

Briefing

Biodiversity, Natural resource management

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Policy pointers

The voices of local communities living with wildlife have been missing from policy debates on the illegal wildlife trade (IWT). National, regional and international policy forums must include community representatives as equal partners alongside government and non-government stakeholders if policy is to be effective in practice.

Increasing community incentives for wildlife stewardship (in policy and practice) and decreasing the costs of living with wildlife must be given equal weight alongside providing alternative livelihoods when partnerships with local communities are considered in the context of the IWT.

Political will is needed to reform existing policy to better reflect clear, consistent lessons on ensuring greater community ownership, rights and tenure. Even where policy supports these issues, greater efforts are needed to implement these commitments.

In the longer term, poaching and IWT are a lesser threat to wildlife than rapid land transformation and increasing habitat loss. Governments need to provide incentives to local communities to support wildlife as an economically viable and competitive land use option.

Local communities: the overlooked first line of defence for wildlife

The long-term survival of wildlife, and in particular the success of efforts to combat the illegal wildlife trade (IWT) in high-value commodities such as elephant ivory and rhino horn, depends to a large extent on the willing support of local communities living alongside it. But communities themselves are rarely consulted on what they think about IWT and how best to tackle it. The First Line of Defence (FLoD) initiative is an approach that directly engages with the communities that are targeted by IWT projects, seeking to understand and give voice to their perspectives. Critically, the initiative explores the extent to which communities align (or not) with the perspectives of those who design and implement IWT projects and those who set policy. Early experiences have highlighted the critical insights that communities can provide, and how these insights can help improve the future design and focus of initiatives and policies to protect species from the IWT.

Local community support is vital to the success of any efforts to combat the illegal wildlife trade (IWT). There is a limit to the protection that can be offered by setting aside areas for conservation; in reality much of the world's wildlife utilises land outside protected areas where small farmers, herders and foresters are struggling to make a living. And even when wildlife does live within a protected area, there is still immense pressure on both the land and the animals from people who live along the boundaries and use the protected areas as a source of fuel, food, building materials and fodder. There is a piece of the puzzle missing: while conservation practitioners, donors and policymakers are increasingly recognising the need for local engagement in IWT projects, communities themselves are rarely consulted on what they think about the IWT and how best to tackle it.

Since 2013, IIED and IUCN have collaborated with a range of partners on initiatives to highlight the important role that local people play in conserving wildlife, to combat the IWT and to better understand the perspectives of local people who are engaged in anti-IWT projects. The Beyond Enforcement Initiative¹ developed a draft theory of change² (ToC) for tackling the IWT through community-level action.

The First Line of Defence (FLoD)³ initiative was then developed to further refine this ToC and field test it in Kenya (with other locations elsewhere in Africa to follow).

The refined ToC identifies four pathways for community-level action:

- Pathway A: increase the costs of participating in IWT

- Pathway B: increase incentives for wildlife stewardship
- Pathway C: decrease costs of living with wildlife
- Pathway D: increase non-wildlife-based livelihoods.

The missing puzzle piece is what communities think about the IWT and how to tackle it

To succeed in combating the IWT with and through community engagement, the ToC suggests that all four pathways require strengthening, along with a series of enabling conditions that include

capacity building, fair and adequate legislation, strengthened governance and a recognition of the difference between community and individual costs and benefits.

The FLoD field-testing process has, specifically, sought to understand how far the assumptions and logic of existing anti-IWT interventions are in line with community thinking. This briefing summarises some key lessons from this process and their implications for future IWT interventions and policy.

The FLoD approach: listening to communities

While communities are sometimes consulted on externally-driven IWT (or broader conservation) projects, this is often quite tokenistic and could be more accurately described as ‘informing’ than consulting. Moreover, it often involves the local chiefs, elders or key decision makers (usually men) rather than the wider community. In contrast, the FLoD initiative attempts more representative community consultations — involving young and old people, and both women and men — and facilitates interaction, feedback and the reconciliation of differences both between different segments of the community and between project designers/implementers and the communities they target.

The first step in the FLoD process has been to understand the logic behind the design of a particular IWT intervention; by interviewing IWT project designers and/or implementers we interrogate and articulate the expected causal results chain and, critically, the key assumptions — explicit and implicit — that underpin it. We have then taken this logic to the community targeted by the IWT intervention and explored whether they have the same perspectives and whether the assumptions being made are valid. Finally, we have brought communities and project designers back together to hear the results of our

consultations, explore differences in perspectives and attempt to reconcile those differences — which may mean changing the way a new project is designed or an existing project is implemented. Our case studies report⁴ and methodological guidance⁵ provide further detail.

The human victims of wildlife crime

We consulted on two IWT initiatives: one in the Olderkesi Conservancy adjacent to the Masai Mara National Reserve and a second in the Kilitome Conservancy adjacent to Amboseli National Park. The communities who shared their insights recognised that poaching was a problem, although it had reduced in recent years. They highlighted that their pastoralist livelihoods are compatible with wildlife and that a functioning pastoral system supported the continued existence of land for wildlife, with one participant commenting: “If there was no livestock there would be no wildlife.” The communities expressed their pride in their wildlife heritage and their longstanding co-existence, and noted the existence of various taboos and cultural norms that help to protect wildlife. In some Maasai clans, for example, killing an elephant is considered equivalent to killing a human. They did recognise that in some cases community members may get involved in poaching, but this is often opportunistic rather than systematic and frequently incentivised by outsiders. They believed that in some areas government rangers from adjacent protected areas were involved.

But communities also expressed their frustration about the political priority that is afforded to wildlife deaths compared to human lives (see Box 1). This anger often results in revenge killing of wildlife and can be as much of a problem as poaching,⁶ albeit one that has received less political attention. Around Amboseli, there have been several revenge killings of elephants recently, the result of local anger at ‘crimes’ ranging from crop-raiding to human deaths. While Kenya’s Wildlife Conservation and Management Act 2013 (WCMA) does include provision for compensation for wildlife-related injury or damage, the resources have not yet been allocated to meet the level of claims already lodged.

Count the benefits, but costs are key

The approaches of the interventions we looked at in Kenya were all in line with our ToC for engaging communities in tackling the IWT, as all employed a mix of the four pathways described

above. For example, Pathway A — increase the costs of participating in IWT — is evident in the reaction communities expressed to the stiff penalties for IWT introduced by the WCMA: all thought these were a strong deterrent to would-be poachers. But as one commentator noted: “Incentives for good behaviour are probably still better than penalties for bad behaviour.” And increased incentives for wildlife stewardship (Pathway B) is a key feature of the interventions we examined, revolving around the purchase of land leases by high-end tourism operators in return for access to wildlife-rich land with excellent photographic tourism opportunities. They also included community wildlife scout programmes, where benefits to local people are provided in the form of jobs, training and equipment, in return for patrolling, providing intelligence and collaborating with state-led law enforcement efforts.

The target communities agreed that it was critical to have a mechanism that allowed them to benefit from wildlife, as an incentive not just to prevent poaching but also to secure land as wildlife habitat. Direct, tangible economic benefits from wildlife tourism, as described above, were seen as the strongest incentive. But, even in prime wildlife tourism sites, there was an obvious mismatch between community expectations and the delivery of benefits on the ground. At Kilitome, tourism-related income has not been a sufficient incentive to prevent local land owners from selling their land or converting traditional wildlife-livestock areas to agriculture. Some people commented that if the benefits from wildlife don't increase but the costs do, then they might start to turn a blind eye to poaching by outsiders.

At Olderkesi, the pressure to convert land to agriculture is less intense — the local people remain largely pastoral — but the project designer's assumption that the community will set land aside for wildlife in perpetuity remains to be tested. Community members have commented that, despite being fully aware of their agreement with the tourism operator, they might well need to access the wildlife land for grazing or water in times of drought. In Olderkesi, concerted efforts are being made to develop livelihood options that are not wildlife-based as a means to bolster insufficient tourism incomes, but in Kilitome there are already numerous other possible livelihoods (particularly agriculture and peri-urban enterprise development, which are generating income that may be helping to reduce incentives to poach). However, poorly enforced land use plans around Kilitome are leading to the fragmentation of wildlife habitats, undermining

Box 1. In their own words: communities on political bias towards wildlife

“If a rhino is killed, someone comes immediately to find out what happened. If a person is killed or injured, nobody comes.”

“If an animal kills you there is no compensation. If you kill an animal you get ten years in prison.”

Comments collected during fieldwork.

the community's higher-level aspirations for sustainable wildlife-based land use.

Beyond these case studies, there are decades of experience in how to incentivise sustainable community-based wildlife management, including how law enforcement is needed to back up local action and vice versa (see Box 2). The lessons from this experience highlight the importance of local rights to own, use and manage wildlife in order to benefit from it, and the importance of putting the right enabling conditions in place to achieve this.⁷ These lessons are just as applicable to engaging communities in tackling the IWT as they are to sustainable wildlife management more broadly. However, while many are well reflected in government policy commitments on the IWT, there has been a consistent failure to turn policy intentions into practice.

Recognising the greater threats

The long-term visions for the interventions at the case study sites in Amboseli and at the Masai Mara are not simply to reduce pressure placed on wildlife by poaching. In both cases it is recognised by both communities and IWT project implementers that growing populations are placing huge pressure on the land and, in the case of Amboseli, rapidly expanding infrastructure development and encroaching urbanisation is exacerbating this. Both the project designers/implementers and the communities in Olderkesi and Kilitome are fully aware of the fact that while poaching must be dealt with as a matter of priority, ultimately the long-term future of wildlife depends on the availability of land to support it. Africa's population is expected to double by 2050,⁸ this increased populace will require more agricultural land, more infrastructure and more urbanisation. Climate change impacts are already emerging

Box 2. Incentivising communities to protect wildlife

“*In situ* law enforcement must be accompanied by socioeconomic aid policies, such as ecotourism, financial transfers, or sustainable trophy hunting, in order to motivate local communities to comply with and internalize wildlife conservation.” — *Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown*⁹

and land for wildlife will be in increasingly short supply; perhaps its best hope is that the pastoralists, smallholder farmers and others who manage land will also manage wildlife.

Communities can still hold the answers. But wildlife management needs to become a viable land-use option for local people; to achieve this, effective land-use planning and governance is required at a landscape level (meaning at large scale, across diverse land uses, including in and around protected areas). Individual IWT projects can be very appealing, promising direct action and on-the-ground results in the short term. However, in the long term, creating an environment of good governance, enlightened policy and strong partnership that fosters and supports communities to be active participants in conservation is likely to provide far greater hope for the future of Africa's wildlife.

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