Mavuso Msimang was formerly CEO of SANParks for six years and retains his interest in nature conservation, serving on the boards of organisations such as the Shamwari Eco-Experience, the Rondo Foundation, and the Maseja Foundation. He is currently SANParks' rhino conservation issue manager. He holds a BSc in entomology.

For more information, visit: http://www.rhinoalive.com

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) will take place in Johannesburg, South Africa from 24 September to 5 October 2016 and will bring the global community together to tackle the world’s biggest wildlife challenges and opportunities.

A PRO-TRADE AGENDA

The ban on the trade in rhino horn was instituted in 1977 and has been in place ever since. However, year after year, there has been a serious escalation in rhino poaching, in spite of the fact that the South African government and others are involved in protecting the species, doing everything they can to put a stop to poaching. The justice system, the police, and the courts have all been aligned as never before in South Africa, to make sure that anyone who is caught killing a rhino illegally is successfully prosecuted and punished, but even this has not been enough to stop poaching.

I am convinced that neighbouring communities are the vital link in the war against rhino poaching. When I took over as CEO for SA National Parks (SANParks) in 1997, the hostility between the people that live in these communities and the Kruger National Park (KNP) was terrible. We started a programme that was meant to create an interest in the value of KNP to these residents by encouraging them to grow things that they could sell to the restaurants in KNP and be trained in road construction and maintenance. Communities have traditionally attached a very strong value to wildlife. For example, they called a buffalo ‘nyali’, a totem for them, which they respect and look after in a particular way. If we do bring back the element