Briefing

**Biodiversity, Natural resource management**

*Keywords:*
Community-based natural resource management, conservation, wildlife, illegal wildlife trade

iied IUCN CEESP SSC Species Survival Commission SULi ceed ARC

**Issue date**
February 2016

## Policy pointers

**Increased enforcement** against illegal wildlife trade is crucial if the current surge in poaching is to be contained, but it can have harsh consequences for local communities living with wildlife unless managed carefully.

**Local communities can** be effectively engaged to help combat illegal wildlife trade but there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

**Co-developed and** cooperative strategies that involve communities as partners in combating illegal wildlife trade are gaining recognition, but need much greater support.

**Using a Theory of** Change for engaging communities in tackling illegal wildlife trade can help policymakers and practitioners think through different options and check that assumptions they base interventions on hold true.

# Engaging communities to combat illegal wildlife trade: a Theory of Change

In recent years there has been a surge in illegal wildlife trade. Poaching of elephants and rhinos for ivory and horn has attracted the most attention, but the trade extends to many other species and commodities. This crisis has attracted funding worth hundreds of millions of dollars, mostly directed at increased law enforcement. Practitioners and policymakers increasingly recognise the need to engage communities that live alongside wildlife as key partners in the fight. Yet there is no straightforward and widely replicable model for effective community engagement — different approaches work or fail in different situations. Here, we present an evolving Theory of Change to help practitioners and policymakers think through what might work well — and why — under different conditions.

The current surge in illegal wildlife trade (IWT) has left governments, NGOs and international conservation organisations all searching for effective responses. To date, their focus has been increasing law enforcement in source countries and reducing demand in consumer countries. However, policy circles are increasingly recognising the importance of engaging local people who live alongside wildlife. Evidence of this can be found in the Global Tiger Recovery Plan (2010), the African Elephant Summit (2013), the London Declaration (2014), the Kasane Declaration (2015), the Brazzaville Declaration (2015), within the United Nations General Assembly (2015) and in the Sustainable Development Goals (2015). Indeed, even the long-established Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognise local community roles in sustainable wildlife management. However, there is no 'blueprint' for engaging communities and little guidance on delivering community involvement 'on the ground'.

This Briefing presents an evolving Theory of Change (ToC) as a first step in better understanding the different incentives and disincentives that influence whether local people engage in IWT, or help to prevent it.

## What is a ToC?

Put simply, a ToC describes 'a sequence of events that is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome'[1]. It helps to map out the 'missing-middle' between what an activity or intervention does and how this leads to desired outcomes and impacts[2]. Sometimes the term is used to refer to any version of this process. The Conservation Measures Partnership and the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation actively promote 'results chains'[3], which are shown as a series of boxes linking inputs (actions) to outputs (what an action produces) then on to outcomes (what

happens as a result) and impacts (how things change in the longer term for the intended beneficiary). Another format is a logframe, which represents the same information in a logical, hierarchical matrix from inputs to final impacts. However, given the complexity of both IWT and of community engagement, and the very varied conditions under which different initiatives operate, we present an evolving ToC of a third more detailed variety, a key feature of which is its explicit consideration of the critical assumptions underpinning different 'causal pathways' to the desired impact[4].

*Efforts to ensure rights are devolved to the community level are paramount*

Assumptions connect early, intermediate and long term outcomes and impacts, and explain how and why proposed interventions are expected to achieve these[2]. For example, if a project intends local communities to receive tourism revenue as an incentive for conservation and to reduce poaching, there is an implicit assumption that the amount of revenue generated from tourism will be sufficient to provide that incentive. It also assumes there aren't any other more influential factors encouraging people to poach. Many conservation projects fail because their assumptions just do not hold true.

## An evolving ToC

Figure 1 sets out our ToC, presenting four different but mutually supportive pathways to engage communities in tackling IWT:

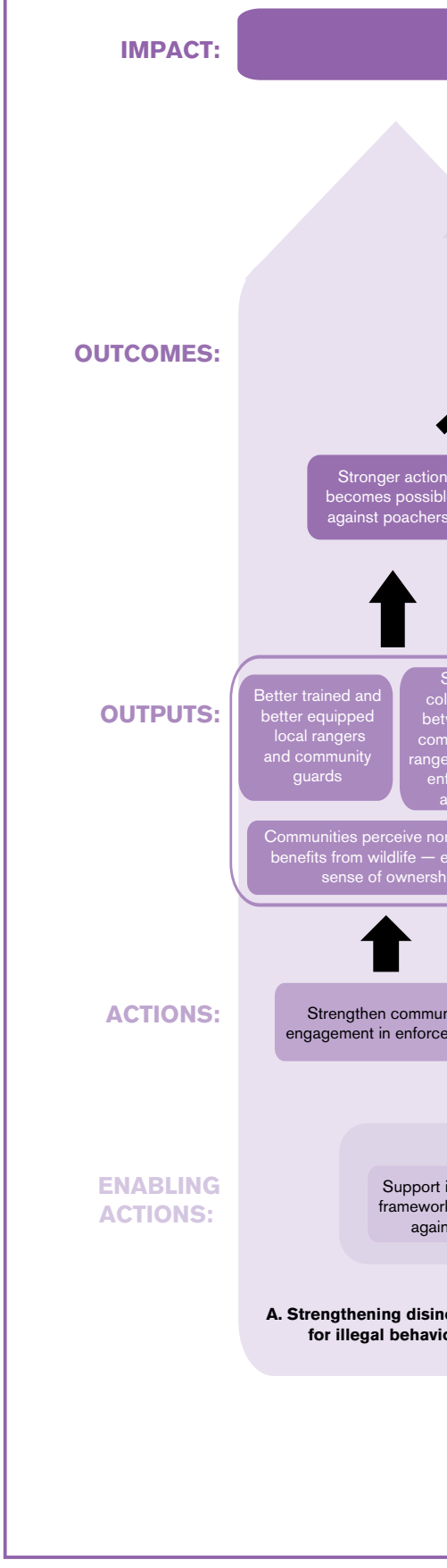
**A. Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour** — making it more difficult and costly for local people to poach wildlife in the first place; to support poachers from outside the community; and/or to trade in the illegally killed animals or their products.

**B. Increasing incentives for wildlife stewardship** — strengthening the financial and non-financial benefits local people receive for protecting and sustainably managing wildlife. These benefits can often come from active engagement in wildlife conservation. There must be direct links between people accruing benefits and their accountability and responsibility for conservation outcomes

**C. Decreasing the costs of living with wildlife** — reducing some of the difficulties that wildlife can impose on local farmers and other community members, including crop raiding; livestock predation; damage to property and infrastructure; and personal injuries (or even deaths).

**D. Supporting non-wildlife based livelihoods** — creating livelihood and economic opportunities that reduce local peoples' dependence on wildlife,

**Figure 1. Summarised ToC for engaging**



communities in tackling IWT

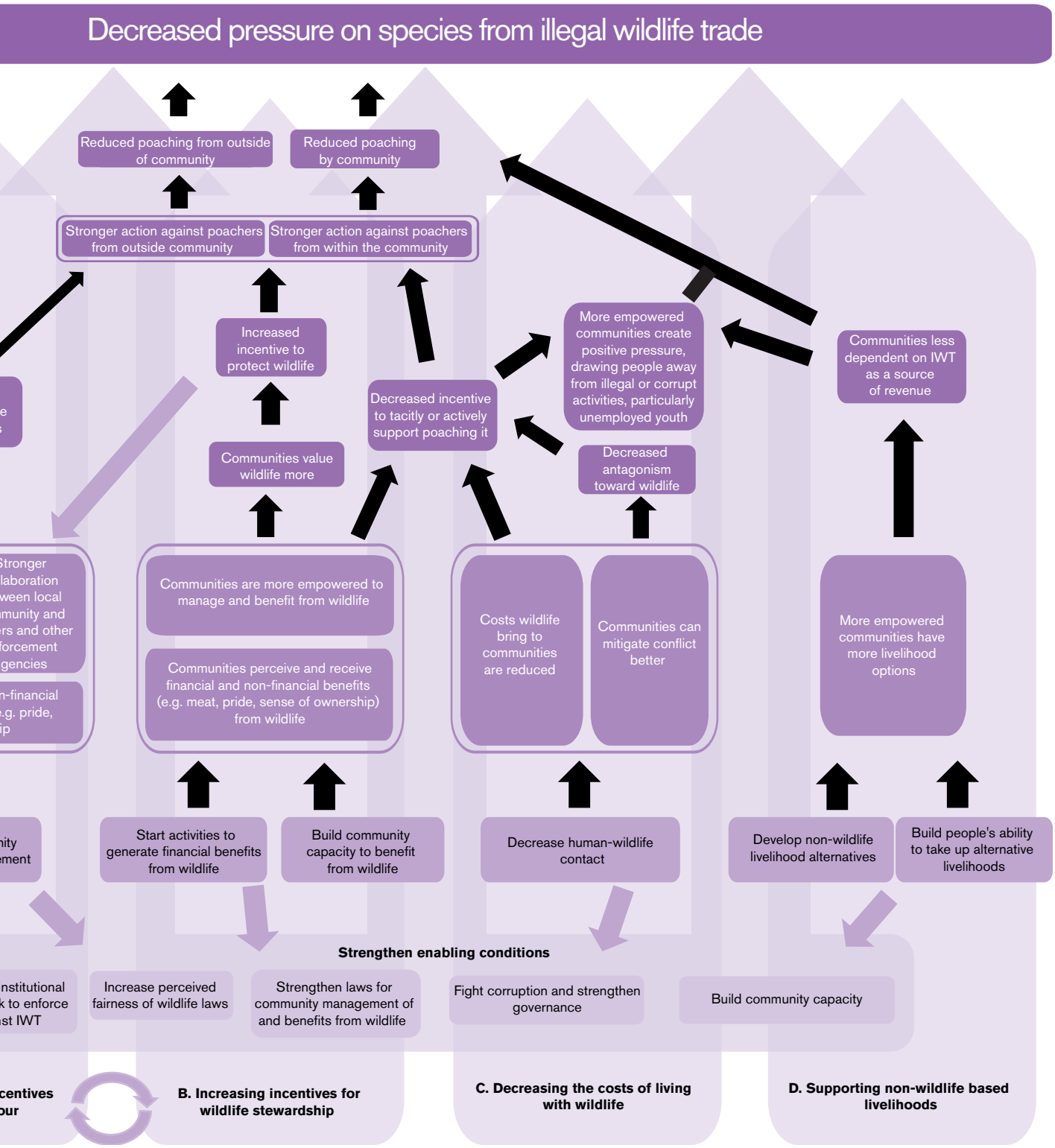


**Table 1: Example assumptions for each pathway**

| Pathway | Sample assumptions |
|---|---|
| A. Strengthening disincentives for illegal behaviour | Community rangers use equipment and training to combat IWT and not to poach for themselves, nor for other purposes.<br>State-led enforcement agents are willing to work constructively with local communities. |
| B. Increasing incentives for wildlife stewardship | Benefits go hand in hand with accountability and responsibility for conservation, and are shared sufficiently equitably.<br>Local elites do not capture most of the benefits, thereby undermining the intervention's chances of success. |
| C. Decreasing the costs of living with wildlife | Government compensation is enough to placate those suffering damages.<br>Compensation does not feed corruption, for example by encouraging communities to falsely report damage by wildlife so compensation can be claimed. |
| D. Supporting non-wildlife based livelihoods | Wildlife products are not so valuable that income from IWT dwarfs that from other activities. Communities and individuals engaged in illegal activity do not simply use alternative livelihoods to augment their income while continuing to poach. |

for example creating new enterprise opportunities or salaried jobs locally or further afield.

For each of these pathways, Figure 1 highlights key activities, and the outputs and outcomes that we would expect those to generate. Underpinning assumptions are central to the pathways. Table 1 gives examples of assumptions to consider but a much fuller list is available at pubs.iied.org/G04008.html.

These pathways are also underpinned by enabling conditions and actions — often the crucial factors in any initiative attempting to tackle IWT or promote community-based conservation. Countries with high levels of IWT often have poor governance[5], so paramount amongst these enabling actions and conditions are efforts to manage corruption and ensure rights are devolved to the community level. Other enabling actions include: supporting the institutional framework to enforce laws against IWT; ensuring wildlife laws are perceived as fair; strengthening laws for community management of, and benefit from, wildlife; and building local capacity to actively support wildlife conservation.

## Challenges and next steps

Our ToC is just that — a theory. Implementing it will always bring challenges. The difficulties of tackling corruption and getting the enabling conditions right for community-based conservation are not unique to IWT, but are certainly magnified by the high stakes. When elephant ivory and rhino horn are worth more than their weight in gold, and rural incomes are so pitifully low, encouraging protection over poaching, or wildlife conservation over agriculture, is hugely difficult.

Further, IWT is dynamic and complex and strategies to address it must reflect this[6]. Our ToC is one part of a larger strategic approach to cut demand reduction and boost enforcement throughout the value chain. Nonetheless, the ToC provides a useful tool for thinking through options for engaging communities and checking that the assumptions such initiatives make are realistic.

Importantly, using a ToC when planning, implementing and evaluating interventions supports collective learning[7]. The next step in developing this ToC will be evaluating the pathways and their assumptions against existing community engagement initiatives and perceptions using proactive action research. Such work should help to design new initiatives and strengthen existing ones.

**Dilys Roe, Duan Biggs, Holly Dublin and Rosie Cooney**

Dilys Roe is the Biodiversity Team Leader at IIED. Rosie Cooney is Chair of the IUCN SULi Specialist Group, a joint initiative of IUCN's Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy and its Species Survival Commission (SSC). Holly Dublin is a member of the SULi Steering Committee and Chair of the IUCN SSC African Elephant Specialist Group. Duan Biggs is a Research Fellow in the Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions and the Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science at the University of Queensland.

## Notes

[1] Davies, R. (2012) Criteria for assessing the evaluability of Theories of Change (Blog for Monitoring and Evaluation NEWS, 12 April 2012 http://mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/criteria-for-assessing-evaluablity-of.html) / [2] What is a Theory of Change? (Center for Theory of Change, 2013 www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change) / [3] Schwartz *et al.* (2012) Perspectives on the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation. *Biological Conservation* 155:169-177 doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2012.06.014; Margoluis *et al.* (2013) Results chains: a tool for conservation action design, management, and evaluation. *Ecology and Society* 18:22. dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-05610-180322 / [4] Rogers, P. (2014) Theory of change Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 2 (UNICEF Office of Research, Florence http://devinfolive.info/impact_evaluation/ie/img/downloads/Theory_of_Change_ENG.pdf) / [5] Smith, R.J. *et al.* (2003) Governance and the loss of biodiversity. Nature 426:67-70. doi:10.1038/nature02025 / [6] Challender, D.W.S. *et al.* (2015) Towards informed and multi-faceted wildlife trade interventions. *Global Ecology and Conservation* 3:129-148. doi:10.1016/j.gecco.2014.11.010 / [7] Valters, C. (2015) Theories of Change: Time for a radical approach to learning in development (Overseas Development Institute, London. www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9835.pdf)

Knowledge Products



**Contact**
Dilys Roe
dilys.roe@iied.org

80–86 Gray's Inn Road
London, WC1X 8NH
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055
www.iied.org

IIED welcomes feedback via: @IIED and www.facebook.com/theiied

This research was funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government.

UKaid
from the British people