



DE BEERS

OKAVANGO ETERNAL

PROTECTING A NATURAL WONDER

MIDTERM REPORT

Prepared for De Beers | March 2025



DEAR FRIENDS,

It has been an honor to partner with De Beers for the past three and a half years, driving forward our shared vision to help protect the Okavango Delta and its headwaters and support the communities who rely on them through the Okavango Eternal partnership.

Through the combined strength of our organizations, we have made significant strides toward this goal, driving meaningful, lasting impact — where science deepens understanding, storytelling sparks action and communities lead the way in conservation. I'm pleased to share our latest impact report, highlighting our accomplishments and the momentum we are building toward the future. The following pages highlight these milestones and many more:

- We are accelerating the work of 24 extraordinary young scientists studying the intricacies of this ecosystem, from the abundant biodiversity across the basin to Angola's peat deposits to the aquatic life in Namibia's Kavango River. This research — accompanied by powerful storytelling — is **shaping global understanding of the Okavango River Basin** and informing actions to safeguard its future.
- By deploying **cutting-edge technologies** — including 17 hydrological monitoring stations — we are generating real-time data and insights for conservation decision-makers in the three countries sharing the basin, ensuring its resilience for generations to come.
- Through the **power of storytelling**, we've inspired more than 4.5 million people globally with "Nkashi: Race for the Okavango," a 9-time award-winning documentary.
- Building on the momentum of the documentary and record attendance at the Nkashi Classic race, **"nkashi" has come to symbolize a social movement**, propelling people forward. With the support of De Beers, this movement comes to life through initiatives such as the Nkashi Bus, which is taking knowledge on the road to communities around the delta.
- We are **expanding educational opportunities** by creating knowledge centres where the local community can participate in Explorer-led Educator Expeditions, financial inclusion workshops, enterprise development programs and Storytellers Clubs.
- And critically, we are working alongside local communities to create **livelihood opportunities, especially for women and girls**.

De Beers' generosity and commitment have fueled these vital efforts — and this is just the beginning.

The work you support nurtures a sense of purpose, ownership and pride, ensuring traditional knowledge remains at the heart of conservation in communities across southern Africa.

Yet, we know there is still so much more to do. The Okavango River Basin faces mounting pressures, and continued collaboration is essential to helping to protect this ecosystem and the communities that depend on it. As we look ahead to the coming years, our partnership will be critical in advancing scientific research, scaling conservation efforts and ensuring that the voices of those who call this place home remain central to its protection.

We are incredibly grateful to De Beers for your partnership. Thank you for your unwavering support and for helping us meet this important moment for the Okavango River Basin.

JILL TIEFENTHALER

Chief Executive Officer
National Geographic Society

STEVE BOYES

National Geographic Explorer
National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project Founder and Project Lead



SNAPSHOT OF OKAVANGO ETERNAL

Since 2015, the National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project (NGOWP) has been working to secure permanent, sustainable protection for the Okavango River Basin.

This work comes to life through rigorous scientific research, documenting and preserving traditional knowledge, immersive education initiatives, and the gripping storytelling for which National Geographic is known. However, NGOWP cannot achieve this level of change alone. That is why National Geographic partnered with De Beers to accelerate the work already underway, elevate local leaders, maximize impact and raise awareness for this critically important landscape.

In 2021, De Beers and National Geographic came together to launch Okavango Eternal, in line with De Beers' Building Forever commitments of supporting livelihoods, climate, and nature. Okavango Eternal is addressing one of the most critical conservation challenges in Africa: helping to protect the headwaters of the Okavango Delta and the lives and livelihoods these waters support. Working hand-in-hand with communities in and around the Okavango Basin, Okavango Eternal is committed to delivering these two objectives of work:

- **Protecting the Natural World** by supporting community-based systems of protection and local governments to protect biodiversity, striving to reach 5.4M hectares around the headwaters of the Okavango River Basin by 2026.
- **Supporting Communities** by enabling stronger economic foundations and providing access to as many as 10,000 livelihood opportunities by 2026.

THESE OBJECTIVES ARE DRIVEN BY SIX ENABLING PILLARS:

<p>1</p> <p>Conservation Stakeholder Engagement: We work closely with decision-makers and traditional authorities to inform and co-create the programs, policies and legislation to ensure the long-term conservation of the greater Okavango River Basin;</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Advancing Knowledge: Through groundbreaking fieldwork and research, we are advancing scientific understanding of the area, including the critical values and vulnerabilities for priority action across the greater Okavango River Basin;</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Traditional Knowledge: By integrating traditional knowledge within all our programs, we formalize this as a primary mechanism of conservation and ensure that communities can benefit from a wider range of income opportunities;</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Capacity Building: We help build local teams, train local technicians and support the next generation of scientists, conservationists and storytellers who will enable long-term and sustainable local impact;</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Community Development: We work directly with communities in the Okavango River Basin, helping strengthen socio-economic and educational foundations, which improves accessibility to livelihood opportunities; and</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Impact Storytelling: By collecting and sharing stories from the basin, we raise awareness of its wonder and importance to push for biodiversity protection and long-term transboundary cooperation.</p>

OKAVANGO ETERNAL GUIDING APPROACH



These six pillars work hand-in-hand to help deliver against the two objectives of Okavango Eternal to protect the natural world and support communities. **Celebrating traditional knowledge** and **advancing cutting-edge scientific research** helps **engage conservation stakeholders and make the case** for the Okavango River Basin's long-term protection. Driving **impact through storytelling** and education helps **raise awareness** and can ultimately lead to protection by inspiring people to care and act on behalf of this vital ecosystem. Importantly, Okavango Eternal envisions a future in which conservation, education and storytelling are locally-led. Supporting **community development** and **capacity building** is essential to meet the moment and the future challenges the basin will face.



Since joining forces through the partnership established in 2021, Okavango Eternal has achieved significant milestones. Among them: defining the boundaries of the Angolan Highlands Water Tower — a remarkable step toward its conservation — and sharing the research with science and policy decision-makers; immersing teachers in Indigenous knowledge through Backyard Expeditions, which they'll take back to their classrooms; and bringing "Nkashi: Race for the Okavango" to millions of viewers, 13 villages and the presidential administration of Botswana.

Below is a high-level progress snapshot, followed by a detailed overview of each partnership component, including testimonials from staff and community members and recommendations for storytelling assets.

PROGRESS TO DATE

COMMUNITY	12,000	6,000	3,000	2,923
	people benefiting from improved infrastructure in Angola, including refurbishing 2 schools, a water system and building 6 new bridges.	conservation education engagements — supported by the Nkashi Bus — in villages around the Okavango Delta, providing educational materials and literacy tools.	students, trainees, scientists, and other visitors hosted at the Nkashi Knowledge Centre in Maun for training, workshops, and community gatherings.	students supported through Okavango Eternal initiatives, such as Backyard Expeditions, internships, offerings at the Nkashi Knowledge Centres, and the Lisima Knowledge initiative.
	1,527	60	53	
CONSERVATION	opportunities across Okavango Eternal-supported initiatives, such as beekeeping, regenerative agriculture, basket weaving, and entrepreneurial skill-building.	youth participated in Storytelling Clubs to learn how to document and share cultural and conservation messages while earning an income.	full-time staff hired in Angola and Botswana through the establishment of three registered organizations supporting Okavango Eternal partnership implementation.	
	1.25 M	545	17	
	hectares mapped and prioritized in the Lisima landscape to help define conservation management opportunities — such as the formalization of conservation areas.	environmental DNA (eDNA) samples collected to help identify biodiversity and invasive species on land and in water.	Hydrological and Meteorological Monitoring Project (HMMP) stations operational across the Okavango River Basin, with many stations being the first to ever monitor rivers in the system.	
STORYTELLING	10	6		
	scientific river expeditions conducted, systematically assessing river health through biodiversity, hydrology, water quality and human impact data.	peer-reviewed publications based on research in Botswana, contributing to conservation strategy and habitat mapping.		
STORYTELLING	100 M	4.5 M+		
	individuals reached through a paid media campaign with National Geographic CreativeWorks.	people experienced the incredible Okavango River Basin and Okavango Eternal through “Nkashi: Race for the Okavango.”		

OKAVANGO ETERNAL TESTIMONIALS



“

Any conservation initiative to protect landscapes and biodiversity will be useless without a profound intention and strategy to allow for sustainable development of these communities. The project will focus on absorbing their intricate connection with these forests and rivers, [and] the already elevated conservation traditions of their natural heritage.”

KERLLEN COSTA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
COUNTRY DIRECTOR, ANGOLA



“

Teachers are the key to achieving a future in which conservation is locally led. ... When we invest in their professional development, they can turn our students into the next generation of scientists, educators and storytellers here in the Okavango Delta.”

KOKETSO “KOKI” MOOKODI
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
NGOWP COUNTRY DIRECTOR,
BOTSWANA



“

I am grateful to the Nkashi Classic organizers for recognizing us by introducing the new youth category. We can now use the river to make some income. I am very grateful. Please continue doing this so that our children can also pole mekoros, just like our parents did.”

BOAGO THOMAMO
POLER FROM SERONGA

Over the first three years of partnership, Okavango Eternal has established a strong foundation for long-term impact by implementing key programs, building local capacity and fostering community engagement. This groundwork has created the necessary structures and partnerships to now enable accelerated progress to scale rapidly, driving significant increases in conservation efforts, livelihood opportunities and community resilience across the region.





1

CONSERVATION STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Okavango Eternal's conservation stakeholder engagement includes advocacy, hosting workshops and symposiums, reviewing legislation, and capacity building with decision- and policymakers to ensure that the policies and legislation are established to support the long-term conservation of the greater Okavango River Basin.

The team works at a grassroots level with communities and traditional authorities, who are the original guardians of these vital ecosystems, to inform and co-create programs that will result in community-based natural resource management and conservation mechanisms for the long-term benefit of the local communities.

Aligned with De Beers' Building Forever Nature focus area, the project is laying the foundation for the enduring conservation of one of Africa's last great wilderness areas and a broader vision of safeguarding the water resources for over one million people by mapping resources and investing in infrastructure and community engagement.

Initiative 1.1: Advocacy and Support for Policymakers in Angola

The completion of the Marxan analysis or rapid Systematic Conservation Plan, which integrates available spatial biodiversity and socio-economic data to identify a robust set of implementation priorities for the Angolan Highlands Water Tower (AHWT) project area, was a key step toward conservation in this area. With these results, in 2023, the team prepared and submitted a proposal to Angola's Ministry of Environment to support the designation of the Lisima Project Area – 5.4M hectares in size and including the AHWT – as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. When a government declares a Ramsar site, it commits to using that wetland wisely and conserving it. The team's research found that the AHWT holds 170 million Olympic-size swimming pools worth of water, supplying water to seven African countries and iconic ecosystems, including the Okavango Delta. After establishing its scientific and ecological importance, it's critical to formally protect the AHWT for the region's future food and water security. Ramsar designation is a critical step toward that. It also brings increased international attention, funding opportunities and opportunities for livelihoods related to wetland management.

Progress to Date Metrics

- The Marxan analysis – a globally recognized conservation planning tool – has been completed. Additionally, a Ramsar proposal for the Lisima Project Area - a geography spanning nearly 5.4M has been submitted.

GOAL FOR 2026 Lisima landscape receives Ramsar status.

- 4 domains of the Lisima landscape, totaling 1.25M hectares, have been mapped in support of the traditional landscape management system, within the broader Lisima Project Area/proposed Ramsar site (5.4M hectares in size). This mapping helps define collaboration and conservation management opportunities - such as the creation of conservation areas - which in turn will support additional livelihood opportunities.

GOAL FOR 2026 An additional 250K hectares mapped to reach a total of 1.5M hectares mapped in the Lisima Project Area in support of the traditional landscape management system.

- 4 sacred sites within the domains described above have been identified for recognition outside traditional authority through a robust engagement process with local leadership. This exciting milestone paves the way for these Okavango Eternal-related sites to gain formal recognition by the local government and, ultimately, a better chance of a protected status at both regional and international levels.

GOAL FOR 2026 Outside recognition of an additional 11 sites to reach a total of 15 culturally significant sites with outside recognition located around the headwaters of the Lisima landscape.

- The NGOWP leadership in Angola has participated in 65 stakeholder engagements and workshops in support of conservation areas, thanks to the Okavango Eternal partnership. Involved stakeholders include decision-makers at all levels of government, representatives from parastatal institutions and grassroots-level leadership.

GOAL FOR 2026 Maintain a presence in the forums and serve as expert-level participants for conservation areas proposed for the Lisima landscape.



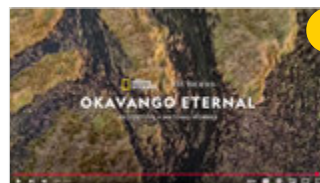
Protecting these headwaters and wetlands, miombo woodland forests – the natural heritage of Angola – is one of the most critical conservation challenges in Africa today.”

STEVE BOYES
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
NGOWP PROJECT LEAD



VIEW THE POST

[instagram.com/p/C9b5O0mRA-j/](https://www.instagram.com/p/C9b5O0mRA-j/)



WATCH THE VIDEO

Surveying the Angolan Highlands

[youtube.com/watch?v=58jV7lf0FAw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58jV7lf0FAw)

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 1.2: Forest Monitoring Program

For generations, communities living in the Lisima landscape have been protecting their forests by using traditional knowledge to manage hunting, fire and the abundance of natural resources. The Watchers forest monitoring program was co-created with local communities and celebrates and enhances their existing conservation practices and long-held knowledge. Every day, Watchers do exactly that: they take care of the forest, and they observe and report critical environmental changes in real time. That includes mapping the location and size of wildfires, which informs efforts to regrow forest and prevent future wildfires; reporting how much bushmeat is harvested; and reporting where and how trees are harvested for construction or charcoal. The Watchers' monitoring of the demands on the forest helps inform conservation decision-makers. And, critically, their efforts aren't just about a healthy forest ecosystem; a healthy forest also means a healthy basin that keeps nourishing people, wildlife and communities downstream.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 75 Watchers and 30 local leaders have been resourced and capacitated – through training and part-time employment – to monitor vast areas of miombo woodlands. Training in the use of the software platform Survey123 and ArcGIS tools, as well as the use of this data and visualization, will help inform local decision-makers in the use and management of natural resources.

GOAL FOR 2026 Resource and capacitate an additional 25 Watchers and 30 local leaders to reach a total of 100 Watchers and 60 local leaders.



READ THE ARTICLE

The shifting lives of the Luchazi people

nationalgeographic.com/culture/slideshow/paid-content-the-shifting-lives-of-the-luchazi-people



There's only a story to tell about the landscape because there are people in it and the people have been seeing the evolution of that landscape for many generations. They are scientific libraries that will inform us of those different cycles, these changes in the landscape."

KERLLEN COSTA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
COUNTRY DIRECTOR, ANGOLA



PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 1.3: Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Botswana

A case study in the villages of Beetsha and Gudigwa, Botswana, explored the connection between Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and natural resource management in the Okavango Delta. The study assessed how local community members utilize natural resources in the surrounding landscape, incorporating mapping exercises that relied on their traditional knowledge and practices. These exercises provided valuable insights into the regular use and management of local resources. Community consultation was a key component of the process, ensuring the accuracy of on-the-ground information while fostering local involvement and support in decision-making.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 4,000 hectares have been mapped to showcase how community members are utilizing natural resources in the surrounding landscape. This mapping exercise will be essential in supporting local governance and managing natural resources.
 - This was completed through 1 survey involving 80 respondents, illustrating the importance of bridging traditional knowledge systems with contemporary resource management practices.
 - 310 people participated in 2 information dissemination workshops held in Beetsha and Gudigwa to give feedback to the communities regarding the TEK survey conducted.



READ THE ARTICLE

Monitoring the heart of the Okavango Delta

[nationalgeographic.com/
environment/article/paid-
content-monitoring-the-heart-
of-the-okavango-delta](https://nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-monitoring-the-heart-of-the-okavango-delta)



A photograph of a man with a beard and a dark t-shirt, holding a small glass vial containing water and some plant matter. He is looking at the vial intently. The background is a sunset over a body of water, with a small boat visible on the left. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of the setting sun.

2

ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE

The implementation of long-term monitoring programs such as repeat river transects, the Hydrological and Meteorological Monitoring Project (HMMP) network, and the open-source sharing of data are key to solving pertinent conservation issues as they arise.

Long-term monitoring is the only way to establish clear trends that will, in turn, inform policy and subsequent protection.

Aligned with De Beers' Building Forever Nature focus area, Okavango Eternal aims to collect and report data and trends that will help policymakers respond to threats and ensure continued biodiversity conservation.

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 2.1: Baselines and Long-term Monitoring

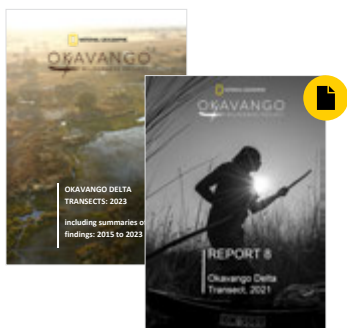
Since the start of the Okavango Eternal partnership, significant progress has been made in scientific research and conservation planning, including a series of river expeditions, hundreds of environmental DNA (eDNA) samples (genetic material found in the water column) collected, and the equipping of a new laboratory as part of the build out at the Nkashi Knowledge Centre in Maun, creating an environment where academic science meets traditional knowledge and has a multiplier effect. With enhanced collaboration, access to cutting edge technologies, and celebration of cultural heritage, the next generation of local scientists will be better equipped to lead, innovate and transform the landscape of science in Botswana and the continent.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 10 scientific river expeditions conducted, covering 3,170 km of river, systematically assessing river health through biodiversity, hydrology, water quality and human impact data.

GOAL FOR 2026 Complete 10 additional expeditions to reach a total of 16 expeditions.

- 6 peer-reviewed publications based on research in Botswana, contributing to conservation strategy and habitat mapping.



READ THE RESEARCH REPORTS

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14C_2yWu3ckkCFASSTF0xhuQLh6anKcYp



READ THE ARTICLE

Biodiversity in the Okavango Basin

nationalgeographic.com/environment/slideshow/paid-content-biodiversity-in-the-okavango-basin

- With the support of Okavango Eternal, the laboratory in Maun has been fully equipped, activating the vital role of this component of research outputs.



Our explorations aim to build awareness around these splendid, yet poorly documented rivers while the baseline data we collect creates a benchmark against which to measure future ecological change.”

DR. RAINER VON BRANDIS
NGOWP RESEARCH DIRECTOR

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 2.2: Hydrological and Meteorological Monitoring Project (HMMP)

The Okavango Eternal partnership has supported the HMMP by establishing and maintaining measuring stations across the Okavango River Basin. Additionally, an updated online dashboard for hydro- and meteorological data serves as an early warning system for potential floods, droughts and water quality concerns. The HMMP is the only independent hydrological dataset for the Okavango River Basin, with many of the autonomous stations being the first to ever monitor rivers in the system. The data from the stations will provide near real-time monitoring capabilities for changes in water flow and water quality, which is important for practitioners, like students and researchers, advocates helping to protect the basin's rivers and biodiversity, and community members whose livelihoods depend on the health of the rivers, like fishers and farmers.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 17 HMMP stations operational across the Okavango River Basin, enabling a comprehensive real-time sharing of information with a variety of end users such as scientists and researchers, students, and local community advocates.

GOAL FOR 2026 Install 9 HMMP stations to reach a total of 26 stations installed and operational across the Okavango River Basin.

- As part of its continued commitment to capacity building with local institutions, Okavango Eternal provided training for 3 technicians in Angola, equipping them with hardware, software and hydrological station management skills.



These images and data provide a benchmark against which to measure future change in terms of ecosystem health and services."

DR. RAINER VON BRANDIS
NGOWP RESEARCH DIRECTOR



READ THE ARTICLE

Five technologies and innovations helping to protect the Okavango

[nationalgeographic.com/
environment/article/paid-
content-five-technologies-and-
innovations-helping-to-protect-
the-okavango](https://nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-five-technologies-and-innovations-helping-to-protect-the-okavango)

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 2.3: Targeted Research and Biodiversity Deployments

Targeted biodiversity surveys, research and eDNA projects are led by scholarship and bursary recipients from Angola, Namibia, and Botswana and supported in the field by NGOWP operations teams.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 2 focused biodiversity expeditions in Angola, supported by local traditional knowledge and scientists from Angolan institutions, have collected thousands of scientific specimens and highlighted the vast biodiversity potential of this underexplored region. The expeditions involved multiple local and international experts in their fields.
GOAL FOR 2026 Continue to analyze samples and publish findings (this can take up to 5 years).
- Participants in the expeditions included 18 specialized scientists, 3 of whom were women and 4 of whom were Angolan nationals.
- 3 Botswana scientists participated in the 10 Delta Crossing Expeditions completed so far over the course of Okavango Eternal.
- Completed the 2023 Kavango River Expedition in which 3 Namibian scientists participated.
GOAL FOR 2026 Convene a symposium in Maun, which will highlight the work of the scientists involved with NGOWP, supported by the Okavango Eternal partnership, and elevate other research efforts conducted across the region.
- 545 eDNA samples have been collected. The potential of eDNA extracted from water samples to allow full inventories of aquatic biodiversity on a spatio-temporal scale is a top priority. It will provide insight into a system that is suffering from overfishing. Additionally, it can aid in detecting exotic invasive species such as Nile tilapia and crawfish.
GOAL FOR 2026 Collect and analyze an additional 140 eDNA samples for a cumulative total of 685 eDNA samples.



Environmental DNA is set to transform environmental monitoring by allowing us to detect species through their genetic material in the environment, without the need for physical capture. This technology is exciting because it can reveal hidden biodiversity, track endangered or invasive species, and monitor ecosystems in ways that were once too expensive or invasive. As eDNA technology advances, it has the potential to become essential for conservation efforts, helping us detect environmental changes, guide restoration projects and mitigate the effects of climate change. With its non-invasive, cost-effective approach, eDNA promises to revolutionize how we protect and understand our biodiversity.”

GÖTZ NEEF
NGOWP COUNTRY DIRECTOR, NAMIBIA

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 2.4: Control of *Salvinia molesta* Infestations

Following the discovery of significant *Salvinia molesta* — an exotic floating weed — infestations in the Okavango Delta, the team initiated a nature-based control programme by setting up rearing ponds for weevils that feed on and destroy *Salvinia*.

Progress to Date Metrics

- Conducted 6 weevil releases after identifying 6 areas of infestation. In 2021, the project deployed thousands of weevils on a massive *Salvinia* infestation on the upper Xudum River by helicopter, which reduced that infestation by more than 80%.

GOAL FOR 2026 Conduct 14 weevil releases to reach a cumulative total of 20 weevil releases.



WATCH THE VIDEO
**Okavango Eternal
- Technology &
Innovations**

[youtube.com/
watch?v=b1knBiEHWCs](https://youtube.com/watch?v=b1knBiEHWCs)



These images and data provide a benchmark against which to measure future change in terms of ecosystem health and services.”

DR. RAINER VON BRANDIS
NGOWP RESEARCH DIRECTOR





3

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Integrating traditional knowledge as a throughline in all of the project's initiatives serves as a primary conservation mechanism and ensures that communities can benefit from a wider range of income opportunities.

Aligned with De Beers' Building Forever Nature, Climate and Livelihoods focus areas, Okavango Eternal focuses on partnering with local communities to learn from them how to help protect this extraordinary natural wonder for future generations. Two initiatives focusing on traditional knowledge in Botswana are highlighted here: The Nkashi Classic race and the expansion of Backyard Expeditions from the original Educator Expeditions Explorer grant.

Initiative 3.1: Nkashi Classic Mokoro Race

The annual Nkashi Classic mokoro race celebrates the rich traditions of mokoro polers in the region. The mokoro (a carved canoe) and nkashi (the pole used to propel it) are essential to daily life, used for transportation, gathering food and firewood, and supporting livelihoods through tourism. Over time, the mokoro has also become a symbol of conservation, with many polers contributing to research expeditions and using their skills to guide scientists to new discoveries. It has also become a source of sport and vibrant community gatherings.

Thanks to the Okavango Eternal partnership, De Beers' sponsorship of the Nkashi Classic race has helped it grow into a nationally recognized event, increasing participation, sponsorship and economic opportunities while strengthening cultural pride. While the race is a highlight, the event is also a major platform for conservation education, engaging thousands of people. Recent races have featured immersive virtual reality (VR) experiences and meet-and-greets with Botswana scientists supported by Okavango Eternal. It's a key example of meeting people where they are to inspire conservation stewardship.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 5,300 people have attended the Classic in person since 2022.
GOAL FOR 2026 2,700+ attendees between the 2025 and 2026 Classic to cumulatively total 8,000 attendees since 2022.
- 32 different vendors — food, artists, service providers, etc. — have participated in the Classic, generating a modest local economic increase every August.
GOAL FOR 2026 Secure the participation of 18+ new vendors.
- 237 polers have participated in the race across multiple categories (Men, Women, Veterans, Youth and Mixed Doubles).
GOAL FOR 2026 163 participants across all categories in 2025 to reach a total of 400+ participants cumulatively since 2022.
- In addition to the De Beers Group, many sponsors have helped make this event happen, including the Botswana Tourism Organization, ABSA Botswana, the European Union and multiple private tourism entities.



VIEW THE POST

[instagram.com/p/Cl3a-rmteT-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cl3a-rmteT-/)

“

My name is Gaetlhophe from Seronga Village. I am very grateful that Nkashi saw it fit to bring the competition to our village. As a young person in the village, I am thankful for this opportunity. Instead of being idle, we are engaged in something meaningful that connects us to our culture and helps us grow. Please continue this great initiative. Thank you very much.”

YOUTH POLER FROM SERONGA

“

My name is Boago Thomamo. I am grateful to the Nkashi Classic organizers for recognizing us by introducing the new youth category. We can now use the river to make some income. I am very grateful. Please continue doing this so that our children can also pole mekoros, just like our parents did.”

WOMAN YOUTH POLER FROM SERONGA

Initiative 3.2: Backyard Expeditions

Backyard Expeditions aims to inspire teachers and enhance science education in the Okavango Delta, where a disconnect can exist between predominantly urban teachers and rural learners about the local biodiversity and culture. Remoteness contributes to low teacher retention, scarce resources, declining academic performance, language barriers, and limited extracurricular and higher education opportunities. Backyard Expeditions provide an opportunity for local Primary School teachers to experience and learn about the local environment and traditional knowledge which will enable them to utilize these skills in the classroom, building deeper connections with their students and creating lessons that can foster pride in their home and heritage.

Traditional knowledge has been woven into all education work of the partnership, including Backyard Expeditions. The work has been scaled into a series across multiple communities, with a mission of implementing effective and long-lasting programs that complement the curricula developed in partnership with the community to inspire a culture of curiosity and respect for nature.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 7 Backyard Expeditions have been conducted in 2 of the 5 eastern panhandle primary schools.

GOAL FOR 2026 Complete an additional 19 Backyard Expeditions at 3 more primary schools to reach a total of 26 Backyard Expeditions at all 5 primary schools in the eastern panhandle and Matlapana Primary School in Maun.

- 54 teachers have been trained and capacitated in connecting the curriculum with traditional knowledge.

GOAL FOR 2026 Train and capacitate an additional 56 teachers for a total of 110 teachers supported.

- 250 students have been directly impacted by this work.

GOAL FOR 2026 Reach an additional 1,250 students for a cumulative total of 1,500 students.

- 5 local guides and elders lead teachers into the wilderness that surrounds their schools to ensure that teachers gain knowledge directly from the people and places where their learners are raised.

GOAL FOR 2026 Build on the number of local elders and knowledge holders in the Backyard Expeditions knowledge exchange.



READ THE ARTICLE

Empowering the educators of Ngamiland

nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-empowering-the-educators-of-ngamiland



The focus is on going to schools, taking teachers out in the backyards of the villages that they teach in, just to have a better understanding of the cultural identity and environment around them through the eyes of important people from that village, like the local shaman. Every single teacher who has participated has left the experience with a profound appreciation for nature. There's a new energy in them when they go back to school – they're reinvigorated."

KOKETSO MOOKODI
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER, NGOWP COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR BOTSWANA

A photograph of two men in a field of tall, dry grass. The man in the foreground is wearing a tan shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses. He is holding a long, thin wooden pole vertically. The man in the background is also wearing a hat and sunglasses, and is holding a long wooden pole horizontally. The background is a hazy, overcast sky.

4

CAPACITY BUILDING

Aligned with De Beers' Building Forever Livelihoods and Nature focus areas, the Okavango Eternal partnership is committed to building local expertise and strengthening conservation leadership across Angola, Namibia and Botswana.

Through initiatives in tertiary education, infrastructure development, and support of the local workforce and leadership, the Okavango Eternal partnership is helping ensure long-term, locally-led conservation efforts that empower future generations of scientists, conservationists and policymakers.

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 4.1: Scholarship Program

By investing in the next generation of conservation leaders — including those from Indigenous and remote communities who have been traditionally underrepresented in the sciences — Okavango Eternal is ensuring the region is stewarded by those who know it best. Okavango Eternal established a scholarship program to fund Ph.D. and Master’s bursaries for students from Angola, Namibia, and Botswana. It is focused on ecological and social sciences while exploring opportunities to support research institutions and government departments in research and technical skills development. Not only is this program supporting home-grown solutions, but it is creating a cohort of early-career scientists and fostering collaboration so they can work together and with communities to achieve impact.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 24 students supported, of which 6 are women, comprising 10 full scholarships, 8 partial bursaries, 3 full bursaries and 3 internships.

GOAL FOR 2026 Continue support and mentorship for current recipients as they complete their studies.



READ THE ARTICLE
Life on the line

[nationalgeographic.com/
environment/article/paid-
content-life-on-the-line](https://nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-life-on-the-line)



Once all of these research pieces are together and this puzzle is complete, you can have data that helps decision-makers come up with the best possible management decisions for the broader ecosystem.”

VILIO MUUNDA
FISHERIES BIOLOGIST AND PH.D. RESEARCHER



PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 4.2: Kissama Biodiversity Internship Program

The Kissama Biodiversity internship program prepares newly graduated, young Angolans for careers in science and conservation through three focus areas: project management, field research on biodiversity, and writing and presentation skills. The program runs for 12 months and is based out of Luanda with programming developed and run by Vladimir Russo, a Senior Advisor to the NGOWP and Fundação Lisima. Participants are able to get hands-on experience in the field with local conservation experts, collecting samples, analyzing data and developing reports to further conservation efforts in the region. Participants are also able to develop English proficiency and gain an introduction to environmental legislation.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 3 iterations of the Kissama Internship Program have been supported by Okavango Eternal.

GOAL FOR 2026 Complete a further 2 iterations of the Kissama Internship Program for a total of 5 iterations.

- 33 Angolan scientists and conservationists have gone through the program, including 18 women.

GOAL FOR 2026 Graduate a further 7 scientists/interns from the program with at least 50% women representation, for a total of 40 scientists/interns.

- 4 graduates and/or interns have progressed to full-time employment in the science or conservation industry.

GOAL FOR 2026 An additional 4 graduates and/or interns will progress to full-time employment in the science or conservation industry.



PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 4.3: Localization

Investment in localization is key to the long-term success of Okavango Eternal. The Okavango Eternal partnership is deeply committed to localizing conservation efforts by building strong local teams, developing leadership and ensuring sustainable capacity building in Botswana, Namibia and Angola. Through these efforts, we are creating a sustainable, locally-led framework that supports community empowerment, strengthens conservation leadership and ensures the long-term success of conservation efforts across the Okavango River Basin. Okavango Eternal's implementing partner, The Wild Bird Trust, now has fully registered and operational nonprofit entities in Angola, Namibia and Botswana, which localizes our collective efforts toward achieving the Okavango Eternal Partnership goals.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 3 registered local entities in Botswana, Angola and Namibia localizing Okavango Eternal's collective efforts toward achieving partnership goals, from community empowerment to strengthening conservation leadership.
- 3 Country Directors for each entity are Angolan, Botswana and Namibian nationals, respectively.
- 23 full-time staff in Angola.
- 30 full-time staff in Botswana.
- 9 women currently occupy key leadership roles.
- Invested in continuous skills development for local teams, providing training in computer literacy, first aid, advanced driving, fire prevention, food health, and safety and career progression.



Conservation of wildlife and the environment began with us, the people who live in the surrounding areas of the Okavango Delta."

GOBONAMANG "GB" KGETHO
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER
AND NGOWP LEAD POLER



WATCH THE VIDEO
Guardians of the Okavango

[youtube.com/
watch?v=S4bygwU3XMc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=S4bygwU3XMc)

Initiative 4.4: Infrastructure Development (Angola)

Through Okavango Eternal, the Conservation Development Node (CDN) in the village of Tempuê, Angola, is being developed and set for full activation in 2025. It will serve as a vital operational base for scientific staff and research expeditions, host workshops for a variety of livelihood opportunities, serve as a meeting space for the community, and more. The CDN will ensure long-term sustainable development and conservation efforts in the Lisima region through a permanent, resourced gathering space.

Progress to Date Metrics

- Supported 20 full-time jobs, including 4 women, with local employment expected to grow.

GOAL FOR 2026 Expansion of the CDN to provide accommodation for 40 people and increase facilities to include offices, meeting areas, workshops and equipment storage, enabling the CDN to serve as a hub for biodiversity surveys, river expeditions and livelihood workshops.



Initiative 4.4: Infrastructure Development (Angola, continued)

While the CDN has been under construction, the Okavango Eternal partnership has found many opportunities to listen to and engage with communities. In response to these sessions, Okavango Eternal identified high-priority infrastructure needs to support. Thanks to the partnership's actions, detailed further below, every resident of the village of Tempué now enjoys access to improved infrastructure – such as a refurbished primary school and clinic – that enhances their quality of life, supports economic growth, and fosters a sense of belonging and pride.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 6 major traditional bridges built by local engineers.
- 1 telephone communications system installed in the Tempué municipality.
- 1 refurbished clinic (installing ceiling panels with lighting, enabling evening classes and extended patient care).
- 3 business hubs established, featuring a honey house, handmade arts center and offices, fostering small businesses and local engagement.
- 15 jobs created, offering alternatives to bushmeat hunting.
- 12,000 people benefiting from the new infrastructure outlined above.
- 2 refurbished primary schools in the Tempué municipality (providing new roofing, doors and windows). This, along with other educational initiatives, has led to 1,950 students with improved access to education.
- Maintenance for 1 airstrip – after being cleared of unexploded ordnance and refurbished – enhancements increase safety and operational efficiency, ensuring rapid response and extraction if needed.
- 6,000 people benefiting from a refurbished government water system in Tempué.



Initiative 4.4: Infrastructure Development (Botswana)

The Nkashi Knowledge Centres in Maun and Beetsha serve as incubation hubs for community development and capacity building, reinforcing a commitment to localization. The fully operational Maun centre provides a valuable resource and convening space for the greater Maun community.

The construction of the Beetsha centre, supported by the Okavango Eternal partnership, marks a major milestone in sustainable conservation and local development in the eastern panhandle. Designed to support livelihoods, environmental sustainability and cultural preservation, the Beetsha centre has already created jobs, supported local suppliers and preserved traditional knowledge. Key sustainable features include strategic architectural design to minimize land disturbance, locally sourced water reeds for employment opportunities, upcycled shipping containers to reduce waste, and solar-powered infrastructure. Additionally, a Biorock sewerage treatment plant and food waste composting system promote a circular economy and support local agriculture.

Progress to Date Metrics

NKC Maun

- 3,000 visitors have been hosted since construction, raising awareness of the NKC Maun and its role in the community. Notable visitors included ambassadors from the European Union and other partnering organizations.

GOAL FOR 2026 Host 2,000 additional visitors for a total of 5,000 visitors hosted over the duration of the partnership.

- 210 youth engaged in STEM initiatives, such as workshops in digital literacy, *Salvinia* management and EcoClubs.

GOAL FOR 2026 An additional 2,790 youth engaged in STEM initiatives for a cumulative total of 3,000 youth engaged.

- 350 women participated in various training programs focusing on financial literacy and enterprise development delivered at the NKC Maun.

GOAL FOR 2026 An additional 650 women participate in various training programs for a cumulative total of 1,000 women.

- 4 training program participants qualified as Financial Inclusion Trainers, working toward deeply embedding the financial inclusion program in the community and ensuring it is run locally.

GOAL FOR 2026 2 additional participants qualified as Financial Inclusion Trainers.

- 4 trainees have been employed as educators, or Nkashi Bus Technicians, so that the goals of the Nkashi Bus are well-informed and well-supported in the field.

GOAL FOR 2026 1 additional trainee qualified as a Nkashi Bus Technician, for a total of 5 trainees qualified.

- 1 EcoClub, a group for students that focuses on science, research and conservation-related topics, has been created at the Matlapana Primary School.

GOAL FOR 2026 An additional 4 EcoClubs, for a cumulative total of 5 EcoClubs activated in villages that fall under the Okavango Community Trust.

NKC Beetsha

- 99 total jobs were supported during the camp establishment and main construction phases of the project in Beetsha. This includes:

- Phase 1: Camp Establishment
 - 36 jobs — all for citizens — supported.
- Phase 2: Main Building Construction
 - 63 jobs supported.
- Phase 3: Operationalise NKC
 - 8 full-time jobs created, including program implementers, cooking, housekeeping, centre maintenance and driving.

GOAL FOR 2026 Further develop the centre as a learning and teaching instrument and hire a Centre Manager.

Nkashi Knowledge Outreach (through both centers)

- 8 schools have been engaged through various programs, such as Educator Expeditions and the Nkashi Knowledge Bus, in an effort to embed the centre in the community as a source for deep, localized and long-lasting support.

GOAL FOR 2026 Increase effectiveness of engagement with 2 additional schools for a cumulative total of 10 schools engaged.

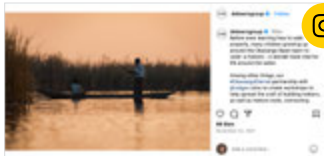
PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 4.5: Training and Workshops for Stakeholders

Okavango Eternal has facilitated workshops with diverse stakeholders, including traditional leaders, government, NGOs and ministries to foster a collaborative and inclusive environment and create lasting livelihood opportunities. Training for local communities covers business skills, financial literacy, ecotourism, leadership, science feedback and conservation education. By 2026, the NKC's aim to become the primary hubs for stakeholder engagement in the Okavango Delta.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 1 Education Program meeting hosted for stakeholders operating in the eastern panhandle. This meeting, moderated by the Ministry of Basic Education Primary Education Officer II and the Department of Environmental Affairs Environmental Education officer, presented an opportunity to present plans, discuss potential collaborations, avoid duplication of efforts, and better understand the community's needs to approach this work holistically.
- In 2024, participants joined a Cattle Task Force Workshop in partnership with the NGO CLAWS, which was supported by the Okavango Research Institute.



VIEW THE POST

[instagram.com/p/CWk8zjog4Zt/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CWk8zjog4Zt/)



VIEW THE POST

[instagram.com/p/CWqGZN_MvYm/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CWqGZN_MvYm/)





5A

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT — ANGOLA

Aligned with De Beers' Building Forever Livelihoods focus area, the Okavango Eternal partnership is supporting initiatives focused on building the enabling conditions for livelihood development.

This is a long-term commitment in an area as remote and inaccessible as the highlands of southeast Angola. These livelihoods will include opportunities for women and girls that might not otherwise be prioritized for this demographic, while strengthening food security and alleviating threats to ecosystems.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Initiative in Lisima, a program fostering economic empowerment, food security and conservation through a diverse range of programs, has experienced tremendous progress. Since 2022, it has actively supported an increasing number of community members, with a strong emphasis on women, youth and marginalized groups. Through the Okavango Eternal Partnership, the initiative has made significant strides in expanding access to resources, driving economic development, promoting sustainable agriculture and advancing financial empowerment — all with measurable impact. With ambitious targets set for 2026 and beyond, it remains on course to strengthen local capacity, enhance food security and create lasting livelihood opportunities in Lisima.

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.1a: Job Creation and Economic Empowerment

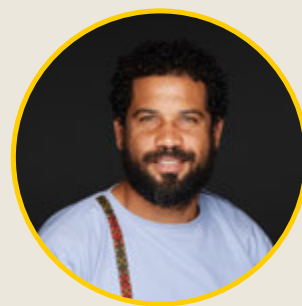
The initiatives detailed below equip communities with the tools to shape their own future, building self-sufficiency, conservation leadership and nature-positive enterprise development. The associated programs include Mel da Vida® (Honey of Life), Regenerative Agriculture, Handmade® Enterprise, Youth Mappers Project, Community Infrastructure Project, Lisima Knowledge, and Lisima Healers.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 856 community livelihoods have been supported through direct engagement in the initiatives detailed below.
 - 137 farmers supported with equipment and agroforestry knowledge.
 - 500 community members involved in the Lisima Handmade program, with 185 entrepreneurs directly supported.
 - 123 beekeepers supported with equipment.
 - 52 government-certified lecturers supported.
 - 32 traditional midwives trained.
 - 12 traditional healers supported.
- Women and girls make up 29% of the participants in livelihood programs in Angola
- 103 workshops have been conducted across various livelihood initiatives, including farmer training, money management habits and more. The full scope for Angola is as follows:
 - 34 workshops conducted on land suitability, nursery development and farmer training.
 - 4 vision workshops held to explore community saving and money management habits.
 - 38 training sessions conducted on product development and market access for local artisans (Handmade® Enterprise program).
 - 15 workshops held for beehive installation, native tree species identification and seed collection.
 - 12 training sessions on land use mapping, including beekeeping suitable areas, abandoned crop areas, pests and infested crops.
- 12 community members traveled to Zimbabwe on a knowledge exchange with successful community-led organizations, focusing on livelihood alternatives that could be applicable in the Lisima Landscape.

OVERALL GOALS FOR 2026

- Support an additional 315 artisans, for a total of 500 artisans across 10 villages.
- Support an additional 127 beekeepers, for a cumulative total of 250 beekeepers.
- Establish a monitoring system for nurseries and seedling management.
- Conduct 2 additional knowledge exchanges, for a cumulative total of 5 exchanges.



Any conservation initiative to protect landscapes and biodiversity will be useless without a profound intention and strategy to allow for sustainable development of these communities. The project will focus on absorbing their intricate connection with these forests and rivers, [and] the already elevated conservation traditions of their natural heritage."

KERLLEN COSTA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
COUNTRY DIRECTOR, ANGOLA

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.2a: Mel da Vida® (Honey of Life)

The goal of Mel da Vida® (Honey of Life) is to develop sustainable beekeeping as an alternative, fair trade livelihood for families, particularly for women and marginalized groups, while documenting and celebrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) for ecosystem conservation. So far, the program has trained over 100 beekeepers in this potential livelihood opportunity, distributing hives, conducting two honey harvests and performing quality sampling. Two knowledge exchanges between communities in Angola and Mozambique have also occurred, sharing best practices and success stories. A key next step for this program is conducting feasibility assessments for local and international markets.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 123 beekeepers have been trained under the Mel da Vida® (Honey of Life) enterprise.



READ THE ARTICLE **Connected by water**

[nationalgeographic.com/
environment/article/paid-
content-connected-by-water](https://nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-connected-by-water)



READ THE ARTICLE **Empowering people to protect the Okavango Basin**

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environment/article/paid-
content-empowering-people-
to-protect-the-okavango-basin](https://nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-empowering-people-to-protect-the-okavango-basin)



Traditional ways of living within these communities are inherently sustainable because they are based on only taking what is needed from the surrounding environment, small-scale agriculture, subsistence hunting, harvesting honey from wild bees. That's the definition of a true guardian. Someone who is in tune with their environment and is only using it [sustainably] for their own sustenance."

KERLLEN COSTA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
COUNTRY DIRECTOR, ANGOLA



PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.3a: Regenerative Agriculture and Food Security

The regenerative agriculture and food security initiative promotes sustainable agricultural practices to enhance food security and ecosystem health for over 10,000 community members while empowering women and girls to actively participate in creating alternative livelihoods. This initiative integrates conservation agriculture, agroforestry, and regenerative techniques and reduces slash-and-burn agriculture expansion. Key actions include farmer training, land rehabilitation, tree planting, nursery development, and cooperative and governance systems formation.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 185 people have benefited from resilient agricultural infrastructure such as tree nurseries growing locally relevant seedlings and through improved agricultural practices like crop rotation, soil protection and preservation of peatlands.

GOAL FOR 2026 Increase beneficiaries to 2,000.

- 1 tree nursery built with capacity for 150,000 seedlings.

GOAL FOR 2026 Build 1 additional nursery for a total of 2 nurseries with capacity for 200,000 seedlings.

- 20 hectares of land are now under improved agricultural practices.

GOAL FOR 2026 Increase capacity to 1,000 hectares.

- 137 farmers have been trained in conservation agriculture and agroforestry.

GOAL FOR 2026 Increase to 500 farmers.

- 34 workshops conducted on land suitability, nursery development and farmer training.

GOAL FOR 2026 Hold 16 additional workshops for a cumulative of 50 total workshops.



We are looking more at biosphere reserves that allow for some economic activities. The objective is to have communities be enabled to enhance the way they use their ecosystem, but in ways that allow for certain measurements of protection as to not destroy that ecosystem.”

KERLLEN COSTA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
COUNTRY DIRECTOR, ANGOLA



VIEW THE POST

[instagram.com/p/CTUOJIRivpc/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CTUOJIRivpc/)

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.4a: Handmade® Enterprise

This initiative enables the creation of a livelihoods sector within the Lisima landscape that generates consistent income for artisans through basket weaving, which recognizes and preserves their traditions in the development of these pieces while promoting community growth and environmental protection through the use of sustainably harvested materials like such as the grassroots used to weave these unique baskets. This is a new opportunity, primarily for the women on the Lisima landscape, to support their families and communities with a source of income.

Progress to Date Metrics

- The Lisima Handmade program is active in 7 communities and has expanded to 3 new villages: Samanaia, Tchitumbo and Tchancilo, with 500 community members involved at various stages and 185 handmade entrepreneurs directly supported.

GOAL FOR 2026: Identify potential overseas markets - South Africa and the USA - and develop the pathway for export and sales.



We make the Chihele so there is something to remember. The [root-made] basket and our memories will still be here and the plastic one will be gone.”

LINDA MBAKU
LEADER OF THE HANDMADE
GROUP IN TEMPUÉ



PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.5a: Youth Mappers Project

The Youth Mappers Project aims to craft a future where Indigenous and local communities wield the power of geospatial technologies, ensuring livelihoods, conserving vital ecosystems and building a world where tradition seamlessly blends with innovation.

In Angola, youth mappers are exploring the environmental effects of traditional versus modern beekeeping. They're mapping tree density, analyzing honey quality and uncovering how harvesting impacts natural resources. Some of the questions they're exploring include: *Is traditional beekeeping harming forests, or are there opportunities to regenerate them? Does modern beekeeping offer a more sustainable alternative, or does it come with its own challenges?* These Youth Mappers are not only understanding the world and natural resources around them but also generating insights that could translate to livelihood and economic opportunities.

Youth Mappers' work is having immediate impacts on conservation decision-making and economic livelihood planning. But longer term, they're developing expertise that could position them well for careers in environmental science and land management.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 8 community mappers have been trained to support land use monitoring, including agriculture and beekeeping.



PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.6a: Financial Inclusion and Skills Development

Through Okavango Eternal, this initiative works to empower the Lisima community members to achieve financial security, economic empowerment and self-reliance by establishing and operating community-based savings and lending groups. It leverages existing informal savings practices, supports small businesses and promotes gender-inclusive economic development. This is achieved through training, radio awareness campaigns and savings mechanisms.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 4 visioning workshops have been held to explore community saving and money management habits.
- 1 financial inclusion booklet developed.
- 16 community members trained in financial literacy.
- 6 radio episodes recorded for an awareness campaign.
- 18 community members participated in “nature-positive enterprises” knowledge exchanges.

GOAL FOR 2026 Participation of 32 additional community members for a total of 50 community members.



READ THE ARTICLE
**Okavango Eternal:
Year one**

[nationalgeographic.com/
environment/article/paid-content-
okavango-eternal-year-one](https://nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-okavango-eternal-year-one)

Seeking ideas and inspiration, Angolan villagers visited Mozambique’s Gorongosa National Park, where they learned how cooperatives boost community prosperity by pooling resources, selling surplus produce and reinvesting in schools and infrastructure.



I learned about savings in the neighborhood. Each neighborhood has a contribution box to store money, with lists and booklets. It is something that I’d like to adapt here. It’s money you can save for the whole year and make it possible to send your children to school.”

ELIAS NGUNGA

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.7a: Lisima Knowledge

The Lisima Knowledge Program is an initiative that aims to empower local communities by improving access to education while preserving traditional knowledge. Through partnerships with the Moxico Provincial Education Department, the program has helped identify and support local community members to receive certification to work as teachers across the region. The team also holds environmental education workshops with local area children, which bring together traditional knowledge and academic science, imparting the importance of learning about the landscape and preserving cultural ways of life. These and other efforts to document and integrate ancestral knowledge into formal education are underway and expanding considerably, ensuring cultural and environmental heritage preservation and supporting the next generation of local conservation leaders.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 2 government-certified lecturers are being supported, including 5 women.

GOAL FOR 2026 Support 50 more lecturers.

- 1,950 children have benefited from increased access to education.

GOAL FOR 2026 Increase access to education for an additional 1,050 children for a cumulative total of 3,000 children.

Initiative 5.8a: Lisima Healers

The Lisima Healers Program works to bridge traditional and modern healthcare systems while improving health access in remote communities by training dozens of midwives and healers in over 40 regional villages. This expanded network of professionals in healthcare is ensuring stronger local expertise and an easier path to accessing care for local communities.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 32 traditional midwives in 40 villages have been trained, addressing infant and maternal health challenges.

GOAL FOR 2026 Train an additional 33 traditional midwives with a cumulative total of 65 midwives trained.

- 12 traditional healers are documenting and imparting their knowledge to the next generation.

GOAL FOR 2026 Facilitate the ability of an additional 13 healers, for a cumulative total of 25 traditional healers, to impart their knowledge.



“

Ever since the project first arrived here, early in 2016, a lot of time has passed. A lot of things have happened in that time. In the beginning, the project needed help from us to show them places with lakes and animals. We couldn't understand the purpose. After 10 years, our relationship has changed dramatically. Thanks to an incredible effort and ethics to maintain the traditional values and system of governance in every decision, both of us — the project and our communities — have grown together, in a way that the project has helped us understand properly what their intention is and they have better understood the importance of respecting our culture and ways. Resulting in collective better stewardship of our ancestral land and its riches, as well as, creating structures and systems to help us develop as a stable community. It is a friendship that we value and hold our word to it, to protect what our ancestors handed to us!”

REGEDOR TCHITANGA

TRADITIONAL LEADER OF THE LAND DOMAIN IN WHICH TEMPUÉ IS PART OF



5B

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT – BOTSWANA

Through Okavango Eternal, NGOWP works directly with communities in the Okavango River Basin to strengthen socio-economic and educational foundations, improving access to livelihood opportunities.

Aligned with De Beers' Building Forever goal to support livelihoods, the project's community-building efforts aim to enhance health and education outcomes while expanding livelihood opportunities to support community resilience and economic diversification.

The Okavango Eternal partnership supports various community development initiatives in Botswana. These initiatives are implemented through the Nkashi Knowledge program, which oversees the implementation of the Nkashi Knowledge Centres and the Nkashi Knowledge Bus. These education and livelihood initiatives will benefit local communities while helping protect the heritage and ecosystems of the Okavango Delta.

Initiative 5.1b: High-Level Metrics

- 223 community livelihoods have been supported through trainees participating in programs across the project.
 - 20 youth enrolled in Itsoseng Youth Groups.
 - 73 locals trained in financial literacy.
 - 60 youth across 3 cohorts have participated in Storytelling Clubs.
 - 12 local polers trained in supporting community-led trail runs.
 - 16 jobs created through Nkashi Knowledge Center outreach.
 - 42 farmers and village leadership representatives and government agriculture departments briefed about the Senkobo disease and its management.

GOAL FOR 2026 Support an additional 277 livelihoods, increasing the cumulative total to 500.

- 9 enterprises supported.
 - 4 interim companies to investigate the potential of community-led mekoro trails.
 - 2 village development committee companies in Seronga and Gunotsoga.
 - 3 savings groups in Beetsha and Seronga.

GOAL FOR 2026 Support 1 additional enterprise for a total 10 supported while continuing to mentor and support these companies.



Initiative 5.2b: Sustainable Livelihoods and Economic Opportunities

In Botswana, Okavango Eternal has made a suite of livelihood opportunities possible for adults and youth in the local communities. This includes providing life skills, vocational training and business mentorship to youth, establishing savings groups and financial literacy training, supporting micro-enterprises for adults, and introducing sustainable, water-efficient farming techniques to improve income opportunities.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 20 youth enrolled in Itsoseng Youth Groups, providing life skills, vocational training and business mentorship to out-of-school youth to reduce unemployment and social issues.

GOAL FOR 2026 Retain an education specialist to reassess the program and make suggestions more suitable to the socio-economic realities experienced in these remote villages.

- 3 savings groups established.

GOAL FOR 2026 Establish at least 7 additional savings groups, for a total of 10, depending on community needs.

- 73 locals trained in financial literacy.

GOAL FOR 2026 Train 77 additional local community members, for a total of 150, in financial literacy.

- Women and girls make up 15% of the participants in livelihood programs in Botswana.

- 5 garden towers created and another 5 underway, showcasing how to operate sustainable, water-efficient vertical farming.

GOAL FOR 2026 Finish and maintain the current 10 garden towers.

- 1 mapping pilot study across 2 villages was implemented. It included 80 surveys to identify and quantify the availability of natural resources like wild fruits, grasses, and cattle grazing land, with a goal of arming village committee leadership with insights to help inform their conservation policies.

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.3b: Education and Knowledge Sharing

Okavango Eternal is helping to advance education, cultural preservation and economic empowerment in Botswana. The Nkashi Knowledge Bus brings learning resources and conservation education to remote communities, while early childhood development programs support young learners and educators. Complementing these efforts, storytelling initiatives empower Indigenous and marginalized storytellers with skills to share their culture and conservation messages, creating new opportunities for income generation and cultural preservation.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 2 playgroups have been established to enhance childhood education, capacitate teachers and support working mothers.

GOAL FOR 2026 Continue mentoring 2 existing playgroups in Beetsha and Gudigwa as per our partnership with SAVE Conservation Trust.

- Operational support of the Nkashi Knowledge Bus. This mobile resource center provides educational materials, literacy tools, internet access and conservation education to remote communities.

GOAL FOR 2026 The bus continues to support all the education and livelihood initiatives in the eastern panhandle by acting as a mobile classroom. It will also support all community development subprojects. Metrics are captured under those initiatives.

- 60 youth across 3 cohorts have participated in Storytelling Clubs to learn how to document and share cultural and conservation messages while earning an income. 24 are women, 20 come from the Basarwa or San community, and 14 are deaf.

GOAL FOR 2026 30 additional youth participate in Storytelling Clubs for a cumulative total of 90 participants.



Teachers are the key to achieving a future in which conservation is locally led. ... When we invest in their professional development, they can turn our students into the next generation of scientists, educators and storytellers here in the Okavango Delta."

KOKETSO "KOKI" MOOKODI
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
NGOWP COUNTRY DIRECTOR, BOTSWANA



READ THE ARTICLE
Sharing Nkashi: Race for the Okavango with people of the Okavango Delta

nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/paid-content-nkashi-race-people-of-the-okavango-delta

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.4b: Cultural and Conservation-Based Tourism

The Mokoro Trails Pilot Project is developing a new and more inclusive community-led tourism model that will allow locally owned tourism businesses to benefit from more of the ecotourism value chain. The Okavango Delta, renowned for its vast and pristine ecosystems, faces challenges due to an increasing human and tourism footprint. To address this, Okavango Eternal supported a comprehensive mapping project to identify ideal areas for promoting no-trace tourism activities, such as Mokoro Trails and Walking Trails, which is an important first step for making the business case for potential mokoro and walking trails businesses.

Progress to Date Metrics

- Began mapping underutilized areas in the delta with minimal human and tourism footprints that could be suitable for promoting ecotourism activities driven by local communities incorporating their cultural heritage.

GOAL FOR 2026 Use the map to propose areas for community access as part of a proposal to the Land Board and Botswana Tourism Organization.

- 12 local polers trained in camp setup, occupational health safety and water safety to upskill them in conducting community-led trail trial routes.

GOAL FOR 2026 Train 12 additional polers, for a total of 24.

- 4 community-owned companies have applied for access to campsites on the back of support from Okavango Eternal to help understand the opportunities for niche businesses set up and run by locally-based entities. This will allow community-run businesses to offer a unique tourism experience with increased direct benefits from the industry.

GOAL FOR 2026 Continue to mentor and capacitate these companies through livelihood programs.



PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 5.5b: Nkashi Knowledge Centres (NKC)

The construction of the Beetsha Nkashi Knowledge Centre, which is supported through the Okavango Eternal Partnership, is a major milestone in community development and sustainable conservation efforts in the eastern panhandle of Botswana. Designed to support local livelihoods, environmental sustainability and cultural preservation, the project has generated economic and employment benefits while ensuring minimal environmental impact.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 16 jobs created through NKC outreach in the region, with individuals working across Okavango Eternal initiatives.
GOAL FOR 2026 Create at least 3 more jobs, for a total of 19.
- 99 total jobs were supported during the camp establishment and main construction phases of the project in Beetsha.
- 500 families are benefiting from NKC programs across 5 villages in the surrounding area.
- 15 households with additional waterpoint access through the new borehole at the Beetsha NKC. The borehole supplements the municipal supply, which can be inconsistent.



READ THE ARTICLE

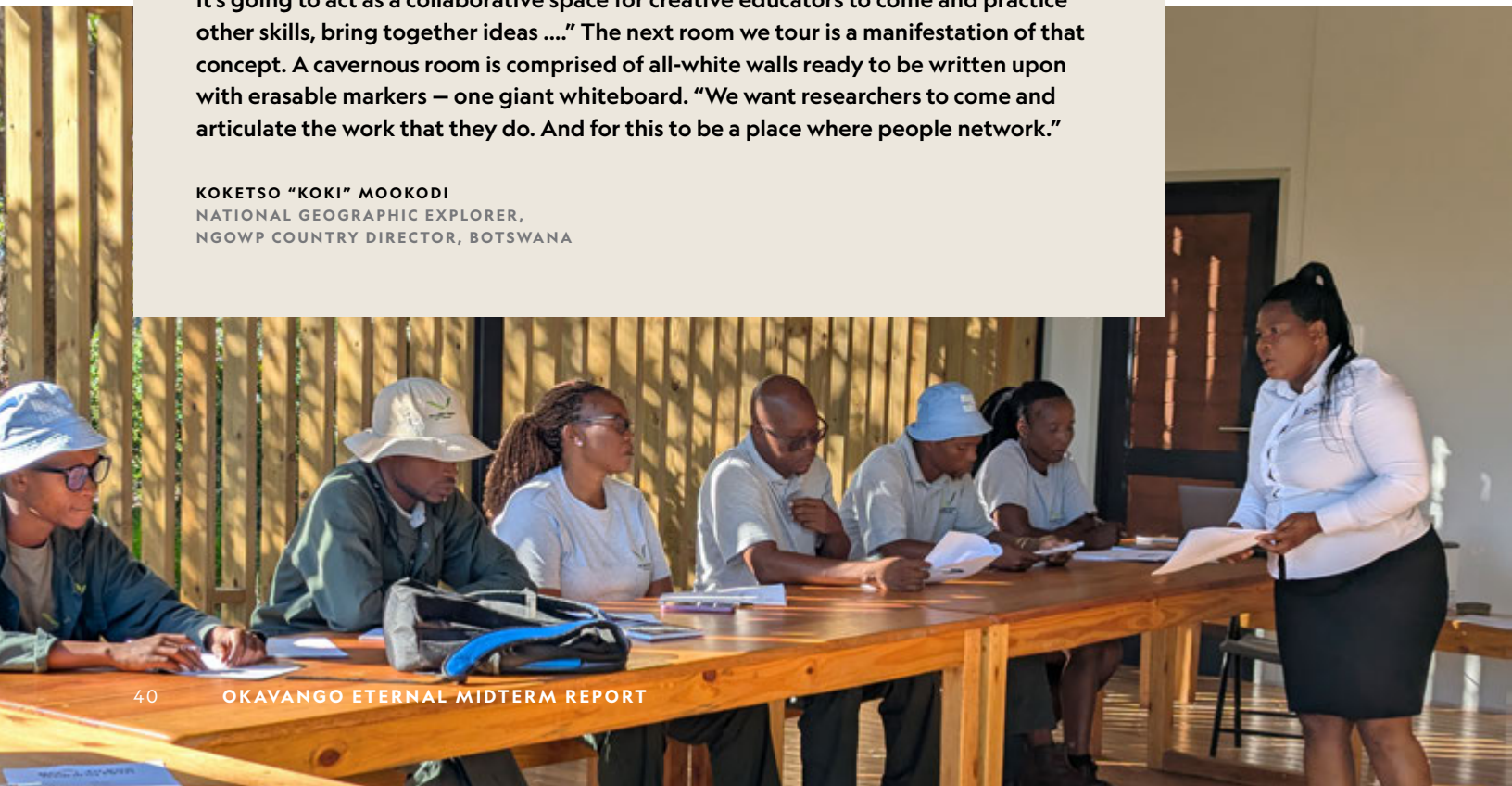
Connected by water

[nationalgeographic.com/
environment/article/paid-
content-connected-by-water](https://nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-connected-by-water)

“

It's going to act as a collaborative space for creative educators to come and practice other skills, bring together ideas” The next room we tour is a manifestation of that concept. A cavernous room is comprised of all-white walls ready to be written upon with erasable markers – one giant whiteboard. “We want researchers to come and articulate the work that they do. And for this to be a place where people network.”

KOKETSO “KOKI” MOOKODI
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER,
NGOWP COUNTRY DIRECTOR, BOTSWANA





6

RAISING AWARENESS

Initiatives in storytelling and conservation education are cross-cutting in support of the project's other goals.

By working with local and international teams to collect and share stories from across the Okavango River Basin, Okavango Eternal raises awareness of its wonder and importance. Aligned with De Beers Building Forever Nature and Climate focus areas, Impact Storytelling helps ensure ongoing support for the communities and biodiversity that depend on these ecosystems and that stakeholders on multiple levels understand the issues and threats facing the system. Through storytelling, the Okavango Eternal partnership aims to spark conversations, reinforce the role of community and traditional knowledge in conservation, and catalyze long-term transboundary cooperation.

PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 6.1: “Nkashi: Race for Okavango” Film

Created by the National Geographic Society’s Impact Story Lab and partially funded by the Okavango Eternal Partnership, “Nkashi: Race For The Okavango” has significantly impacted local communities in the Okavango Delta. The film, produced through a groundbreaking partnership between the Society’s Impact Story Lab and Botswana-owned Parable Motion, premiered in Maun in March 2023. Thanks to the support of Okavango Eternal, this film was made in Botswana and allowed for extensive mentorship and career growth for the Botswana and regional filmmakers, composers, and artists who shaped this film. The film has also sparked an important national narrative about how media productions – with local talent in front of and behind the camera – can drive economic development.

Since the film’s creation, the goal has been to share it with the people of the Delta – right where they live. The Botswana Wild Bird Trust, with funding from Okavango Eternal, held screenings in 13 villages in Ngamiland, reaching thousands of people. This initiative has bolstered community pride, reinforced the value of Indigenous knowledge and spurred increased participation in the Nkashi Classic race, thereby supporting livelihoods and advancing the field of impact storytelling for conservation.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 4.34M individuals reached via “Nkashi” documentary.
 - 2.2M individuals in southern Africa via National Geographic Wild
 - 2.14M via BTV.
- “Nkashi” has reached an audience of 4,500 people across 13 community screenings in and around the Okavango Delta, with attendance figures ranging from 90 to 550 per location.
 - The screening events not only brought local traditions to life through live musical performances but also mobilized 50 local staff for security, crowd control and cleaning.
- 1-year run time for “Nkashi” on Botswana Television, providing an opportunity for the film to reach 80% of households in Botswana.

- “Nkashi” has amassed 59,000 views on National Geographic’s YouTube in just 7 months

GOAL FOR 2026 Screen “Nkashi” for a De Beers audience in London and Johannesburg to celebrate the Okavango Eternal Partnership and create internal awareness of this work.



READ THE ARTICLE

Sharing Nkashi: Race for the Okavango with people of the Okavango Delta

nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/paid-content-nkashi-race-people-of-the-okavango-delta



WATCH THE FILM
Nkashi: Race for the Okavango

youtube.com/watch?v=yum0xq2gmzc



This is a great film. I was emotional from the opening to the very end. It took me through a whole journey. Not only did it showcase the Delta, but the people who live in the Delta and how engaged and involved with their environment they really are...There is a symbiotic relationship, and it's real, not just perceived. Like people who live in the Delta love their environment. They appreciate it for what it is."

AUDIENCE MEMBER
MAUN, BOTSWANA

Initiative 6.2: Conservation Education Botswana

The Conservation Education Program is an initiative aiming to bridge scientific research, TEK and community engagement to foster long-term conservation of the Okavango River Basin. The program does this by addressing misconceptions about conservation, promoting science-based storytelling and empowering local stakeholders. It ensures that communities become active participants in conservation efforts. The goal is to build trust in the communities and inspire the next generation of scientists and conservationists. Examples of activities within this program include the Nkashi Bus outreach work, supported in part by Okavango Eternal, conservation film screenings in local languages and conservation education events to promote opportunities in the conservation field.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 6,000 conservation education engagements – supported by the Nkashi Bus – have taken place in villages around the Okavango Delta.

GOAL FOR 2026 300 more conservation education engagements, for a total of 6,300.

- 250 screenings of conservation films – often translated into Setswana – held in Okavango Community Trust villages.

GOAL FOR 2026 At least 50 more screenings, reaching a total of 300 screenings, and continued outreach.

- 2 conservation education events – 1 career fair and 1 STEM festival – hosted by NGOWP at the Maun and Beetsha Nkashi Knowledge Centres, thanks to the Okavango Eternal partnership.

GOAL FOR 2026 Host 2 more conservation education events.

- 18 conservation-focused articles shared on social media targeting non-science expert audiences.

GOAL FOR 2026 Share 18 additional conservation-focused articles on social media targeting non-science expert audiences, reaching a total of 36 conservation-focused articles.

“

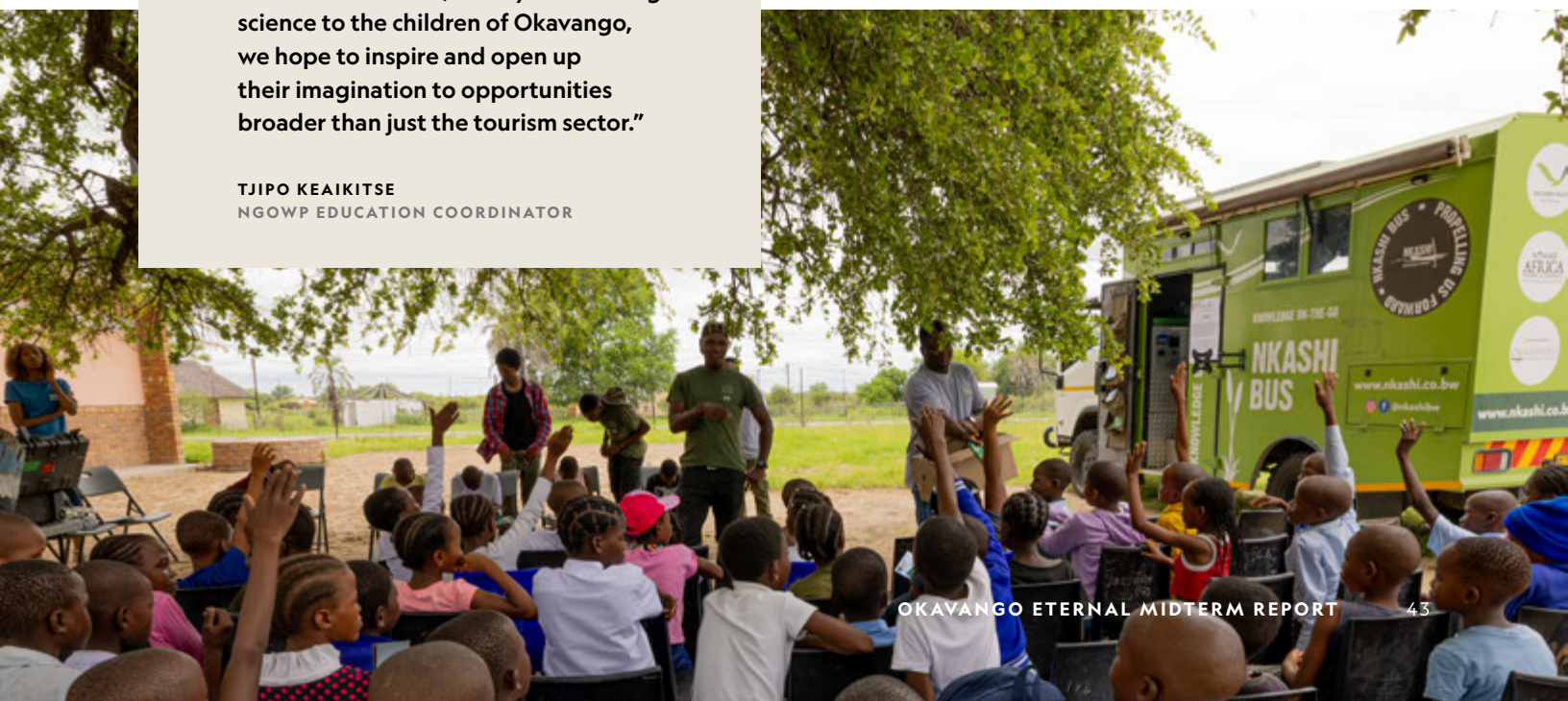
Children are inspired by what they see lived. Science-based careers are the future of the world, and by introducing science to the children of Okavango, we hope to inspire and open up their imagination to opportunities broader than just the tourism sector.”

TJIPO KEAIKITSE
NGOWP EDUCATION COORDINATOR



VIEW THE POST

[instagram.com/p/CThNgl8oEkF/?img_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CThNgl8oEkF/?img_index=1)



PROGRESS TO DATE (INCLUDING KEY HIGHLIGHTS):

Initiative 6.3: Conservation Education in Namibia

The Kavango Wilderness Project (KWP) Conservation Education Pilot Project, activated through the support of Okavango Eternal, is an integrated initiative aimed at fostering environmental awareness, biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management among youth and local communities in Rundu, Namibia. This project came together following the threats identified on the Kavango river transect, supported fully by Okavango Eternal, and is a natural extension of community education initiatives in Botswana and Angola. By blending scientific research, TEK and hands-on learning experiences, this project seeks to empower the next generation to become active stewards of their natural environment.

The section of the river between Katwitwi (Angolan border) and KIFI (close to the Botswana border) is a key section of the Okavango River Basin because of the relatively high human activity there. Decreasing fish stocks, increased human-wildlife conflict and increasing pollution are key indicators that led to prioritizing initiatives in the Kavango area.

Progress to Date Metrics

- 1 project launched in 2024 with the development of a conservation education toolkit and booklet in direct response to threats identified through community consultation.
 - Completion of the Kavango River transect.
- GOAL FOR 2026** Implement the conservation education program as part of the curriculum in 1 school and propose the expansion of the program for future projects (working in partnership with the Namibian Ministry of Education).

Initiative 6.4: Okavango Eternal Campaign

The Okavango Eternal campaign, through paid media with National Geographic CreativeWorks, has achieved significant success in raising awareness, driving engagement, and positively influencing consumer perceptions. By leveraging National Geographic's digital and social platforms, the campaign continues to expand its reach and impact, reinforcing De Beers' commitment to sustainability and conservation.

Progress to Date Metrics

- Over 100 million individuals reached across Nat Geo Digital & Social platforms, outperforming media benchmarks.
- 94% of the De Beers core target audience agreed the campaign stood out, with 76% able to recall the Okavango Eternal campaign.
- 1.1M total engagement across Nat Geo Social posts (1.8x higher than estimated).
- 338K page views on www.NatGeo.com/Okavango-Eternal (1.5x higher than estimated).
- 91% Positive/Neutral audience sentiment among Nat Geo social media followers for all on-platform organic posts.

| THANK YOU

The Okavango River Basin faces growing challenges, and continued collaboration is essential to its protection. As we look ahead, our partnership will be key to advancing research, scaling conservation efforts, ensuring local voices remain central to the future of the Okavango River Basin, and raising global awareness of this vital landscape and the work we are advancing together. We are deeply grateful to De Beers for your unwavering support in this critical moment. Through the Okavango Eternal partnership, alongside local communities, NGOs and governments, we are working to safeguard this vital ecosystem for people and wildlife.

In line with De Beers' Building Forever goals, our shared vision for the Okavango River Basin has never been more urgent, and we couldn't do it without you. Thank you for standing with us to help protect this region for generations to come.

OKAVANGO ETERNAL

PROTECTING A NATURAL WONDER

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