural communities in Namibia and across transboundary conservation areas are empowered through resilient, self-sustaining institutions, creating a lasting impact with a thriving natural resource base that enhances livelihoods and encourages harmonious coexistence with wildlife.

Mission

Rural Namibians in communal areas are sustainably managing and benefiting from healthy natural resources.

Value Proposition

IRDNC is a trusted and pioneering grassroots NGO with a strong track record in community-based natural resource management. Deeply rooted in local communities and with firm government partnerships, IRDNC empowers rural communities through capacity building and sustainable resource management, combining nature conservation, livelihood improvement, and strong governance to deliver lasting impacts. With an adaptive, field-based approach, IRDNC remains a leader in driving innovative solutions to uplift livelihoods and sustain Namibia's natural heritage.

Theory of Change

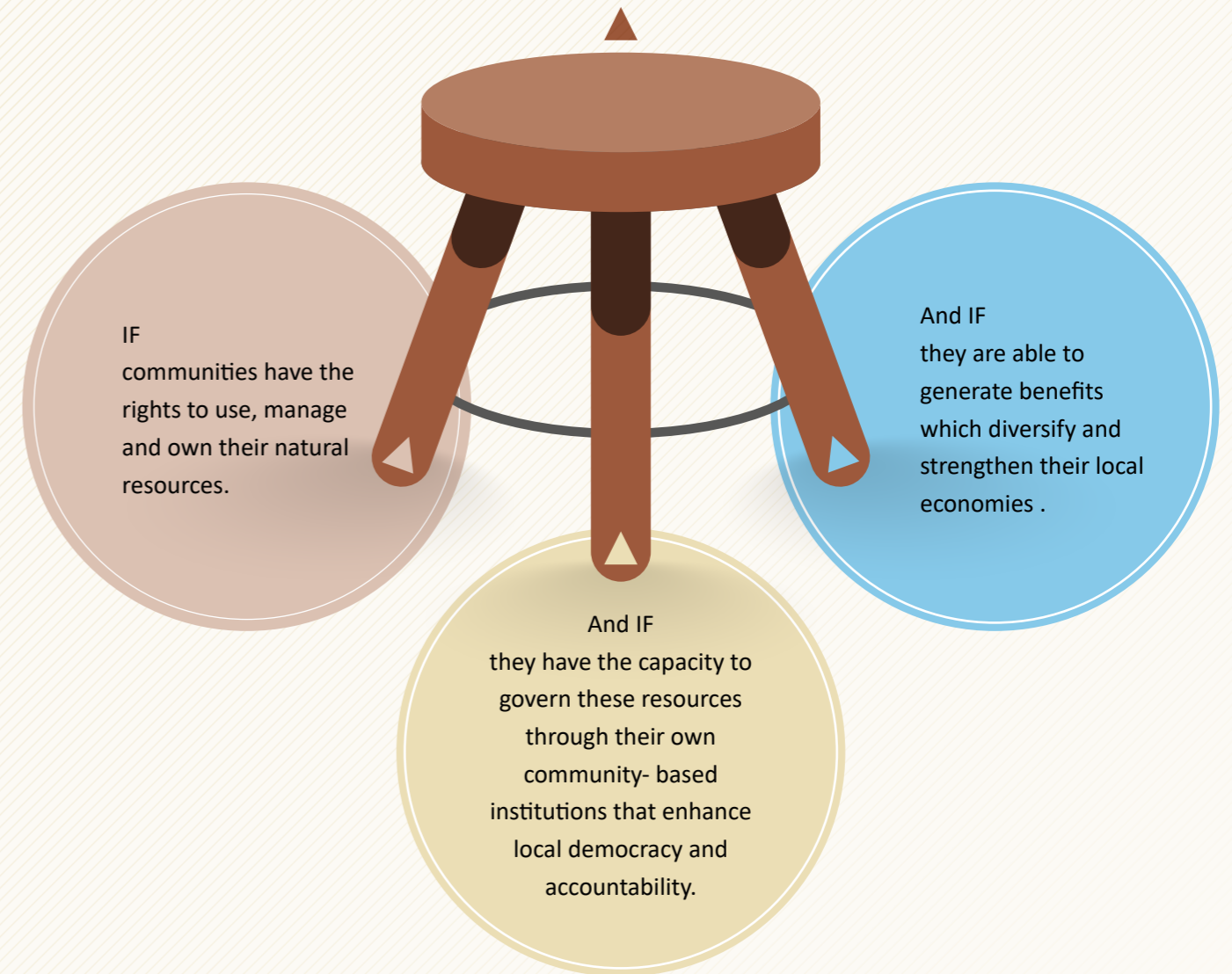
The Challenge:

Despite progress in community-based natural resource management, communities face persistent challenges that limit their ability to manage resources and improve livelihoods sustainably. These include:

- **Weak Governance and Accountability:** poor decision-making and inequitable benefit distribution at the household level due to fragile governance structures.
- **Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC):** competition for resources leads to loss of livelihoods and resistance to conservation.
- **Economic Vulnerabilities:** over-reliance on tourism and farming leaves communities exposed to shocks.
- **Land Use Conflicts:** competing priorities undermine conservation and livelihoods.
- **Climate Change:** droughts, floods, and extreme weather threaten biodiversity and livelihoods.
- **Policy Gaps:** misaligned policies hinder land tenure, resource management, and fair returns.

IRDNC strives to increase the rights of rural people to manage their diverse range of natural resources sustainably. We believe that a healthy natural resource base lays a foundation for rural development. This is fully optimized when natural resources are secured outside of protected areas and will ensure a vibrant local economy and improved livelihoods of individuals.

There will be better livelihoods and improved natural resource management and conservation...



Assumptions

We believe this approach will work because:

- Securing community rights over natural resources provides a strong incentive for sustainable management, as communities directly benefit from conservation success.
- Well-functioning, accountable, and inclusive community-based institutions foster trust, participation, and equitable decision-making, which are critical for long-term environmental stewardship.
- Diversified and strengthened local economies reduce dependency on unsustainable practices and ensure that conservation delivers tangible benefits to community members.
- Empowered communities can effectively balance conservation and development goals.
- Strategic partnerships with NGOs, governments, and private sectors provide communities with the technical, financial, and policy support needed to succeed.



Strategic Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Strengthening Community Governance, Accountability, and Inclusivity

Strengthening governance within communal conservancies and community forests is critical for long-term sustainable natural resource management. Governance frameworks that are transparent and inclusive empower communities to take ownership of their resources and decision-making processes. Without these systems, issues such as mismanagement, corruption, and lack of community trust can hinder conservation efforts and reduce community benefits.

Some conservancies lack strong governance structures due to a lack of technical expertise, and broader community accountability leaving them vulnerable to financial mismanagement and inefficiencies. However, there is an opportunity to strengthen governance by incorporating lessons learned, encouraging inclusivity, and supporting leadership development.

This goal focuses on building transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance structures where all community members, including underrepresented groups such as women and youth, actively participate in decision-making. Strong governance will ensure that resources are managed sustainably, benefits are distributed equitably, and communities have a shared vision for the future. The outcome will be more inclusive, effective, and self-sustaining conservancies and community forests that promote trust, align with local needs, and are critical for long-term sustainable natural resource management.

Objective 1: Ensure Annual General Meetings (AGMs) are conducted in line with national standards

Target: By 2027, 46 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in Zambezi, Kavango East and Kunene hold AGMs annually and comply with MEFT Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Objective 2: Strengthen the financial management capacity of CBOs

Target: By 2031, deliver financial management, governance and induction training to management committees and staff across 46 CBOs.

Target: Provide targeted financial training to financial managers in all 46 conservancies by 2031.

Target: Facilitate quarterly financial audit training to 46 CBOs by 2031.

Target: Ensure 46 CBOs have sound financial control systems in place by 2031.

Target: Ensure Financial Auditing of all 46 or more conservancies by 2031.

Target: Partner with other organisations to enhance financial governance and accountability at the conservancy level by 2031.

Objective 3: Review and revise policies, plans and key governance documents

- Target:** Ensure 46 CBOs have updated and approved key governance documents (constitutions, Benefit Distribution Plans (BDPs), Game Management Utilization plans (GMUP), financial and HR policies) by 2031.
- Target:** By 2031, 46 CBOs annually monitor and evaluate the implementation of governance and financial policies.

Objective 4: Empower rural communities to understand and exercise their conservancy rights

- Target:** By 2027, at least 80% of members in 46 CBOs demonstrate awareness of their conservancy rights and report active participation in governance meetings.

Objective 5: Enhance gender equality and youth participation

- Target:** By 2031, at least 16 CBOs in Zambezi and 18 CBOs in Kunene will have women and youth representation in at least 30% of leadership roles.

Objective 6: Strengthen governance and policy advocacy

- Target:** By 2031, advocate for policy revisions to ensure fair benefit distribution from tourism, wildlife utilization, and extractive industries (such as mining), focusing on communal conservancy rights and equitable income distribution.
- Target:** By 2031, have at least two landscape level skilled managers.

Objective 7: Strengthen research and development

- Target:** Establish a conservancy assessment tool in 46 conservancies to assess support requirements by 2027.
- Target:** IRDNC to support targeted research on effectiveness and impacts of CBNRM by 2031.

Goal 2: Integrated Management for Sustainable Resource Use at Landscape Level

Ecosystems do not adhere to boundaries created by people, and wildlife corridors, water resources, and land use plans require integrated management to function effectively. Managing resources at a landscape level allows for sustainable development while preserving biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Fragmented conservation efforts and conflicting land-use plans threaten critical habitats and wildlife corridors. Integrated management offers an opportunity to address these challenges by aligning the interests of multiple stakeholders, from local communities to government and private entities at the national and transboundary level.

This goal emphasizes creating cohesive strategies that unite conservation and development across vast, ecologically significant landscapes. The aim is to enhance ecosystem connectivity, reduce habitat fragmentation, and improve resilience against climate change. At a local level, this ensures sustainable livelihoods through practices like sustainable agriculture and wildlife-based tourism. The broader outcome is a balance between environmental health and community well-being, securing long-term benefits for people and nature.

Objective 1: Strengthen landscape-level conservation forums

- Target:** Establish landscape-level planning and forums to coordinate NRM efforts.
- Zambezi & Kavango East:* Hold two biannual planning meetings, two chairpersons forums, and 16 complex or People's Park meetings annually.
- Kunene:* Establish one functioning transboundary forum with people living within and alongside the IONA National Park, with biannual meetings by 2031.
- Target:** Establish one strategic stakeholder forum to coordinate integrated land use management planning and provide input towards the development of landscape management plans by 2026.
- Target:** Establish a CBNRM regional governors forum in Erongo-Kunene-Omusati by 2026.



Objective 2: Develop landscape management plans

Target: By 2027, develop, implement, and evaluate two integrated landscape management plans.
Zambezi: Develop two management and development plans for Mudumu and Chobe landscapes by 2026, monitored annually.
Kunene: Engage all conservancies and Community Forests in landscape conservation, with biodiversity mapping and a regional rangeland management programme developed by 2031.
Kunene: Coordinate the development of management and tourism development plans for three People's Parks, tourism concessions, and four landscapes by 2027, monitored annually.

Objective 3: Enhance human-wildlife coexistence and protection of core wildlife areas

Target: By 2031, at least 37 CBOs implement Human-Wildlife Conflict Action Plans (HWCAP) and protect core wildlife areas, including conducting transboundary game counts.

Objective 4: Strengthen Monitoring, Sustainable Use, and Benefit Sharing of Natural Resources

Target: By 2031, IRDNC and its partners implement robust monitoring systems and sustainable management practices across 46 conservancies, ensuring equitable biodiversity conservation.



Goal 3: Resilient Local Economies and Diversified Livelihoods

Communities dependent on a single income stream, such as tourism, are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks like pandemics or environmental changes. Diversifying livelihoods builds resilience, reduces dependency on unpredictable revenue streams, and enables communities to adapt to changing circumstances.

Many conservancies struggle to sustain their operations due to inadequate funding. Simultaneously, emerging opportunities such as biomass energy, carbon markets, and biodiversity credits offer untapped potential for income diversification.

This goal focuses on creating a range of income-generating opportunities that align with sustainable resource management. Examples include supporting value chains for indigenous products, engaging in the biomass energy sector, and promoting conservation-linked enterprises. By diversifying revenue streams, communities can achieve greater economic stability, which in turn enhances their ability to manage natural resources sustainably. The outcome is stronger, self-reliant local economies that support both people and conservation goals.

Objective 1: Diversify Income Streams

Target: By 2031, at least 40 conservancies have valid, fair contracts with joint venture partners who comply with contract regulations, and joint management committee meetings are held annually.
Zambezi & Kavango East: Natural plant products and Wildlife credits in at least eight conservancies and carbon credits in 10 pilot conservancies by 2031.
Kunene: At least 15 conservancies generate income from natural plant products, carbon credits and other diversified sources by 2031, with one landscape-level strategy developed by 2027.

Objective 2: Strengthen Existing Income Streams

Target: By 2031, conservancies have valid, fair contracts with joint venture partners who comply with contract regulations, and joint management committee meetings are held annually.

Objective 3: Identify and Pilot New Livelihood Projects

Target: Identify and pilot new livelihood options in at least two conservancies per region by 2027, expanding to four conservancies by 2031.
Target: By 2031, expand household level income generating initiatives to four conservancies (prioritizing non-income generating conservancies).

Objective 4: Strengthen Climate Change Adaptation initiatives

Target: By 2031, at least 14 CBOs in Kunene and Zambezi will implement climate-smart agricultural practices through collaboration with other partners.
Kunene: Develop and implement through collaboration, a regional Climate Change Adaptation strategy by 2026 (employ strategic partnerships such as Conserve Global).

Objective 5: Strengthen CBO's negotiation capacity

Target: By 2027, quantify the economic value of at least two key community natural resources in Kunene and Zambezi to improve negotiation leverage in resource-based agreements.

Objective 6: Increase the economic benefits of natural resources to members

Target: By 2031, at least 37 CBOs generate sufficient revenue to provide tangible and equitable benefits to their members, with at least 80% reporting improved financial capacity and member satisfaction.
Target: Carry out a comprehensive assessment of the social and economic benefits to conservancies members from investments made by conservancies in projects and services by 2031.

Objective 7: Strengthen the financial sustainability of CBOs by enhancing their ability to generate sufficient income

Target: By 2031, at least 26 CBOs generate sufficient income to fully cover their operational costs and achieve financial self-sufficiency.

Objective 8: Enhance the effectiveness of strategic partnerships

Target: By 2027, identify and formalize partnerships with at least three strategic organizations in Kunene and Zambezi, ensuring collaborative support for implementing and scaling livelihood projects.

Objective 9: Enhance the ability of CBOs to secure fair and equitable benefits from extractive industries

Target: By 2027, establish and operationalize a regional forum to coordinate CBO engagement with extractive industries such as mining.
Target: By 2029, co-develop a guiding framework document in collaboration with various ministries to ensure that fair income from extractive industries reaches the rightful owners of resources.
Target: By 2031, ensure that at least 30% of Kunene conservancies receive fair and transparent benefits from extractive activities in their areas.



Strategic Implementation Approach

To deliver on the goals and targets of IRDNC's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan, an effective resourcing and implementation approach is essential. The following priorities detail how IRDNC will build its capacity, secure the necessary resources, and strengthen operational systems to ensure sustainable impact.

1. People and Organizational Capacity

To effectively achieve its strategic objectives, IRDNC requires a dynamic and skilled team that aligns with the organization's mission. Key actions include:

- Filling all vacant positions with qualified individuals, with emphasis on field positions in specific thematic areas such as community governance, biodiversity, and livelihoods. This also involves targeted recruitment for strategic and specialized roles, including a COO, a dedicated M&E officer, and a communications & fundraising specialist.
- A detailed staff development plan will support ongoing training, skill-building workshops, and external learning opportunities, ensuring the team is equipped to meet evolving challenges in the community-based natural resource management sector.
- A clear team structure will allow staff to focus on specific projects and thematic areas, promoting expertise and accountability within the organization.

2. Leadership Development and Organizational Management

Strong and adaptable leadership is central to IRDNC's success. The organization is committed to building a resilient leadership team and a structure that supports operational effectiveness, efficiency and strategic direction.

- To address gaps in leadership capacity, IRDNC will pursue ongoing training for managers and encourage mentorship opportunities from established leaders within the sector. This will help cultivate a leadership style that is adaptive, supportive, and grounded in IRDNC's mission and values.
- A key priority is strengthening the senior management layer to support the Executive Director. Restructuring the current management model will establish a clearer hierarchy, with middle and senior management roles distributed to alleviate workload and create specific leadership responsibilities for thematic areas.
- Strengthening board engagement and accessing external expertise will ensure the management team has access to timely guidance and support for decision-making and strategic adjustments.

3. Financial Sustainability and Fundraising

Sustainable funding is vital for IRDNC to achieve its long-term goals. A multi-faceted fundraising approach will ensure a steady flow of unrestricted and project-specific resources.

- IRDNC would like to recruit a skilled fundraising professional responsible for donor engagement, grant writing, and exploring new funding streams. This role will be key in establishing a dedicated fundraising unit.
- Efforts will focus on increasing unrestricted funding to support operational flexibility. IRDNC will explore various funding sources, including private foundations, international donors, and government grants.
- To increase resilience, IRDNC will pursue initiatives that generate independent revenue streams, allowing greater freedom and stability beyond traditional donor funding.

4. Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

Building a strong, clear, and strategic communications function is essential to increase IRDNC's visibility, communicate impact, and build stakeholder trust.

- IRDNC will develop a comprehensive communications strategy to guide both internal and external communications efforts. This strategy will outline clear objectives, target audiences, and key messaging to strengthen IRDNC's profile.
- Enhancing the IRDNC website, producing regular impact updates, and sharing success stories will provide greater visibility to the organization's work and outcomes. IRDNC will look into having a dedicated, skilled communications person/team to lead these efforts.
- Strengthening communication channels with local communities, government partners, donors, and the public will build trust and support for IRDNC's work across the regions it operates in.

5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

A MEL system will be built to enable IRDNC to track its impact against strategic goals, refine its programmes, and demonstrate results to stakeholders.

- Hiring a dedicated MEL officer will provide the capacity needed to implement SMART indicators, monitor, and report on IRDNC's objectives and targets. The MEL system will include a monthly tracking routine to monitor progress.
- Data analysis will inform adaptive management decisions and be communicated to stakeholders through regular reports and updates.
- By engaging in workshops, learning exchanges with peer organizations, and regional collaborations, IRDNC will ensure that adaptive practices are integrated across the organization, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

This resourcing and implementation plan will empower IRDNC to achieve its strategic goals while adapting to the evolving needs of communities and landscapes in Namibia and beyond. Through strengthened capacity, sustainable funding, and streamlined management, IRDNC will maximize its impact on Namibia's conservancies and community forests.



Join us in Securing Namibia's Future

The challenges we face are significant, but so are the opportunities to create lasting change. At IRDNC, we envision a future where Namibia's communities thrive alongside healthy ecosystems, where wildlife roams freely, and where local people are empowered to manage and benefit from their natural resources. This vision is only possible with collective effort.

We call on partners, supporters, and stakeholders to join us in this journey. Whether you are a policymaker, a conservationist, a donor, or a community member, your role is vital in building a sustainable future. Together, we can: 1) empower communities to lead the way in conservation and development; 2) secure Namibia's natural heritage for generations to come and 3) demonstrate that people and nature can coexist in harmony.

By supporting IRDNC's strategic goals, you are investing in a proven model that transforms lives, protects biodiversity, and strengthens local economies. Your commitment helps ensure that Namibia continues to be a global leader in community-based conservation, inspiring efforts across Africa and beyond.

Now is the time to act. Let's work together to make this vision a reality. Partner with IRDNC, amplify our impact, and be part of a legacy that benefits both people and nature.



Acknowledgments

The Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) team would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to the development of this strategic plan.

This document is a reflection of the collective vision, dedication, and collaboration of a diverse group of stakeholders who share a commitment to empowering rural communities and conserving Namibia's unique natural heritage.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the conservancies and community forests with whom we have worked closely. Your insights, experiences, and unwavering dedication to sustainable natural resource management have shaped the foundation of this strategy.

Our gratitude goes to the Namibian government, particularly the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water, and Land Reform, for their continued support and partnership. Your leadership in championing community-based natural resource management has been instrumental in the success of our shared goals.

We also acknowledge the support of our donors and funding partners, including international conservation organizations, private sector contributors, and philanthropic foundations. Your financial support and belief in our mission have made it possible to drive meaningful change across the landscapes we serve.

A special thanks to our dedicated IRDNC team, whose expertise, passion, and tireless efforts in the field and at the organizational level have brought this strategy to life. Your commitment to the communities and ecosystems we serve is the backbone of our success.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to the rural communities of Namibia. Your resilience, stewardship, and partnership inspire us to strive for impactful, sustainable solutions that benefit people and the natural environment.

This strategic plan is more than a roadmap, it is a testament to what we can achieve together when we prioritize collaboration, respect, and shared responsibility for our natural world.

Thank you all for your invaluable contributions.





IRDNC

Head office: No. 7 Rossini Street, Windhoek West, Windhoek, Namibia

Email: info@irdnc.org.na Phone: +264 61-228506/9 Website: www.irdnc.org.na