

POLICY BRIEF



Taking action against wildlife crime in Uganda: balancing law enforcement with community engagement

Wildlife crime has come under increasing international scrutiny in recent years, with ever more money being spent on activities to combat it. But often little is known about the local factors that drive people to become involved in wildlife crime, or about which interventions are the most effective in tackling it. A huge amount of resources can be wasted if the interventions selected do not address the underlying drivers of crime. In Uganda, detailed research undertaken around the Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth protected areas has helped us to better understand who is involved in wildlife crime and why. Based on its results, **park level action plans have been developed for tackling wildlife crime.** These describe how the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) can strike a better balance between law enforcement and community engagement. This policy brief sets out the key recommendations in the park action plans, and summarises the next steps that UWA and partners need to take to operationalise them.

Policy pointers

- Many people are engaged in wildlife crime, for various reasons. In some cases it is because they have few other opportunities to earn income. In others it is because they are angry about the lack of support they receive to deal with human-wildlife conflict.
- Protected area ranger patrols can and do help deter wildlife crime. But the likelihood of someone either encountering a ranger or being prosecuted is low, so many people feel it is still worth the risk to enter the park illegally.
- Ranger patrols do not address the fundamental drivers of wildlife crime: a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities and insufficient attention to human-wildlife conflict.
- Although UWA has a Community Conservation Unit (CCU) which does attempt to address these issues, it suffers from a lack of sufficient resources and from poor relationships between the law enforcement unit and local people; there is a lack of trust on both sides.
- To date, UWA senior management has not considered the activities of its CCU as being part of the overall effort to combat wildlife crime.
- If wildlife crime is to be effectively tackled there needs to be a better balance between the current focus on law enforcement and community engagement, and better coordination between the UWA staff responsible for different aspects of wildlife crime prevention.
- Park level action plans can help clarify the priority interventions that UWA can adopt, along with conservation and development partners.
- Leadership is needed from UWA headquarters and conservation area managers to ensure appropriate action is taken, and to provide the necessary support for park staff to own and implement the plans.

Who is involved in wildlife crime and why?

Involvement in wildlife crime is widespread around the Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth Protected Areas in Uganda (over 42 per cent of the households interviewed were estimated to have been involved in illegal hunting and 29 per cent were estimated to have been involved in illegal fishing or grazing of livestock inside one of the two parks). Households that were most likely to be involved in wildlife crime included those that were better off, those that had suffered from human-wildlife conflict and those that felt that they were not benefiting from UWA's revenue sharing scheme.

At both parks, activities put in place to combat wildlife crime focus heavily on law enforcement, with ranger patrols receiving a significant proportion of annual budgets. However, interviews with known hunters cast doubt on the effectiveness of these patrols, suggesting that only approximately 1 in 500-

1000 illegal incursions into the parks ever resulted in an arrest. Consequently, hunters were not deterred from entering the parks by the presence of UWA patrols.

UWA does try to support local communities living around the edge of the parks. It has a community conservation unit which works on education and awareness raising, human-wildlife conflict mitigation and, in some cases, livelihood support. To date, however, these activities have been poorly resourced – especially compared to law enforcement – and have not been directly linked to combatting wildlife crime. When asked, local people thought that the types of interventions that would be most likely to reduce their involvement in wildlife crime were: improved investment in human-wildlife conflict mitigation and support for small enterprises that could provide alternative sources of income. They did not think that increased law enforcement would reduce their involvement in wildlife crime. Local people around both parks were particularly interested in the notion of local wildlife scouts who could help monitor and respond to incidents of human-wildlife conflict. When UWA staff were consulted separately and asked to prioritise the interventions that they thought would be most effective, their perspectives were strongly aligned with those of local communities – although they also emphasised continued and improved law enforcement.

In addition to being potentially more effective, local people thought the three community-focused interventions (small enterprises, wildlife scouts and improved human-wildlife conflict mitigation) were significantly fairer than the current approach to tackling wildlife crime which emphasises law enforcement. These approaches were predicted to increase both the time local people spend pursuing legal livelihood activities and the likelihood of them informing UWA about illegal activities. These findings make clear that **greater support for community engagement approaches is likely to significantly improve UWA's ability to combat wildlife crime.**

How do park action plans respond?

In response to these research findings, park level action plans to combat wildlife crime have been developed in consultation with UWA staff and endorsed by UWA's executive director. The plans seek to balance the current focus on law enforcement with greater attention to, and investment in, community engagement. The approach set out in the action plans is guided by three central principles: i) the development of **strong relationships and mutual trust with local communities**, ii) the provision of **positive incentives for behaviour change** and iii) the need for **effective, but fair, law enforcement**. The action plans seek to address the underlying drivers of wildlife crime as well as creating a deterrent to would-be offenders. The plans include actions for combatting three high priority offences: poaching of high value species, bushmeat hunting for commercial trade and bushmeat hunting for subsistence use.

What should UWA do differently?

Overall the action plans highlight the need for a better balance between law enforcement and community engagement. A number of strategic actions first need to be taken at headquarters level in order to set the right enabling environment. Beyond these high-level, strategic changes, there are specific changes that UWA needs to make at the park level.

Strategic changes at headquarters

1. More balanced allocation of budget between community conservation and law enforcement

Currently the budget allocated to community engagement activities is very small in comparison to that allocated to law enforcement and is insufficient to support viable, effective interventions. Bearing in mind the research showed that current law enforcement efforts have limited effectiveness, UWA needs to consider if this is money well spent. One manifestation of the small budget for community engagement is the very small number of staff in the CCU compared to law enforcement. Given the size of the parks, more community conservation staff are needed if community engagement is to be meaningful, let alone effective.

2. Provision of training in community engagement for all staff

UWA staff involved in law enforcement activities receive extensive training, but there is no equivalent training programme in community engagement. Staff in the CCU require specialist training in issues such as conflict resolution, effective communication and enterprise design, but law enforcement rangers also need training in basic human rights and community engagement skills.

3. A revised and updated community conservation policy

Uganda's Community Conservation Policy was published in 2004 with a goal to strengthen conservation of wildlife resources through sustainable and equitable distribution of conservation benefits and/or costs among all stakeholders. This goal is perfectly in line with the goal of engaging communities in order to help tackle wildlife crime. However the policy does not reflect the contribution communities' play. Updating the policy could also set a clear direction for the CCU, helping to change internal mind sets about its importance as a strategic and necessary complement to law enforcement.

Park level changes

a. Improving coordination between law enforcement and community conservation units

There is very little **operational coordination** between the two units at park level, which leads to situations where heavy handed law enforcement can directly undermine the CCU's efforts to build relationships and trust with local people. Greater coordination between the units, for example in the form of joint monthly planning meetings, would help to minimise these clashes. Where it is unavoidable that law enforcement efforts will have a negative impact on community relations, then community conservation rangers need to be in a position to act as intermediaries and communicate UWA's actions and the reasons behind them.

b. Commit to long-term relationships with local communities

Since UWA CCU staff are few in number and therefore spread so thinly at each park, it is often impossible for them to maintain long term dialogue with local people and provide the continued support that is necessary to get projects to work. Short term investments in relationships and projects not only waste money but also negatively impact local peoples' perception of UWA. Current relationships with communities are poor and it will take time to turn them around. Sustained support and engagement over several years is important to build relationships, even if progress appears at first to be slow. This means ensuring that key staff remain longer in post, rather than being moved from park to park, so they have the time to work closely with people, building their trust and respect.

c. Make more effective use of community conservation budget

The majority of the budget for the CCU is currently spent on human-wildlife conflict mitigation. While this is in line with the research findings, the problem is how this money is spent and on what. In some cases the interventions employed (such as elephant trenches) have not addressed the problem but simply moved it elsewhere. In other cases, interventions such as fencing or hedging have not been maintained because of insufficient funds. Activities that generate positive benefits for local people (rather than simply reducing the cost of living with wildlife) have received very little investment (for example only US\$800 was allocated to enterprise development at QEPA for 2016/17). UWA needs to think more carefully about how it allocates its community conservation budget if it is to make best use of the funds available. It also needs to learn lessons through effective monitoring as to which types of projects work and which don't, in terms of changing behaviour for the long term.

d. Target resources at priority sites, people and offences

Linked to this is more effective targeting of priority interventions. Even with an increased community engagement budget there will never be sufficient funding to do everything everywhere. Interventions by UWA and partners need to be coordinated and targeted at the communities who have the greatest

impact on wildlife, and at areas where the drivers of wildlife crime are strongest (e. areas with human-elephant conflict). The action plans identify priority offences, hotspot areas, target groups and priority actions in order to help with this process. This might require revision of the revenue sharing policy as well.

e. Expand the wildlife scouts programme

The appointment of wildlife scouts is a simple, low cost intervention that people respond well to. One of the main drivers of wildlife crime is the perception that UWA do not care about the damage that wildlife can do to people and their property. In areas with high levels of human-wildlife conflict it is essential that UWA is seen to respond quickly and effectively. There is a scouts programme at Murchison Falls protected area but not at every conflict hotspot, and there is no programme at the Queen Elizabeth protected area. Once appointed, scouts need to be supported and incentivised – one-off provision of raincoats and boots is not sufficient. On the other hand, well supported scouts can not only support UWA in its responsibility for tackling human-wildlife conflict, but are also likely to be more motivated to provide information on illegal activities.

f. Design intelligent projects that create real, positive incentives

There are decades of experience with small enterprises and other livelihood support programmes which show that simply handing out benefits such as goats to local people around protected areas will not change their attitude to conservation. Benefits need to be linked to changes in behaviour, but projects also need to be well supported with the potential for scaling up. UWA needs to become more sophisticated in the types of projects that it invests in, if it is to convert people from wildlife poachers to wildlife protectors.

g. Build strategic partnerships

UWA does not have to undertake all these activities alone – and indeed some issues, such as the lack of income earning opportunities in the communities surrounding protected areas – go way beyond the mandate of UWA to resolve single-handedly. Many NGOs work in and around protected areas in Uganda. Greater coordination is need to ensure these are implemented under one overarching strategy and that they don't duplicate effort or confuse local people by sending out contradictory messages. Beyond conservation partners there are also potential development partners both within the Ugandan government (eg the Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services) and outside (eg the World Bank Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Project) and the private sector. Even tapping into a small part of one of those projects could help improve local economic development around the parks. If well targeted and designed, these projects could change attitudes to conservation.

Next steps

The action plans are a new approach for UWA to tackle wildlife crime. For the plans to work, leadership is needed by headquarters staff and by the conservation area managers. Some actions can be implemented immediately, whilst others require working in partnership or fundraising. Most importantly, park staff need to feel ownership of, and commitment to, the plans and be actively involved in developing community engagement interventions. Overall, UWA needs to be absolutely clear in all communications that engaging local communities is fundamental to its strategy to combat wildlife crime.



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