



Wildlife Justice
Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dirty Money: The Role of Corruption in Enabling Wildlife Crime

July 2023



In the fight against corruption, the Wildlife Justice Commission works with a diverse range of partners to share intelligence, support investigations, and contribute to research and policy development, including governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and entities in the private sector. We thank all our partners for their ongoing collaboration and support, and we acknowledge the vital and long-standing efforts of the many organisations and individuals worldwide who are working to break down silos and address this complex issue across all fronts.

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Executive summary

Corruption is an insidious scourge that can be found in all countries regardless of their size, wealth, and level of development. It is also one of the biggest challenges facing law enforcement agencies combating wildlife crime. Corruption greases the wheels of the illegal wildlife trade, facilitating the movement of wildlife shipments along all stages of the supply chain from source to market, and serving criminal networks by obstructing the criminal justice response, allowing them to operate with impunity.

Harm from corruption can taint every aspect of society, but specifically in relation to wildlife crime, impacts can be seen in the erosion of trust in institutions responsible for environmental protection, the resulting environmental damage, and in the violence and threats to human life.

The intrinsic link between corruption and wildlife crime is recognised in a multitude of agreements in the international policy framework, but the lack of data and prosecuted cases compared to the volumes of intelligence collected during investigations suggests there is inadequate implementation of these commitments in practice.

This report presents a collection of examples stemming from Wildlife Justice Commission investigations and open-source research, to illustrate how corrupt acts occur in the wildlife crime context and to depict the crucial enabling function of corruption in real terms. Corrupt acts can include – among others - bribery of rangers to provide information to poachers, the involvement of government officials in stockpile theft and embezzlement, bribery of customs officials to facilitate the safe passage of shipments, the use of fraudulent export and import documents, and bribery to secure bail and release from custody.

The report also provides a detailed rhino horn trafficking case study that highlights the close links between crime enabling factors and areas of corruption risk, many of which can be addressed together with the use of standard law enforcement methodologies and tools such as intelligence analysis, specialised investigation techniques, financial investigations, and international cooperation.

Price data and intelligence collected by the Wildlife Justice Commission suggest that corruption-related costs are treated as regular business costs within wildlife trafficking operations and make up a considerable portion of the total costs of an illicit wildlife shipment. These costs can be highly variable between different locations and are influenced by factors such as the perceived level of risk in the activity and the rank or position of the officer requiring payment. Intelligence indicates that corruption costs that are more structured and organised are often paid by bank transfer, such as fees to secure customs clearance and fees for fraudulent permits. Apart from the use of third-party bank accounts to make and receive payments, wildlife traffickers appear to make very little effort to hide or disguise their financial activity.

Wildlife crime and corruption must be addressed in a more connected way as recommended in the policy framework, rather than being treated as two separate issues in law enforcement responses. Levelling the playing field will require an innovative and cohesive approach on the part of all stakeholders to identify the high-risk areas for corruption, develop the means to prevent, investigate, and prosecute corrupt activities, and establish a robust framework to tackle corruption along the wildlife supply chain. These actions must be prioritised to eradicate corruption harms and reduce the opportunities for criminal networks to engage in wildlife crime.

**Law enforcement and legal
experts fighting transnational
organised wildlife crime.**



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