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Milking the Rhino

(Documentary) A Kartemquin Educational Films production, in association with Independent Television Service production, with participation of Corp. for Public Broadcasting. (International sales: Kartemquin, Chicago.) Produced by David E. Simpson. Executive producer, Gordon Quinn. Co-producers, Jeannie R. Magill, Rehad Desai. Directed, written, edited by David E. Simpson, based on a concept by Jeannie R. Magill.

By [LESLIE FELPERIN](#)

With so many docs on the circuit depicting Africa's miseries, "Milking the Rhino" reps refreshingly optimistic fare. Helmer David E. Simpson (best known for his editing work) explores how two tribal communities in Kenya and Namibia have shifted from killing wildlife to conserving it in order to generate lucrative tourism. Pic doesn't stint on depicting the difficulties this involves or the hardships experienced, but its upbeat slant should ensure further charges at fests and airings on specialized TV stations.

Fluently cut pic starts in Kenya's Il Ngwesi ranch, where Masai villagers have set up a lodge catering to Westerners who come to see the region's abundant wildlife. Hitherto, interviewees explain, the locals would have killed cattle-consuming lions and crop-ravaging elephants, but now there's more money in what narration describes as "grassroots conservation." Meanwhile, over in Namibia's Marienfluss Valley, members of the Himba community learn similar skills. However, in one comic sequence, the tribesmen look baffled when a white hotelkeeper suggests they don't set out wares for sale when tourists come round -- because, it's implied, it would spoil the noble-savage illusion. Tech package impresses throughout, especially the choice of music.

Camera (color, HD), Jason Longo; music, Mark Bandy, Joel Diamond. Reviewed on DVD, Hoveton, U.K., Dec. 10, 2008. (In Intl. Documentary Festival Amsterdam.) English, Maa, Herero dialogue. Running time: 96 MIN. Narrator: Munyikombo Bukusi.

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