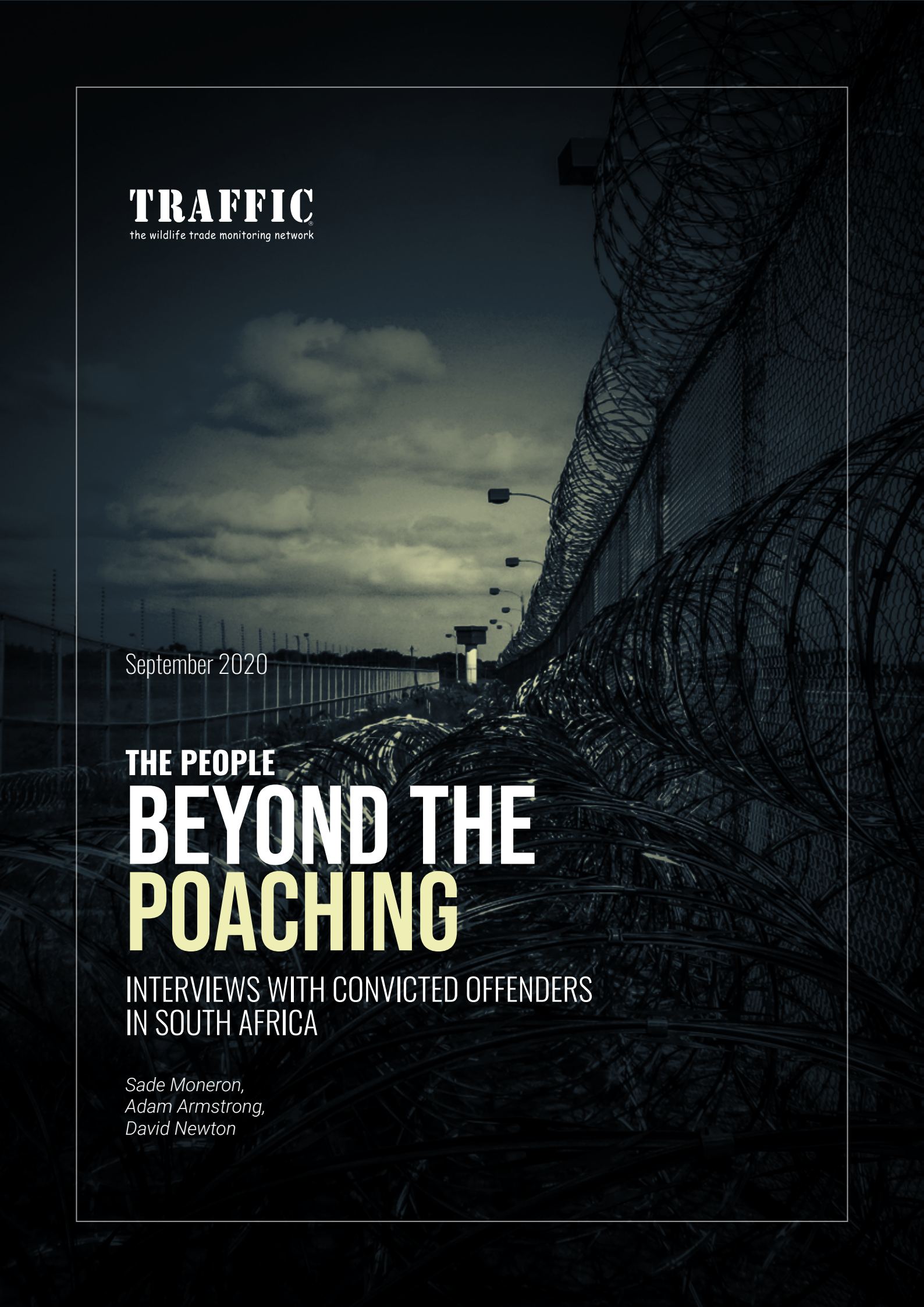

TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

September 2020

THE PEOPLE BEYOND THE POACHING

INTERVIEWS WITH CONVICTED OFFENDERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Sade Moneron,
Adam Armstrong,
David Newton

TRAFFIC REPORT

TRAFFIC is a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

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OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

INTERVIEWEES AND SURVEY LOCATIONS

73 **OFFENDERS** were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire

the interviews took place in

25 CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

across South Africa

WILDLIFE OFFENCES

9 **CYCAD** related offences

10 **ABALONE** related offences

54 **RHINO** related offences

ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE ACTIVITIES

Self-reported participation in different roles along the IWT supply chain (some offenders participated in multiple roles)

55% **POACHING OF WILDLIFE**

13% **SALE OF COMMODITY** to intermediaries/buyers

11% **DOMESTIC TRANSPORT** of commodity

11% **RECRUITMENT OF POACHERS/DRIVERS**

4% **LOOKOUT OR INFORMER** to poachers

3% **STORAGE OR PROCESSING OF WILDLIFE**

3% **INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT** of commodity

OFFENDER **DEMOGRAPHICS**

48% were
SOUTH AFRICAN

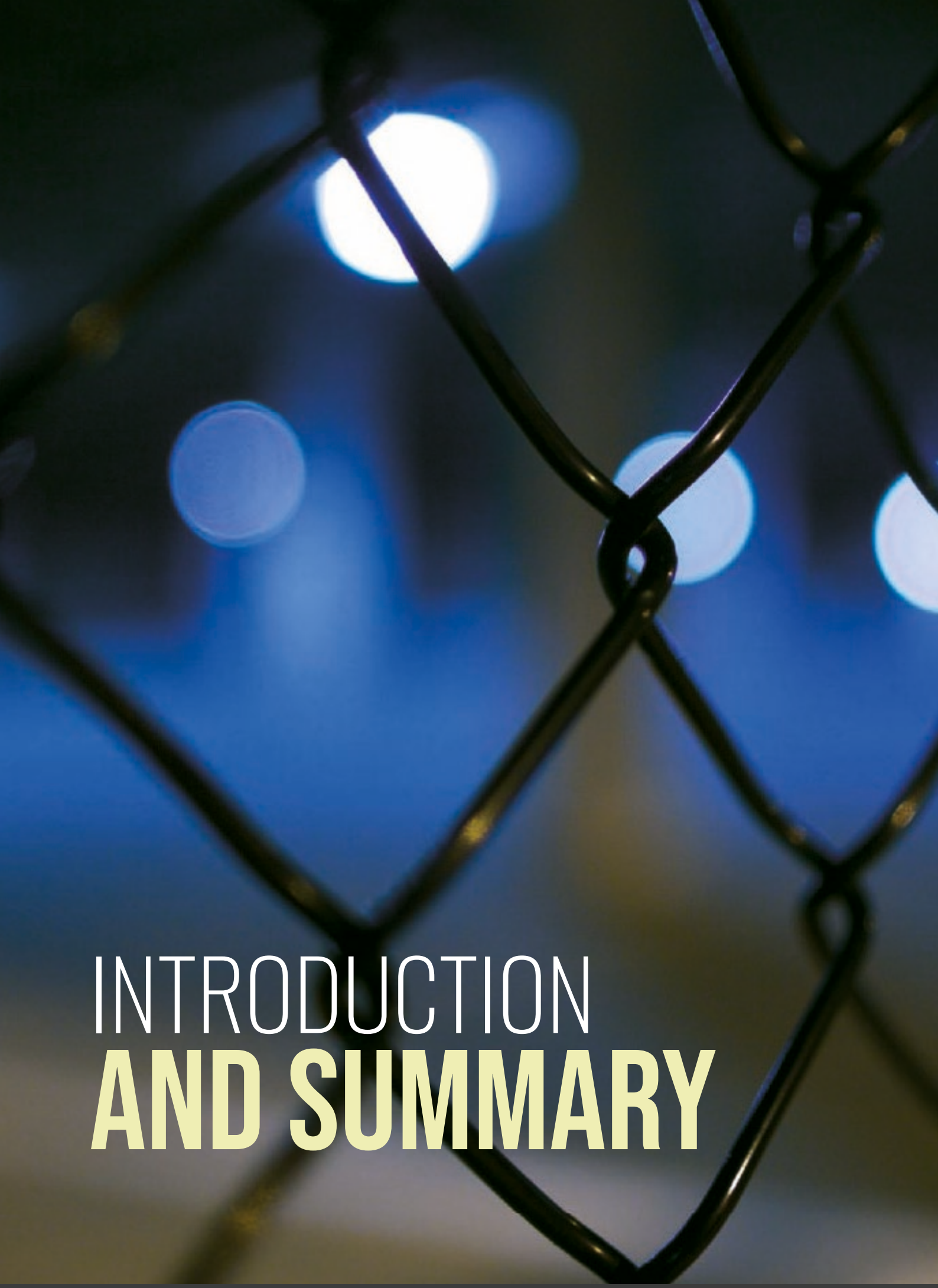
66% were aged
22–35

83% did not reach or complete
SECONDARY SCHOOL

38% were
UNEMPLOYED

54% were influenced by
PEER PRESSURE

At the community level, factors such as opportunism and peer pressure may be addressed by a combination of traditional regulatory approaches and the empowerment of individuals to resist opportunities for crime



INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE TO IWT INTERVENTIONS

Interventions to combat crime, especially the illegal trade in wildlife for commercial purposes, have placed strong emphasis on traditional regulatory measures such as proactive enforcement and detection efforts. Based on the call for a more nuanced understanding of illegal wildlife trade and why individuals engage in these activities, this study interviewed 73 convicted wildlife offenders incarcerated in 25 of South Africa's correctional centres. The focus of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of the demographics of offenders and the factors that influenced or rationalised their engagement in illegal wildlife trade. More accurately understanding the various factors of why these crimes may be committed enables policy makers and implementors such as national, provincial and local government including other actors such as civil society, to respond to or prevent engagement of individuals in illegal wildlife trade.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that the majority of the interviewed offenders participated in the initial activities of the illicit supply chain specifically the poaching of the commodity while a smaller number of offenders participated in other activities such as the transport, processing and storage, and the sale of the commodities to domestic or international buyers or intermediaries. The wildlife commodities targeted by the offenders included abalone, cycads, and rhino horn. Most offenders had low education levels, were either unemployed or informally employed prior to their involvement, and all offenders cited multiple socio-economic factors influencing or rationalising their decision to engage in illegal wildlife trade. These included income generation, opportunity, normalisation (contested illegality), the lack of state legitimacy and a skewed perception of the risks or consequences

These findings call for recommendations to increase the arrests and prosecutions of the individuals that occupy the higher echelons of these illegal supply chain networks. Furthermore, prioritising the provision of basic services and economic opportunities to communities most at risk of being exploited by criminal networks for the illicit wildlife trade, in conjunction with various community based interventions that engage communities as equal partners is paramount to preventing engagement in illegal wildlife trade. The recommendations also call for the need to emphasise the often-unreported social, familial and personal consequences of engaging in illegal wildlife trade, alongside the need to equip individuals with the ability to resist opportunities of crime through interactive community-based education programmes.

Wildlife poachers move elephant tusks and other commodities

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

TRADITIONAL **MODELS FOR ADDRESSING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR**

Scholars, practitioners, and legal authorities have attempted to understand and address the reasons that people engage in criminal behaviours. The majority of efforts in this regard, informed by micro-economics, employ the instrumental perspective—viewing humans as rational actors who make decisions based on assessments of the costs (risks) and benefits of various behaviours (Ayling, 2013; Eloff & Lemieux, 2014; Felson & Clarke, 1998; Gezelius & Hauck, 2011; Herbig & Warchol, 2011; Pires & Moreto, 2016; Tyler, 1990; van Doormaal *et al.*, 2018; von Essen *et al.*, 2014). The instrumental perspective views compliance as the outcome of an individual's response to changes in incentives and penalties, also referred to as the Rational Choice Theory (Gezelius & Hauck, 2011; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Tyler, 1990; von Essen *et al.*, 2014). Rational Choice Theory is based on the idea that increasing the costs of a behaviour will reduce the number of people who engage in that behaviour. In traditional law enforcement increasing the probability of detection (through strengthened law enforcement efforts) and the severity of the sanction (through higher fines or longer imprisonment sentences) are viewed as effective ways to influence an individual's likelihood of engaging in an illegal activity (Tyler, 1990).

This approach to crime prevention has been employed by various authorities globally, including the South Africa government and their approach to the illicit trade in wildlife. Interventions to address the illegal wildlife trade (IWT)[1] in South Africa place strong emphasis on proactive enforcement and detection efforts, and increased penalties to deter individuals from engaging in IWT (Ayling, 2013; Hübschle, 2016).

A NUANCED **UNDERSTANDING OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR**

This traditional criminal justice approach is viewed by a number of scholars to be insufficient in the reduction of IWT (Cook, 2016; De Greef, 2013; Eliason, 2003; Eliason, 2004; Enticott, 2011; Filteau, 2012; Gezelius & Hauck, 2011; Hübschle, 2016; Hübschle and Shearing, 2018; Kahler & Gore, 2012; Lambrechts & Goga, 2016; Lunstrum & Givá, 2020; Tyler, 1990; von Essen *et al.*, 2014). Instead of creating increasingly harsh penalties, some scholars believe that understanding human decision making may be a more effective approach (von Essen *et al.*, 2014). This approach is based on the normative perspective, which focuses on understanding the nuances of human behaviour and how norms, values, morals, personal experiences and other social or political factors affect human decision making. The instrumental perspective may overlook these more subtle factors that affect the decisions to engage in criminal activities, particularly with regards to IWT (Hübschle, 2016; von Essen *et al.*, 2014).

[1] The illegal wildlife trade (or illegal wildlife trafficking) encompasses the illegal supply chain of wildlife crime including activities such as the illegal killing or harvesting (poaching), smuggling, possessing, and trading of fauna and flora. This definition also includes the various forms of corruption, money laundering and marketing of the illicit goods that are necessary for these transactions to occur

ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE IN **SOUTH AFRICA**

The illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife parts and products globally is estimated to be worth billions of US dollars annually, ranking alongside the illegal trafficking of narcotics, arms, and humans (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2014).

South Africa is considered a key country in the illicit trade in wildlife because of its role as a source, transit and destination country (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016; Utermohlen & Baine, 2018). In the last decade, more than 8,200 rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium* spp. and *Diceros* spp.) have been poached[2] for their horns in South Africa to supply the illicit market (Department of Environment, Forestry & Fisheries [DEFF], 2020).

South Africa has also been implicated in the export of poached South African abalone *Haliotis midae*, with an estimated 96 million abalone illegally harvested between 2000 and 2016 predominantly for Asian markets (Okes *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the illegal trade in cycads (*Stangeria* and *Encephalartos* spp.) is said to be the main threat to the survival of cycads in the wild in South Africa (Donaldson & Bösenberg, 1999).

[2] Poaching refers to the illegal hunting, killing, capturing, harvesting, collection or removal of wild fauna or flora or any of its derivatives or parts.

96 MILLION
ABALONE
illegally harvested between 2006–2016

CYCADS
ILLEGAL TRADE
is the main threat to their survival in the wild

8,200
RHINOS
poached in the last decade

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

More accurately understanding why individuals engage in IWT and how they rationalise their behaviour will enable government, private sector and civil society actors to respond to and prevent non-compliance with wildlife regulations. Consequently, this research sought to gain deeper insights into the factors that influenced or were used to rationalise an offender's engagement in IWT. This report forms one part of a wider set of objectives emanating from this research which sought to gain a better understanding of the structure and *modus operandi* of illicit wildlife trade networks in southern Africa. This report draws on information collected through interviews with convicted offenders imprisoned in 25 of South Africa's correctional centres for a wildlife related offence. It describes the self-reported demographics of the offenders, the wildlife commodity[3] targeted, the offender's participation in specific roles and the factors that influenced or were used to rationalise the offender's decision to take part in IWT.

METHODS

Interviews with offenders were face to face and semi-structured, using pre-designed interview questions. The questions used in the interviews were used more as a guideline to steer the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee so as to encourage an informal fluid conversation as opposed to a structured survey. The interview questions covered five main themes: (1) demographics of the offender including their education level, employment history and income; (2) family background and number of dependents; (3) factors influencing their engagement in IWT; (4) their perception of the associated risks (including prior knowledge of laws and sentences); and (5) wildlife commodity involved.

TRAFFIC began interviews in August 2018 and completed 75 interviews with 73 offenders by May 2019 (two offenders were interviewed twice). The interviews were conducted one-on-one in a designated office within the respective correctional centre. Most interviews were between 45 and 60 minutes long and were often free flowing between the interviewer and interviewee. In situations where the interviews could not be conducted in English, an interpreter was used. All interviews were audio-recorded with the offender's consent and were subsequently transcribed verbatim and where necessary, translated into English.

Transcribed data from the offender interviews were imported into a data sheet for analysis. Quantitative analysis of the closed-ended questions was limited to descriptive statistics, due to the limited sample size. Analysis of the open-ended questions was done by manually reviewing the transcripts and identifying the common themes and their prevalence across the entire dataset of 75 interviews (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). Identification of these themes was done subsequent to the collection of data and was done in conjunction with a review of published literature on criminology, behavioural science and IWT.

[3] Commodity means the whole, dead or alive, animal or plant, or parts and derivatives derived from an animal or plant that is traded

INTERVIEW QUESTION THEMES

1. **DEMOGRAPHICS**
   education level, employment history, income
2. **FAMILY**
   background and number of dependents
3. **MOTIVATIONS**
   behind their involvement in IWT
4. **PERCEPTION OF RISK**
   including prior knowledge of laws and sentences
5. **WILDLIFE**
   commodity targeted

SAMPLING

The initial identification of offenders targeted for this study was conducted through searching online news media, open source articles, government press releases and reports for convictions related to IWT and using TRAFFIC's Wildlife Trade Information System[4]. TRAFFIC also contacted several senior state prosecutors and requested their assistance in identifying additional offenders. While an initial total of 178 offenders was identified, only 90 offenders were approached to participate in the research. This was based on TRAFFIC's access to the offenders at the time of the study. This access was influenced by the Department of Correctional Services's availability to facilitate the research and the offender's availability potentially to partake in the research. It was found that some offenders had since been released on parole; had been transferred to another facility; or had been transported to attend a court hearing on the day of the proposed interview.

RESEARCH SITES

South Africa's Department of Correctional Services (DCS) manages 241 correctional centres and two public-private partnership (PPP) correctional centres across six regions (DCS, 2019). Verification of the incarceration of the 90 offenders within their respective correctional centres was confirmed by various DCS officials (including commissioners and heads of centres) before visitation to the centres

FIGURE 1

The 25 correctional centres visited during the survey in South Africa (those in close proximity not mapped separately)

[4] This system contains information on wildlife seizures and criminal cases from open sources as well as information collected by TRAFFIC when carrying out surveys.

RESEARCH **ETHICS**

In order to fulfil the requirements (ethics approval from a university or other recognised institution) from the DCS to conduct research within correctional centres, TRAFFIC obtained research ethics approval from the University of Witwatersrand's Research Ethics Committee (REC) in South Africa (Protocol number H180321). The selection of the university was based on TRAFFIC's existing relationship with the University of Witwatersrand, to which the co-author David Newton is an Honorary Research Fellow. Upon approval to conduct research with offenders by the DCS, the DCS appointed an internal research guide to TRAFFIC who advised on procedures that needed to be followed in order to interview offenders within DCS's correctional centres. TRAFFIC abided by all procedures and guidelines stipulated by the DCS and the University's REC.

TRAFFIC acknowledges the inherent vulnerability of incarcerated offenders in research, due to their reduced autonomy, anonymity, and confidentiality. These vulnerabilities existed due to the correctional centre environment where offenders' movements and freedom were highly regulated and controlled. In addition, requirements by DCS that an official was present in the room where the interviews took place influenced the offenders' anonymity and confidentiality. The use of interpreters further added to this issue.

To mitigate these vulnerabilities, all candidates were briefed prior to the interviews about the research, including the explanation that participation was voluntary, anonymous (to any individuals not designated by the DCS to be present in the room during the interview) and that their participation would not result in any negative consequences nor would they receive any direct benefits or compensation. The researcher also reiterated to the offenders that they may withdraw from the process at any time with no repercussions and were not obligated to divulge any information that they did not feel comfortable sharing. Informed consent was obtained from each offender prior to the start of the interview, either in writing or verbally, in line with ethical standards for research. Of the 90 selected offenders, 73 opted to participate in the survey (18.8% refusal rate).

In addition, TRAFFIC was aware that during interviews some offenders may identify people currently involved in illegal activities or identify people who evaded arrest. TRAFFIC, as a guiding rule, judged each situation as it arose and subsequently weighed the option of divulging information to authorities versus TRAFFIC's obligation to the interviewee.

LIMITATIONS AND **CHALLENGES**

AVAILABILITY, RELIABILITY, AND INFLUENCES ON OFFENDERS

This research was limited in that it only interviewed offenders who were incarcerated for crimes relating to IWT at the time the research was being conducted. It did not include offenders who evaded arrest or offenders who received non-custodial sentences, such as fines or suspended sentences. Furthermore, access to offenders during the research period was also limited by DCS's availability to facilitate and the offender's availability to be interviewed. The unavailability to conduct interviews with some offenders (due to transfers or other reasons) may have influenced the results of this research.

Furthermore, due to challenges experienced in obtaining an accurate, up-to-date list of all offenders incarcerated for crimes related to IWT in South Africa, TRAFFIC relied on open source reports and discussions with prosecutors in order to obtain a list of potential candidates for the study. This may skew the results as we were unable to identify all offenders serving custodial sentences for wildlife related crimes rather only those offenders who were reported on by news media or in government reports.

TRAFFIC also acknowledges that offenders interviewed for this study may have provided misleading information during interviews. As far as possible, triangulation of data was conducted through examining court case records, through interviews with prosecutors, investigating officers, and community members of some villages where the offenders stated they lived prior to their arrest. These interviews were not used specifically to fact-check certain statements made by particular offenders but instead provided supporting insights to data collected from some offenders. The identity of the offenders was never divulged at any point during these background interviews. In addition, in some instances, TRAFFIC was able to interview multiple offenders who were involved in the same case. This assisted with the verification of facts, bearing in mind the possibility that if the offenders were incarcerated in the same correctional centre, they may have influenced each other's responses. In cases where triangulation of data was not possible, the data were accepted and analysed as they were reported by the offenders.

While the use of interpreters assisted in bridging the language gap between the researcher and the offender in 38 of the interviews, interviews with offenders that were able to communicate in English held better rapport. Not being able to communicate in the various languages spoken by the offenders (Afrikaans, Mandarin, Shangaan, Shona, Siswati, Xitsonga and Zulu) may have prevented the interviewer from obtaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics of IWT.

TRAFFIC also acknowledges the potential influence of external personnel (such as interpreters, DCS officials, and a TRAFFIC

interviewer) on the research results. For example, the presence of a DCS official may have influenced offenders' responses to certain questions and some offenders may or may not have divulged specific information. Furthermore, the presence of a TRAFFIC (an international non-governmental organisation working on trade in wild species) interviewer may have influenced the offenders' responses to certain questions. As far as possible, the interviewer assured offenders that TRAFFIC was conducting the research independently and they were encouraged to speak freely without judgement or prejudice.

Establishing trust between the interviewer and the interviewees was crucial in obtaining information about illegal activities and while the researcher reiterated to the offenders that the information they would be providing would have no negative repercussions on them or their families, TRAFFIC is mindful that some offenders may not have divulged all information relating to their activities. TRAFFIC also had to manage the expectations of some offenders who thought that their participation in the research would have a positive influence on their current sentence or stand them in good stead with the DCS. These discussions took place before any of the interviews were started.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS OF OFFENDERS

AND THEIR **ACTIVITIES IN IWT**

This research consisted of interviews with a total of 73 offenders, of whom 54 (74%) were serving sentences for rhino related offences, 10 (15%) for abalone related crimes and 9 (11%) for crimes relating to the illegal trade in cycads. Offenders participated in a range of activities along the illegal supply chain including the poaching, transport, processing and storage, and the sale of the commodities to domestic or international buyers or intermediaries. Table 1 displays the self-reported participation in various roles in the IWT supply chain.

Most offenders interviewed were incarcerated for the illegal hunting of rhino for its horn (~65%)

It is difficult to ascertain whether this finding is a direct consequence of the concerted emphasis on tackling rhino poaching (and convicting poachers) in South Africa (Annecke & Masubelele, 2016; DEFF, 2020; Hübschle, 2016; Nanima, 2019), or a result of this research's sampling bias (described in section Limitations and Challenges). The finding could also be explained by a combination of these factors. Roles participated in by offenders appear to differ depending on the commodity—for example, offenders incarcerated for cycad and rhino related offences were not involved in activities such as storage and/or processing, or the sale of the commodity to international intermediaries as is seen in abalone related offenders. As suggested above, this study is unable to confirm whether this finding is a consequence of the sampling bias or whether this is an accurate representation of current criminal or law enforcement activities.

Clear patterns emerged from the demographic data (Table 2). The nationality of the 73 offenders surveyed were South African (48%), Mozambican (38%), Zimbabwean (12%) and Chinese (1%). The vast majority of offenders were male (97%), with low levels of education (83% stated they did not complete their secondary schooling), and were either arrested (if they maintained their innocence) or admitted to becoming involved in illegal wildlife activities while in their youth (69%), which is under the age of 35 in South Africa..

OFFENDER ARCHETYPE

- ✓ 48% were **South African**
- ✓ 38.5% were **aged 29–35**
- ✓ 83% did not have **secondary education**
- ✓ 36% had **informal employment**
- ✓ 54% were influenced by **peer pressure**

IWT ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY OFFENDERS	ABALONE (N = 10)	CYCAD (N = 9)	RHINO (N = 54)
Poaching *of wildlife commodity*	6	*8*	48
Transport *of commodity domestically*	7	*3*	2
Facilitator *of activity by acting as a lookout*	4	*0*	0
Informer *to poachers about wildlife locations*	0	*0*	1
Storage *and/or processing of commodity*	3	*0*	0
Recruitment *of poachers or transporters*	6	*3*	3
Sale of commodity to domestic *intermediaries/buyers*	5	*2*	2
Sale of commodity to international *intermediaries/buyers*	6	*0*	0
Transport *of commodity internationally*	3	*0*	1

TABLE 1

Self-reported participation in different roles in IWT.

With the exception of four offenders (<6%), all offenders had at least one dependent reliant on them for financial support. Seventy-four per cent of the offenders were either unemployed or informally employed prior to their arrest. Informal employment in most cases involved farming, fishing, construction or selling goods such as clothes. Some offenders who said that they were unemployed stated that they would do ad-hoc work, such as painting or bricklaying. Many offenders did not disclose their exact household income, instead perceptions of the offender's own household economic status were recorded. Many offenders perceived themselves as "poor"[5], reporting that their household income was not enough, that they were only able to afford day to day basics, and that they struggled to make ends meet. Most offenders (74%) also claimed that they had no previous criminal history and that this was the first time they had engaged in an illegal activity.

While the majority of offenders exhibited the above characteristics (incomplete education, insecure employment status and families financially dependent on them), there were some offenders for whom this was not true. These offenders were more educated (17%), having completed secondary schooling or higher, some were also formally employed (25%), and they did not consider themselves to be "poor" or "struggling financially" (26%). There were only six offenders who encompassed all three of these attributes (more educated, formally employed and did not consider themselves "poor"). These six offenders were mostly involved in activities such as the recruitment of poachers and transporters, or the sale of the commodity to domestic or international buyers or intermediaries.

Fishers of a community in Massingir, Mozambique return from their day of fishing to cook a meal on the banks of Massingir Dam (Massingir is a district on the eastern border of Kruger National Park, South Africa).

[5] The word "poor" here is taken from the offenders' own words and does not reflect any measurement against any defined poverty lines used by World Bank or others..

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF OFFENDERS	NUMBER OF OFFENDERS (%)
GENDER	
Male	71 (97%)
Female	2 (3%)
NATIONALITY	
China	1 (1%)
Mozambique	28 (38%)
South Africa	35 (48%)
Zimbabwe	9 (12%)
AGE (at first offence as reported by offender, or at arrest if offender maintained their innocence)	
15–21 years	2 (3%)
22–28 years	20 (27.5%)
29–35 years	28 (38.5%)
36–42 years	11 (15%)
43–49 years	8 (11%)
50+ years	4 (5%)
HIGHEST EDUCATION QUALIFICATION	
No formal education	7 (10%)
*Incomplete General Education and Training (GET)**	27 (37%)
GET (or equivalent)	26 (36%)
*Further Education and Training (or equivalent) (FET)***	9 (12%)
*Higher Education (HE)****	4 (5%)
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	
Formal Employment	18 (25%)
Informal Employment	26 (36%)
Unemployed	28 (38%)
Retired	1 (1%)
NUMBER OF DEPENDANTS	
Zero dependents	4 (5%)
1–5 dependents	57 (78%)
6–10 dependents	10 (14%)
11–15 dependents	2 (3%)
HOUSEHOLD INCOME (AS PERCEIVED AND SELF-REPORTED BY OFFENDER)	
Not enough income to survive	5 (7%)
Only enough to cover day to day basics of food, water & shelter	48 (66%)
Able to afford certain extras such as television, vehicle, clothing, other entertainment, or hobbies	19 (26%)
Data deficit (offender did not answer)	1 (1%)
CRIMINAL HISTORY	
None	54 (74%)
Previous arrest and/or conviction	10 (14%)
Previous engagement with illegal activities (evaded arrest)	9 (12%)

TABLE 2

Demographics of the interviewed offenders (n=73)

** General Education and Training (GET) incorporates learners up to Grade 9, as well as an equivalent adult basic education qualification.*

*** Further Education and Training (FET) comprises Grades 10–12 in school education, out-of-school youth, and adult learners. Technical, youth and community colleges, as well as a range of other industry-based and non-formal providers, also fall into the FET band, also known as secondary school or secondary education.*

**** Higher Education (HE) incorporates a range of national diplomas and certificates up to and including postdoctoral degrees, also known as tertiary education.*

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED OR RATIONALISED **INVOLVEMENT IN IWT**

INCOME GENERATION + **OPPORTUNISM** were the two primary driving factors behind involvement in IWT

This section discusses the various factors that influenced or were used to rationalise the offenders' engagement in IWT. While 73 offenders were interviewed for this study, 17 interviewees maintained their innocence to the interviewer and denied any responsibility or wrongdoing, despite being found guilty by the justice system. These 17 offenders were excluded from the identification of factors. The interviews with the remaining 56 offenders revealed a diverse range of factors that influenced or were used to rationalise their actions to partake in IWT activities.

It is noteworthy that in the interviews with offenders, when discussing their decisions to engage in IWT, it seemed that many of the offenders did not simply employ a cost–benefit assessment of the risks and rewards. Offenders, instead, discussed several economic and non-economic factors that influenced or rationalised their engagement in IWT activities. Table 3 contains a list of the factors identified by the offenders and their prevalence amongst the entire dataset. The factors were not ranked according to their importance in influencing the offenders' decisions.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED OR WERE USED TO RATIONALISE THE OFFENDERS' ENGAGEMENT IN IWT	NUMBER OF OFFENDERS (%)
INCOME GENERATION	**73 (100%)**
Individual pressure	
Family pressure	
Horizontal pressure	
OPPORTUNISM	**46 (82%)**
SKEWED PERCEPTION OF RISK	**45 (80%)**
Legal	
Social, personal and familial	
NORMALISATION (CONTESTED ILLEGALITY)	**42 (75%)**
HIGH VALUE OF AND DEMAND FOR COMMODITY	**38 (68%)**
LACK OF VIABLE ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES	**37 (66%)**
PEER PRESSURE	**30 (54%)**
LACK OF STATE LEGITIMACY	**23 (41%)**
Lack of basic service delivery	
Lack of sufficient and equal opportunities	
Corruption	
OMISSION	**7 (13%)**
PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT FOR OTHERS (MORAL LICENSING)	**5 (9%)**

TABLE 3
Factors that influenced or were used to rationalise the offenders' engagement in IWT

1 INCOME GENERATION

Every offender claimed that the prospect of income generation influenced them to partake in IWT activities. The need for income stemmed from pressures felt by the offenders including the pressure to provide for their families (family pressure), pressure to compete with their peers (horizontal pressure) and their own individual need to achieve personal goals and aspirations (individual pressure).

1.1 FAMILY PRESSURE

Seventy per cent of offenders stated that they felt pressure to provide for their families. This could be in the form of necessities, such as food, schooling, clothes, and housing, or other expenses such as their childrens' hobbies or interests. One offender explained that his son enjoyed an expensive hobby of riding motorcycles and the offender felt pressure to provide his son with the capital needed to be successful in this hobby. Some offenders also expressed responsibility for their parents and siblings in addition to their partner and children, while others expressed how they did not want their children to experience the same hardships they had experienced as children. The below statements express these sentiments:

> **"I ended up leaving school early to find work so that I can support my mother and my sister. Then as I got older, our economy in Zimbabwe, it went from bad to worse. I decided to come to South Africa to look for something better as I also had a wife and I am a father of three children. I found a job and I managed to support my family and my mum. Then I lost my job when my boss moved to another city. That is when things got even worse.**
>
> **— INTERVIEW 11**

> **"I just wanted to give my children a better life than I had. Everything I did, I did for them. I just want them to have a better life than me.**
>
> **— INTERVIEW 19**

> **"I just wanted to send my first-born child to school so that he could get education and be different from me. I wanted him to have the opportunity which I was denied as a child.**
>
> **— INTERVIEW 24**

1.2 HORIZONTAL PRESSURE, EXACERBATED BY INEQUALITY, AND HISTORICAL AND CURRENT CONTEXTS

More than half of the offenders (54%) interviewed referenced their own experiences of feeling inadequate, especially when compared with other individuals and peers within their communities. Lunstrum and Givá (2020) attributed this finding to inequality experienced by individuals. This inequality, as suggested by others (Hübschle, 2016; Hübschle & Shearing, 2018; Lunstrum & Givá, 2020), stemmed from both historical and current socio-economic and political environments. For example, South Africa is consistently ranked as one of the most unequal countries in the world (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2019a). This has been linked to its history of

colonisation and apartheid, where the majority of the population were denied equal opportunity (Stats SA, 2019a). Despite efforts by the government to reduce inequality since its democratic transition in 1994, progress has been limited (Stats SA, 2019a). This is in part due to the failure to implement policies and programmes, exacerbated by the breakdown of accountability and the presence of instances of corruption (Matsangou, 2019; National Planning Commission [NPC], 2012). High unemployment rates, inequality, and multidimensional poverty (in terms of education, health and living standards) still plague many of South Africa's communities, especially those surrounding natural resource areas such as national parks, private and public nature reserves and marine areas.

A particularly worrying trend emerged in the interview data, where the individuals viewed as "successful" in several towns and villages where offenders resided were those who had accumulated their wealth through involvement in IWT. This concept is illustrated in some of the below quotes from interviews with offenders:

> "I didn't go to Skukuza[6] because I wanted to, I was in a difficult situation. My friends in the village used to come back with money after working in Skukuza. What attracted me most is that they were living a good life, they had nice houses, and they could afford anything they wanted, whenever they wanted it. I wished for that. One day I went to the tavern with a person who poaches rhinos. We met some other people there. The way they were behaving made me look like I am not man enough because I couldn't afford what they could. I was turned into a laughingstock in my community. Then one night I met a stranger and he asked me if I know who the people are in the village that can help him get rhino horn. I told him I could do it.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 58**

> "I first heard about it [poaching rhinos] where I work as a fisherman at a local dam. We used to always fish every day and sell our catch to support our families. Me and my friend used to fish with another man every week, but we didn't know that he poaches rhinos. The one day he said the money we are making [from fishing] was too little and if we want to be successful, we should do what he does. When we looked at him, he didn't look like he was suffering, we saw he was doing great, he had more money than us. We decided to listen to what he had to say, and we ended up joining him.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 55**

1.3 INDIVIDUAL ASPIRATIONS

Nearly 40% of offenders cited their own internal personal aspirations and ambitions as a factor motivating them to achieve economic and social mobility. These individuals were seeking a sense of accomplishment and self-fulfilment, with many having stated that increased income would help them achieve such goals. In his own words, one offender said:

> "My biggest problem is maybe I am too ambitious. There are people in life who dream big, who want big things, who always want more success in their life, who are never satisfied with what they have. I am one of those people. And it is very easy to tempt those people. Especially if somebody gives you an easy way to get what you want.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 75**

[6] Skukuza is the administrative headquarters of Kruger National Park (KNP) and the term is used by many offenders to refer to poaching in KNP

2 OPPORTUNISM

Over 80% of offenders claimed that opportunity was a factor that enabled their engagement in IWT. Most interviewees recited the circumstances they found themselves in when first hearing about the illegal activity and how they subsequently became involved in IWT. These recollections often involved meeting a person who was actively involved in IWT and who subsequently presented the offender with an opportunity to engage in a certain activity (poaching, facilitating, transporting, etc.) in return for an economic benefit. This was explained by one offender, as detailed below:

> "I met a guy, I used to work with him in the electrical industry, and sometimes I would help him out with electrical jobs. One day, I went to his house before we were going to do a job and inside his garage, I saw these plants [cycads] lying there. So, I asked him what they were. He told me, it's just some trees. Three months later we are on another electrical job together and when I went to his house, I saw them again. He tells me finally that he sells these trees on the side for some extra money because they are worth lots of money. A few weeks later I was on my way to Durban for another electrical job and the same man phoned me to assist him on a job he received. I told him, no, I am not around, I am in Durban on another job. He then asked me when I was planning on returning. He told me that he had a friend in KwaZulu-Natal that had some of those trees and he asked me to fetch those trees from his friend and carry them in my vehicle back to his house upon my return to Johannesburg. He told me he would pay me nice money for my help—he said, I'll give you 20,000 [South African Rand] (~USD1,200). I told him 'that is nice money, I can do that'. At that time, I didn't know that the activity was illegal, so I wasn't even scared. On my return to Johannesburg I stopped at his friend's house, loaded the plants, and drove to Jo'burg [Johannesburg]. And he gave me my money cash on arrival. That's how it started, that's how I got hooked.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 75**

3 SKEWED PERCEPTION OF RISK

While the majority of offenders acknowledged prior awareness of the activity's illegality (86% of offenders) and some the associated risks (79% of offenders), knowledge of the severity of legal penalties or the social, personal or familial consequences was acknowledged by less than half of the offenders. This suggests that many offenders may have had a skewed perception of the risks involved in their respective crimes, as they were not aware of the consequences and challenges that they and their families would face if they were caught, as expressed below:

> "I was just thinking that if I were arrested, I would get maybe 6 months in jail. I was thinking that this thing [illegal hunting of rhino] is just like when you are hunting for bushmeat. But now I received ten years imprisonment.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 36**

> “Sometimes you just do not think of the things you are doing—I never thought of what could happen. I was only hoping that after this I will be getting money. I never thought of who will be providing for my kids if I get killed or sent to jail.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 18**

> “I am wasting my life here in prison. I do not want to ever come back here. My family need and want me. And you know my son is young, and he doesn’t even know me.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 56**

It was not only the lack of knowledge of the consequences that may have caused a skewed perception of risk, but many offenders pointed out that many people in their community were engaging in IWT and reaping the financial rewards while evading arrest. This gave offenders the **perception that committing these crimes was possible and that their chance of apprehension is low**. This resulted in some offenders choosing to “try their luck”, as suggested by one offender:

> “Because in my town, most of the boys are involved in poaching. They are young boys too; they are driving nice cars. They’re also having fancy clothes. I wanted that too. And you know most of those boys didn’t even try to go to school but they’re able to afford those things. That’s why I think maybe I can go and try my luck there.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 18**

Some offenders, despite admitting prior knowledge of risks, simply stated that they chose to ignore the risks. The below statement displayed the stark situation that some offenders found themselves in:

> “Yes, I was fully aware that my decision was illegal, but I was encouraged to take the risk in order to make ends meet for my family. I knew that if I succeeded, I would make money for them and if I got caught I would either face jail time or worse yet, death. I was fully aware that my actions were illegal and that there was a possibility of an arrest. I took wrong decisions driven by the impetus to support my family.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 24**

Interestingly, one repeat offender involved in the sale of poached wildlife to intermediaries stated that he had a previous conviction for the same offence. He had stated that he had received a fine for that conviction and while he stated that it acted as a deterrent at first, he claimed that it was not an effective deterrent as he continued his involvement one year later:

> “I was arrested previously; I was a first-time offender and was given a fine. That’s actually where the major mistake happened, because now I thought ‘well, I can just get a fine’. I was shaken a bit at that time, so I went back to legal work, and I stopped [involvement in IWT] for almost a year. But when you are used to a certain lifestyle, going back to working life was not easy, I had to work eight to five every day and didn’t even make half of what I made before. I started using my cash savings from before and over time this savings started to deplete. Then I thought, let me do this thing but now I’ll be careful, I won’t get caught this time, I’ll be smart.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 75**

4 NORMALISATION (CONTESTED ILLEGALITY)

Approximately 75% of the offenders interviewed for this study contested the inappropriateness of their actions, claiming that the use of natural resources was perceived as a normal and acceptable way in which to earn a living. Activities such as fishing, hunting for animals and the use of flora for sustenance, medicine or commercial trading were viewed as legitimate behaviours. This was evidenced by offenders denying any fears of retaliation or ostracisation from their communities or peers. There appeared to be no social stigma or deterrent associated with IWT to dissuade individuals from engaging in IWT.

This was particularly evident in one offender's interview, where he explained that hunting for bushmeat is an acceptable practice in the village he comes from, adjacent to Kruger National Park. He went on to explain that subsequent to him shooting an animal in the park (usually buffalo), he would return to his village and would ask anyone who was in the vicinity for assistance in bringing the meat back to the village. When questioned if he was worried about other people in the community advising law enforcement that he was trespassing in a national park and illegally hunting animals, he seemed confused and replied with:

> "No, why would that happen? They know I hunted this illegally, but they accept it. And they are the ones who usually buy the meat from me anyway.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 14**

Another offender explained that members of the community that are not directly involved in IWT knew who the individuals engaged in IWT were, but they "just ignore it" (Interview, 2018). When probed why the community did not inform law enforcement about these suspected offenders, the offender went on to say:

> "Because they did not take your stuff so why should you worry? That is wildlife. That is how they do, that is how they earn their money.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 18**

Another offender described this normalisation of criminal behaviour in a slightly different way. He had been told that all those who had achieved financial success had committed a crime in some way or another:

> "I will never forget what one man told me once, he said 'You can never be filthy rich without getting your hands a little dirty'. Just look, even in our government, you find a man winning a tender for some big contract and he is not even qualified to do the job, but he has the right connections, he has friends in the right places. That's just how it works in life.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 75**

Fourteen offenders further contested the illegality or inappropriateness of IWT by saying that the crime was "victimless" because it did not hurt any humans. Statements such as "I didn't kill anyone" or "it's just a snail, I don't see what the big deal is" and "how can someone be imprisoned for a plant, it's just a plant" (Interview 07; Interview 68) were common explanations amongst these offenders.

5 HIGH VALUE OF AND DEMAND FOR COMMODITY

Nearly 70% of offenders referenced the high value of, and the demand for, wildlife commodities as a factor that drove them to engage in IWT. This finding concurred with other researchers who found that wealth and demand further down the supply chain provided a stimulus for poaching (De Greef, 2013; Hübschle, 2017b). One offender stated that he earned between ZAR300,000 and ZAR400,000 (~USD20,000–USD27,000) every week for his role in the illegal abalone trade (Interview, 2019), while another offender claimed to earn approximately ZAR95,000 (>USD12,900) for his share in the profits from selling two rhino horns alongside his two accomplices, more than what most people within his community earn in one year.

> A half day's job transporting some cycads made me more money than the three-day legit job I just did for a customer.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 75**

> Working in this illegal line of work was just more lucrative than my nine–five job. I didn't have to work as hard for the same kind of return.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 6**

> No, in fact it was just easy for me to fall into that organisation, because when you look at the money that you are promised just for having that rhino horn, it was very tempting.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 2**

> I had been hunting buffalo, kudu, zebra for a long time and selling the meat. Then I heard someone say that there is a lot of money if you kill a rhino. So that is when I decided to do that.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 14**

Additionally, many offenders were unaware of the exact value of the wildlife commodity involved but they knew someone wanted it and would be willing to pay a lot of money for it:

> I had no idea how much money we were going to make. All I knew was that after a successful job, I would be rewarded handsomely
>
> **— INTERVIEW 60**

$ 6 LACK OF VIABLE **ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES**

An explanation offered by over 65% of offenders was the lack of alternative ways that they could improve their current economic and social circumstances. While markedly different, the economic situation in both Mozambique and Zimbabwe is dire (African Development Bank Group [ADBG], 2020; World Bank, 2019) and many offenders from both countries stated that they came to South Africa to look for employment opportunities.

Salaries and employment prospects may be better in South Africa than in Zimbabwe or Mozambique, but South Africa is also struggling with slow economic growth and unemployment. Economic growth in South Africa slowed to 0.7% in 2019, while the official unemployment rate at the end of 2019 was at the highest it has been since 2008, at 29.1% (ADBG, 2020; Stats SA, 2019b). Prospects for growth in 2020 have also diminished due to the global COVID-19 pandemic with South Africa's economy forecast to decrease by approximately 7% in 2020 as a result (World Bank, 2020). Young South Africans are disproportionately affected by unemployment, particularly those with low education levels (Stats SA, 2019c). Given this broader context of weak economies and high levels of unemployment, resorting to IWT is one of the few options that offenders perceived as a means to make a living. This was described by various interviewees:

“The government tries to help the poor through welfare programmes, but when it comes to employment, there are those who are not lucky enough to secure permanent employment. They only get temporary contracts that may span as short a time as two months. This leads to one resorting to desperate measures like crime.

— INTERVIEW 24

“There are no jobs. That’s why we went there.

— INTERVIEW 26

“There is no money where I am from. That’s why I was tempted.

— INTERVIEW 40

“But you know, if I were working, I would not have gone and done this. It’s just sometimes when you are in [a] tough situation, you resort to desperate measures.

— INTERVIEW 36

“Orange season was over [temporary work], and I was without work for four to five months—there were no jobs available. That’s why I decided to join the other poacher when he asked me if I wanted to go with.

— INTERVIEW 32

“I unfortunately did not complete my Matric qualification [secondary schooling] but I managed to find a temporary job at a large retail chain store in town that sells clothes. The managers told me that they couldn’t make me permanent because I did not finish my schooling. They sent me to try and finish my studies but unfortunately, I failed again because now at that time I had two small children and I couldn’t spend enough time on my studies. I then lost my job there. That’s where the problems started.

— INTERVIEW 75

“I moved to PE [Port Elizabeth] when I was 20. I tried to find a job but didn’t manage to get one, so I resorted to buying and selling small items to make a living. The money was barely enough. That’s when I met an abalone poacher and he offered me money in return for running bags of abalone for him.

— INTERVIEW 32

7 PEER PRESSURE

Almost half of the offenders interviewed (44%) cited the influence of peer pressure in their decision to engage in IWT. These peers were usually close friends or family of the offenders. This finding correlated with evidence from Agnew (1991), who found that the impact of peers on an individual's own likelihood of committing a crime was stronger among those who spend more time with these peers, and who were closely attached and had strong interpersonal bonds. Fenio (2014) and Lunstrum and Givá (2020) found similar examples in their research—where young men may enter the illegal trade in rhino horn out of intimidation or mockery by more established poachers. The below admissions reiterated this concept:

> "It was peer pressure that got me into this because I was still young. I was working full time as an acting supervisor. My friends were older than me. I used to work with them. They are the ones who used to do this poaching thing and I joined them because they are my friends. They were driving cars. I wished to be like them. I felt bad because I was always with them and I did not match their standard, so I ended up doing illegal things. I wished I could be like them, but I was fooled, and I regret what I did.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 41**

> "About rhino hunting … I was afraid because I saw other people coming back dead and we buried them. I used to warn them not to go to that place because they will be killed, but as time went by, I got tempted because of the man that I go to church with, who has a son involved. Then one day I met him, and he asked me if I wanted to go to Skukuza. I told him that I couldn't. I wanted to go, but I was afraid. He said if you want to go, I will go with you, because I can see that you are suffering. Because I trusted him, I thought if I go with him, I will succeed. He called me one day and said if you want, we can go to Skukuza tomorrow. I was confused. I told him to wait so that I could think about it. Then I called him later and said it's fine, we can go if you have a gun to shoot. That's the way I got into Skukuza.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 40**

> "I joined those two other men to go [to] Kruger to hunt rhinos because I trusted this man who I grew up with. He told me that all I have to do is help these two other men.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 45**

One interviewee claimed that while peer pressure did not influence his entry into IWT, it did influence his continuation in IWT activities. This offender explained that after his first arrest and conviction, his accomplices who were not arrested at the time urged him to continue his involvement in IWT. This, among others, was one factor that influenced his decision to engage in IWT again after he had initially decided to stop.

8 LACK OF STATE LEGITIMACY[7]

Approximately 40% of offenders referenced dissatisfaction with the current legal authorities and their perceived failure of appropriate governance as a factor that influenced or rationalised their engagement in IWT. Different dissatisfactions were expressed and included the lack of basic service delivery, a lack of sufficient or equal job opportunities, unnecessary wasteful expenditure, corruption, and the government's reliance on the sale of illegally harvested seized commodities (specifically related to abalone). This dissent and dissatisfaction has also been documented by De Greef (2013) and Gezelius and Hauck (2011) who found that some fishers in South Africa continued illegally to harvest marine species as they were frustrated with the authorities around the allocation of fishing rights. In addition, Hübschle (2017b) and Lunstrum and Givá (2020) found that the displacement of communities from the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique was a trigger for dissent and a driver of poaching behaviour.

Corruption linked to IWT in South Africa has been well documented and further erodes state legitimacy (Brandt, 2019; Crosta, 2018; Geldenhuys, 2016; Leithead, 2018; Petersen, 2018). Several offenders had knowledge of corruption along the illegal wildlife supply chain, including bribery of customs officials at airports and land borders to facilitate the transport of illegal goods, or the involvement of rangers to facilitate the poaching of rhinos.

An interview with one offender incarcerated for his role in the illegal trade in abalone criticised the authorities for selling abalone that they confiscate from individuals:

> **"Those guys who are buying the abalone in Asia, they are buying the legal perlemoen [common name for abalone in South Africa] and buying the illegal perlemoen too, and even cheaper when our abalone that gets confiscated from us gets sold to them by our own government. So, what makes them [the state] so different from me, a criminal?**
>
> **— INTERVIEW 60**

Some offenders also criticised the government for "wasting millions of Rands [South African Rand]" instead of investing that same money into economic opportunities for local communities. Two offenders explicitly stated how they had employed people who the government did not support and had not provided job opportunities to. These observations are in line with Lambrechts and Goga's (2016) suggestion that the void created by the legal authority's failures may be filled by organised crime groups and IWT.

9 OMISSION

Less than ten offenders rationalised their engagement in IWT through omission or inaction. These claims were mostly used by offenders who were not actively involved in the poaching of the wildlife commodity and instead occupied other supporting roles within the illegal supply chain. One offender who agreed to allow for the storage of abalone on his property claimed that he was guilty for "keeping my mouth shut and not turning those guys in to the police." (Interview 70). A similar statement was made by another offender responsible for paying abalone divers and providing logistical support: "I wasn't involved, involved, involved, I never actually touched the stuff [abalone]. I never thought what I did was so wrong because I only paid the people on behalf of the main guys." (Interview 72). These offenders appear to distance themselves from the "crime" of IWT and claim that their participation was the facilitation of an activity rather than the active involvement in an IWT activity.

[7] Legitimacy refers to the extent that the state and/or government institutions have the capacity and will to manage and meet its citizens expectations.

10 PROVISION OF **EMPLOYMENT FOR OTHERS**

Lastly, a smaller proportion (<10%) of interviewed offenders stated that they assisted or helped people improve their lives through their involvement in IWT. This factor was only mentioned by those offenders who employed others to engage in IWT and not by offenders who were directly involved in the poaching of the wildlife commodity. These offenders who employed individuals in IWT activities claimed to feel good about their actions, as they were responsible for placing food on the table for many of their employees' families, with one offender claiming to have employed over 40 people who were breadwinners for their families. Another offender explained this concept in more detail:

> "You know I also assisted people during all of this. There were two men, they weren't well off and just used to sell wood at a local racetrack. The one was friendly but shy and he used to be ridiculed by the racers. I felt sorry for him and I took him under my wing because I thought his prospects of improving him and [his] family's financial situation were low. He used to tell me they didn't have hot water at home and were just living in a shed on someone's property. Then some criminals broke into the property and stabbed a member of his family. I assisted during that ordeal. I then put the man and his family into a house with a pool and told him to come work for me... You know this guy had never been in an aeroplane before, so I flew him to Johannesburg once and he was so excited. I thought I was doing good, I felt good about myself.
>
> **— INTERVIEW 60**

DISCUSSION

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A fishing village on the edge of Massingir Dam, Mozambique drying their catch of fish for sale in a town approximately 140km away.

SOCIETAL AND COMMUNITY **MOTIVATIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN IWT**

All offenders identified one or more factors that supported their decision to engage or rationalised their involvement in IWT, indicating that a culmination of factors was likely responsible as opposed to one or two factors. This complexity may be better understood as those encompassing external stimuli at the societal and community level and those encompassing internal stimuli at an individual level (Figure 2). While this study did not investigate further which factor may have played a more influential role than another in the offender's decision to engage in IWT, collective strategies and initiatives that seek to address or remove the enabling factors at each of these levels may be better placed at increasing compliance and preventing engagement in IWT (De Greef, 2013; Fenio, 2014; Hauck & Sweijd, 1999; Hübschle, 2016; Kahler & Gore, 2012; Lambrechts & Goga, 2016; Lunstrum & Givá, 2020). Additionally, use behavioural change approaches (such as "behavioural journey mapping"[8]) could complement existing strategies and help to understand further the importance of one factor over another in influencing a potential offender. This may assist in directing resources towards particular deterrence interventions or strategies.

For example, societal factors including the lack of viable economic alternatives and the lack of state legitimacy require broader interventions by government, civil society and the private sector. This may include the provision of basic services and equal economic opportunity to communities; the reduction in unemployment and inequality; the inclusion of the communities into decision-making including around alternative livelihoods; and an increase in anti-corruption investigations. These interventions, along with other community-based interventions, may improve the perception of the authorities, while garnering better support for current and future laws, regulations and interventions.

[8] A behavioural journey map is a visualisation of the processes or series of steps (user thoughts, emotions, pressures, etc.) that an individual goes through over time when choosing to conduct or engage in a certain action or behaviour. For a more detailed explanation on behavioural journey mapping, visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4yzQWmkLkE

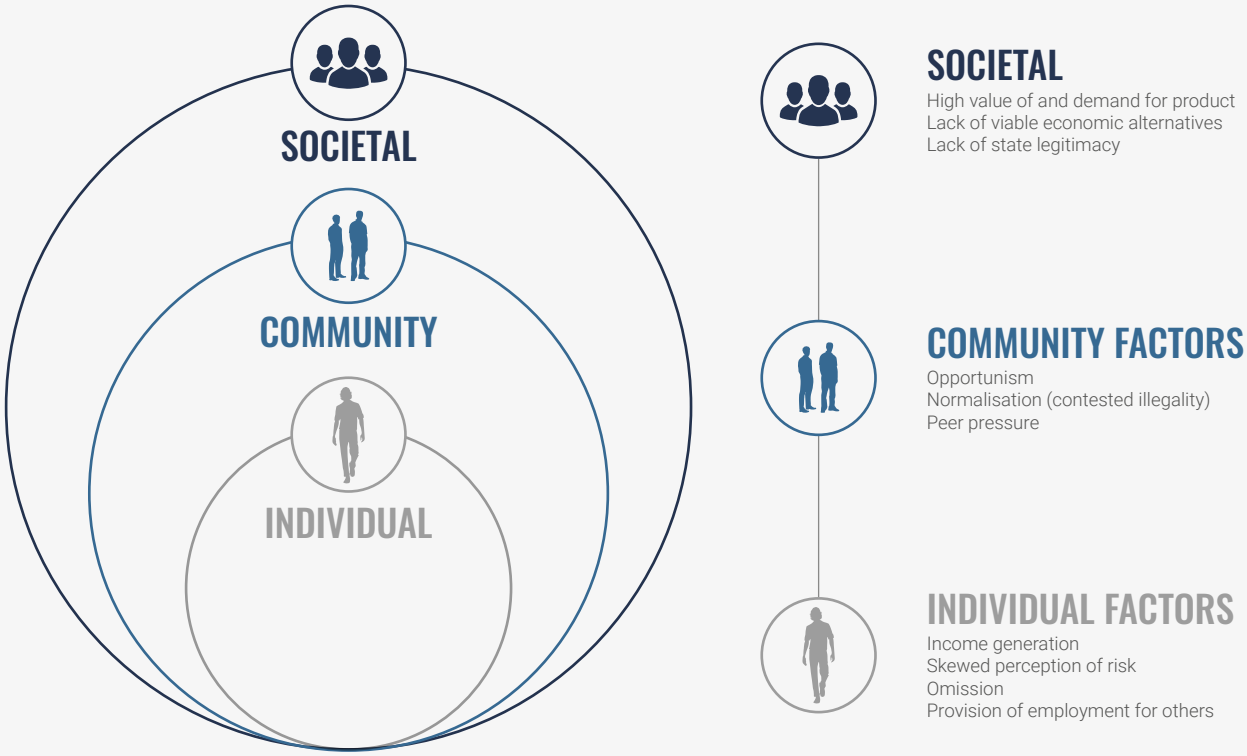


FIGURE 2
An illustration of the factors that influenced or rationalised offenders' engagement in IWT.

At the community level, factors such as opportunism and peer pressure may be addressed by a combination of traditional regulatory approaches and the empowerment of individuals to resist opportunities for crime

For example, the claims that ground-level poachers, transporters, and other facilitators are being actively recruited by individuals further down the supply chain warrants an increase in arrests and prosecutions of such higher-level individuals. Intervention strategies such as scenario-building and role playing could further equip individuals that are being recruited for these lower-level activities with the knowledge and tools to resist the pressure placed on them by their peers or recruiters.

Other factors at the individual level may also benefit from a combination of traditional regulatory approaches alongside educational interventions that emphasise the social consequences of engaging in IWT. For example, the claims that offenders saw other individuals evading arrest and reaping financial rewards from their engagement in IWT warrants investigation, arrest, prosecution and the asset forfeiture of these individuals (their peers or "bosses" evading arrest). This may decrease the perception that IWT is low risk. Additionally, while the prior lack of knowledge about the legal risks associated with IWT was mentioned and likely influenced the offenders' skewed perception of risk, it was the social, personal and familial consequences that offenders mentioned most. The impact of incarceration on the offenders and their families was the largest source of regret for most offenders. Initiatives that seek to emphasise these consequences (social, personal and familial), in addition to the legal and environmental consequences of IWT may be better placed at deterring potential offenders.

These findings reinforce the need to understand engagement in IWT from an offender's perspective. This study has reiterated that compliance with wildlife laws and regulations is more nuanced than the instrumental cost–benefit analysis that currently informs interventions. A better understanding of which factors may influence a potential offender more than another will guide efficient and effective interventions that deter individuals from engaging in IWT.

CONCLUSION

This is the first study to have conducted interviews with a variety of different wildlife offenders incarcerated in correctional centres in South Africa, and despite the limitation of not interviewing other offenders involved in the trade in other wildlife commodities (due to sampling and logistical constraints), was able to garner a more holistic understanding of IWT offenders and their reasons and rationalisations for their involvement in IWT. Most offenders interviewed participated in the initial activity of the illicit wildlife supply chain—the poaching of the wildlife, while a smaller number participated in other roles such as transport, storage or the subsequent sale of the commodity. The commodities targeted by the offenders included abalone, cycads and rhino horn. Furthermore, the majority of offenders had low education levels, and were either unemployed or informally employed prior to their engagement in IWT.

Despite the difference in the wildlife commodity involved or the different activities participated in by offenders, offenders referenced similar factors. These factors included external stimuli at the societal level including the lack of state legitimacy, the lack of viable economic alternatives and the high value of and demand for the commodity. Other external stimuli at the community level included the normalisation of IWT (or contested illegality), peer pressure and opportunism. Internal factors influencing the offenders' engagement in IWT included income generation, a skewed perception of the risks, omission and moral licensing.

Given the context of these findings, some factors may be best dealt with from a traditional regulatory approach while others would benefit from alternative strategies such as community-based interventions. These community-based interventions could include the provision of services and opportunities to communities, and social and educational initiatives that equip individuals with the ability to resist opportunities to engage in IWT. A better understanding of which factors may influence an offender more than another could assist in directing resources towards such interventions. A mixture of law enforcement responses which seek to target the recruiters and individuals further down the supply chain, the increase in anti-corruption initiatives, and various community-based interventions can and should exist in parallel in order to prevent and respond to IWT.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the context and findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

IMPROVE INVESTIGATIONS AND PROSECUTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS FURTHER DOWN THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE SUPPLY CHAIN, AS OPPOSED TO GROUND-LEVEL OFFENDERS SUCH AS POACHERS

There needs to be a concerted effort placed on investigating, arresting and prosecuting those individuals that occupy the higher levels of the illicit wildlife trade in South Africa—those individuals responsible for recruiting poachers and transporters, supplying intermediaries, and controlling the export of wildlife commodities to their international counterparts, as opposed to simply arresting and prosecuting the ground level offenders such as poachers and drivers. Investigations into these individuals need to be adequately resourced and incentivised by providing both human and technical capacity. Investigations need to include sufficient intelligence gathering (including gathering information from arrested and prosecuted offenders), telecoms analysis, financial investigations, anti-corruption investigations, and intergovernmental and private sector co-operation. Many of these aspects have been outlined by the National Integrated Strategy to Combat Wildlife Trafficking (NISCWT) (NISCWT, 2017). There is an urgent need for this strategy to be approved and implemented by the South African government.

PRIORITISE THE PROVISION OF BASIC SERVICES AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES TO COMMUNITIES AT RISK OF BEING EXPLOITED BY CRIMINAL SYNDICATES FOR THE ILLICIT WILDLIFE TRADE, IN LINE WITH SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030

It is crucial that the provision of public services, such as health care, quality education, employment opportunity, food security, and infrastructure such as electricity, water, sanitation, transport and telecommunications, are extended urgently to the communities most at risk of being exploited by criminal syndicates for illicit wildlife trade. The provision of these services should include the active involvement of communities as the change agents rather than communities simply being the passive receiver of these services. These services may result in communities being more resistant against opportunities of crime and will assist in improving individuals' perception of the legitimacy of the authorities.

In 2012, South Africa adopted the National Development Plan (NPC, 2012) which is a long-term vision and plan that serves as a blueprint for the work that needs to be done to achieve a prosperous society for South Africa by 2030. The core priorities of the NDP are to reduce poverty, unemployment, and inequality. At its core, the NDP aims to raise living standards through the provision of basic services and economic growth and opportunity. Effective implementation of these services needs to be prioritised by various government departments, including but not limited to the Departments of Social Development; Health; Trade, Industry and Competition; Basic Education; Transport; Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Public Works and Infrastructure and various provincial and local government institutions.

ENGAGE COMMUNITIES AS EQUAL PARTNERS IN COMBATTING IWT

Local community support is paramount in combatting IWT. Various community-based interventions exist in South Africa, such as the Black Mambas (Black Mambas Anti-Poaching Unit, 2013) and others under the People and Parks programme (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2019), and elsewhere globally including First Line of Defence (IUCN, 2020a) and Beyond Enforcement (IUCN, 2020b) that seek to strengthen community action against IWT while simultaneously reducing community support for IWT. These initiatives may include (1) increasing incentives for wildlife stewardship; (2) supporting livelihoods unrelated to wildlife; (3) decreasing the costs associated with human–wildlife conflict; (4) increasing the costs of participating in IWT; or (5) education and awareness raising.

The importance of involving communities in helping to identify and define solutions and interventions to prevent and combat engagement in IWT, as opposed to simply being a passive receiver of externally provided benefits, cannot be overstated. This may provide the communities with a feeling of ownership and responsibility and may be more likely to succeed than initiatives developed or imposed among communities without their buy-in.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES, THAT (1) EMPHASISE THE PERSONAL AND FAMILIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ENGAGEMENT IN IWT (AS OPPOSED TO THE LEGAL OR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES), AND (2) EQUIP INDIVIDUALS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND TOOLS TO RESIST PRESSURE PLACED ON THEM BY PEERS AND RECRUITERS TO ENGAGEMENT IN IWT

In order to deter individuals from potentially falling victim to engagement in an illegal wildlife activity, personal experiences of previous offenders could be publicised. The sharing of the often-unreported personal consequences on offenders and their families could be better placed at deterring individuals as opposed to simply raising awareness about the legal or environmental consequences of their potential actions.

Furthermore, equipping individuals with the ability and insight to decline opportunities for crime placed upon them by their peers or recruiters may assist in helping individuals successfully to avoid engagement in IWT. These interventions could be done through a variety of means including radio or television narratives, the use of storytelling through paroles or previous offenders who have completed their imprisonment sentences, and other interactive activities.

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