WILDLIFE CRIME AND CORRUPTION

Options for moving forward

TACKLING CORRUPTION RELATED TO WILDLIFE CRIME IS AN INTERNATIONAL PRIORITY – BUT CORRUPTION IN WILDLIFE CRIME IS A COMPLEX PROBLEM AND IS STILL RELATIVELY POORLY UNDERSTOOD. THIS BRIEFING GIVES A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT AND OUTLINES SOME OF THE PROMISING STRATEGIES WWF AND PARTNERS U4 ANTI-CORRUPTION RESOURCE CENTRE AND TRAFFIC ARE EXPLORING.

As wildlife crime has risen up the international agenda, a series of high-profile international agreements and declarations have highlighted the importance of tackling corruption in wildlife crime. More broadly, corruption is recognised as a threat to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, leading to the inclusion of a specific target (SDG 16.5) to 'substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms'.

The problem is being approached from both a conservation and a governance angle. For example, in 2016 the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) adopted a resolution on 'Prohibiting, Preventing and Countering Corruption'. The same year, wildlife crime featured on the agenda of the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) for the first time, while in 2017 the G20 released a set of 'High Level Principles on Combating Corruption Related to Illegal Trade in Wildlife and Wildlife Products'.

However, while corruption is widely acknowledged as one of the key factors enabling wildlife crime, our knowledge of where, how and why it happens and how to tackle it remains limited. Evidence is patchy and largely anecdotal, making it difficult to know where best to target interventions. We lack a full picture of how big the problem is across different forms of wildlife crime, countries, institutions, species and commodities, and of the various types of corruption that occur. Models of effective anti-corruption interventions are also lacking, particularly related to wildlife. Collaboration between conservationists and anti-corruption specialists has until recently been limited.

WWF, TRAFFIC and partners are seeking to fill these gaps. In 2016, WWF, TRAFFIC and the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology brought together the fields of anti-corruption, development, anti-transnational crime and conservation to form the 3C Network (Countering Conservation-related Corruption). WWF has also collaborated with U4 and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) to set out possible entry points for addressing corruption in wildlife crime.

In 2018, a consortium including WWF, TRAFFIC, the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre at the Chr. Michelsen Institute and the Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center at George Mason University was awarded a grant from USAID's Targeting Natural Resource Corruption Programme. This will greatly facilitate deepening understanding of corruption and testing approaches aimed at reducing corruption and improving conservation outcomes.

CORRUPTION AND WILDLIFE CRIME: WHAT WE KNOW

Corruption can be understood as 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gain'. Although we lack a comprehensive understanding of corruption associated with wildlife crime, we have enough evidence to conclude that many actors are involved along the entire value chain. These include politicians and public officials, members of the judiciary, law enforcement and military personnel, officials from forest and wildlife departments, customs officers, local elites and so on.

Examples of corruption facilitating wildlife crime at different levels include:

Public officials issuing false permits: Guinea's former head of the CITES Management Authority was convicted and sentenced in 2015 to 18 months in prison for issuance of export permits including for great apes declared as 'captive bred' in return for bribes. (In January 2017, he was granted a presidential pardon while awaiting the ruling of his appeal.)

Rangers and law enforcement officials involved in poaching: In Kenya, the Ministry for Natural Resources and Tourism fired 21 game wardens for collaborating with poachers. In Tanzania, police officers near the Selous Game Reserve hired and armed ivory poachers.

Bribery of customs and border officials: It's estimated that US$18,000-30,000 is paid in bribes to border officials every day along the Vietnam–China border to enable the passage of illegal ivory. Border officials in Poland have reportedly been bribed to allow illegal caviar from the Russian Federation into the European Union.

Embezzlement of resources for wildlife conservation: Corrupt practices like procurement fraud and the theft of national park revenues can make it harder for those tasked with protecting wildlife to do their job.

Corruption in the criminal justice system: Numerous examples exist of attempts to prevent prosecutions of suspected wildlife criminals, such as bribes being paid to officials to destroy or lose court records. Conversely, in Gabon in 2016, a prosecutor was offered US$4,000 to secure the release of a foreign national arrested for wildlife crime – but instead launched a successful corruption case.

Grand corruption at high levels of government: During the apartheid era, the South African armed forces and Military Intelligence Department were directly involved in selling ivory, rhino horn, hardwoods and drugs to fund wars and destabilisation campaigns in South West Africa (now Namibia), Angola and Mozambique.

Corruption can facilitate wildlife crime at many different levels and through many different actors along the value chain.

CORRUPTION DOESN'T OCCUR IN A VACUUM. IT THRIVES WHERE GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONS ARE WEAK, AND WHERE THERE ARE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES. IT CAN BECOME NORMALISED, A FORM OF GOVERNANCE ITSELF WHERE IT IS SO ENTRENCHED, SO MUCH PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE THAT IT IS MORE OR LESS TAKEN FOR GRANTED AND PERPETUATED.

Examining the causes and motivations behind corruption is important for designing effective interventions. For example, among the reasons wildlife rangers may become corrupted are low morale, low wages (bribes may be used to pay for essentials like school fees), inadequate supervision, limited equipment, incomplete training, or familiarity with illegal actors due, for example, to having spent significant time in close proximity with such actors in the field.

Understanding the social context is also important to avoid enforcement actions that target low-ranking, vulnerable individuals, without addressing underlying systemic issues. Rather than seeing corruption as a problem of individuals, interventions should address government and society as a whole. Since corruption disproportionately affects the poor and marginalised, a human rights perspective is important here; a rights-based approach can provide promising avenues for promoting effective institutions, appropriate laws, improved governance, and the participation of concerned stakeholders.

APPROACHES FOR TACKLING CORRUPTION LINKED TO WILDLIFE CRIME

Follow the money

Financial systems and arrangements in OECD countries as well as legal tax havens facilitate investment of corrupt monies from resource-rich developing countries. Despite the large profits generated, wildlife crime has not yet been recognised as a significant money-laundering threat.

Following money flows and conducting financial audits could help inform how corruption is facilitated. Targeting the financial beneficiaries should also help redress the often disproportionate focus on low-level actors, bring into play laws with harsher penalties including asset recovery, and enable action against higher-level actors, such as politically powerful individuals, who are often seen as operating above the law. Mobile phone networks (widely used for financial transactions in Africa and Asia) and private sector financial institutions are potential partners for identifying illicit financial activity.

Research and risk management

Smuggling caviar differs from smuggling ivory, which differs again from transhipping tuna or laundering illegal timber. Illicit wildlife commodities operate on different scales, use different modes of transport and follow different routes to market. New research is needed to document and analyse empirical evidence of the scale and types of corruption associated with different types of wildlife crime, the actors involved, and their incentives and motivations.

While the types of corruption may be similar, it is vital to understand how they play out locally for different wildlife crimes and commodities. This information is needed in order to develop tailored corruption risk management processes. These should include risk identification (what specific corruption risks apply in that particular context), assessment (of both the probability and potential impact of those risks) and mitigation measures. Prevention is critical where wildlife is concerned – once an animal is killed, any action is too late.

Anti-corruption approaches, like other conservation measures, need to be continually reviewed. Interventions should be refreshed and checked for effectiveness as corrupt practices change. Wildlife criminals adapt to new approaches in law enforcement and other political, social and environmental changes. For example, stricter border controls in one area may lead to a change in illegal trade routes, while increased random inspections may lead to more bribes being paid out.

Collaboration and coalitions

Tackling corruption related to wildlife crime is a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration between the criminology, anti-corruption, conservation and development communities. Specialists from other areas, such as the social science and behaviour change communities, can also help design more nuanced and effective interventions. Importantly, agencies and organisations who work to address corruption must identify anti-corruption champions within countries where wildlife crime occurs, and forge partnerships with them.

Until recently, there has been little crossover between the fields of wildlife conservation and anti-corruption. This raises the risk that interventions to tackle corruption in wildlife crime will be hampered by missing out on the latest knowledge, thinking and developments in the anti-corruption sphere. Equally, wildlife conservation practitioners may have knowledge of issues that those working to address corruption are unfamiliar with.

Lessons can be learned from anti-corruption work and governance reforms in other sectors. U4's research into corruption in African fisheries found that opportunities for corruption flourish where important decisions on fisheries management lack transparency; it recommended that committees, rather than individuals, should be responsible for licensing decisions, and that relevant information should be made public. Similar considerations could reduce opportunities for corruption in areas such as issuance of CITES permits or hunting licences.

Social norms and networks

Corruption is closely connected with social norms – in some contexts, an 'honest' official is seen as one who demands no more than the usual going rate for a bribe. Where governments and governance structures themselves are corrupt, attempting to influence the social norms and networks that shape people's behaviour may be an effective approach. This requires a close understanding of the regional, national and local context and the 'political economy' – how the country is really governed, and the relationships between individuals and society.

Interventions based on untested assumptions that transpose ideas directly from one context to another are likely to fail. For example, a study of forest governance found that well-intentioned efforts to clamp down on illegal logging have led instead to increased payments of bribes to police to allow illegal acts to continue, strengthening institutional corruption – with those unable to pay,

including local communities, being charged with illegal logging. This underlines the importance of integrating core human rights principles – transparency, accountability, non-discrimination and meaningful participation – into anti-corruption strategies.

Relevant in this context is Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which measures corruption perceptions across countries. Significantly, there is a strong correlation between countries scoring badly on the CPI and the illegal killing of elephants. As countries generally don't want to be seen as more corrupt than their neighbours, the CPI can help drive measures to reduce corruption at a national level. Developing a special index on corruption in relation to environmental crime could improve understanding of the relationship between environmental harm, governance and corruption. This could support advocacy to strengthen legislation and improve transparency, and lead to greater collaboration between environmentalists, anti-corruption organisations and civil society.

Reducing demand

The demand for illegal wildlife products creates incentives for corruption. If profitable illegal markets didn't exist, there would be no need for bribes and other corrupt practices to evade the law. This makes demand reduction, supported by enforcement actions, an important strategy for reducing corruption associated with wildlife crime.

Captive breeding facilities are known to be particularly vulnerable to corruption, with false documentation being used to 'launder' illegal wildlife specimens. A CITES mechanism was recently launched to review trade in animals reportedly bred in captivity, to identify anomalies and suspicious actions – such as CITES permits declaring specimens captive bred when the species has never before been bred in captivity.

URGENT ACTION

Global poverty has been significantly reduced over the last 20 years. Public finances have in many countries been made more secure, many children are receiving better access to education, and many patients are being treated in better equipped hospitals. In certain circumstances, confronting corruption head on has played a role in these advances.

We need to bring the same honest dialogue and tools to the table to address corruption that facilitates wildlife crime. We need governments, members of parliament and civil society across the world to call out corruption in the wildlife sector when they see it. We need to seek out those partners who want to make a difference, and not shy away from difficult conversations. And because wildlife crime and the corruption that enables it pose an immediate threat to the survival of many species, we need to act urgently.

62,800

Wildlife crime and the corruption that enables it pose an immediate threat to the survival of many species. The pangolin is the most trafficked mammal in the world – up to 62,800 are estimated to be traded each year, and over a million were killed in the last decade.

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