

Working Paper 30

Corruption and wildlife trafficking: exploring drivers, facilitators and networks behind illegal wildlife trade in East Africa

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1 Context

As part of a multi-disciplinary programme of work focused on intelligence-led action against financial crime in illegal wildlife trade (IWT), the Public Governance division of the Basel Institute on Governance is leading research and community engagement activities in East Africa.

The objective is to contribute towards the prevention and combating of IWT by developing a better understanding of the context-specific drivers of trafficking and the role of informal social networks and their associated corrupt practices in facilitating such illicit behaviours.

This Working Paper presents a broad overview of relevant literature on wildlife trafficking, focused on two main questions:

- Why does wildlife trafficking happen?
- How does wildlife trafficking happen?

It reflects on important themes and dynamics in regard to the wildlife trade in Africa; the drivers and facilitators of wildlife trafficking; the characteristics, functions and operations of trafficking networks; corruption as a cross-cutting theme; and the important role of Uganda as a transit country for the trafficking of wildlife.

The literature review provides the conceptual anchor for social network analysis and field research in East Africa, in particular Uganda. The insights gained are important stepping stones to address the third main question of the wider research project:

- What can be done to curb wildlife trafficking?

Developing a better understanding of the root causes of IWT, along with the application of social network analysis to support the investigation of related crimes, provides a novel and complementary approach towards the prevention and effective combating of IWT in East Africa.

2 Illegal wildlife trade in Africa

Wildlife across the African continent are increasingly under threat. Alive, dead, processed, they are highly sought after to feed fashion trends, to serve as status symbols and as important components of traditional medicine. Demand driven in particular by the growing middle class in Asian countries finds its impact thousands of miles across the globe in African savannas, forests and jungles, where as a consequence, many species of wildlife are in decline (Abotsi et al., 2016).

The illegal trafficking of wildlife can be described as a “low risk and high reward business” (Clarke & Babic, 2016, p.58). Low rates of detection and arrests (and weak penalties when caught), offset against the potential high rewards, make for an attractive business endeavour. Consequently, wildlife trafficking is now the fifth most lucrative criminal activity around the globe and is estimated to have doubled since 2007 (Clarke & Babic, 2016).

The consequences of this equation are manifold. The direct consequences are risks to the long-term survival of many iconic species and the livelihoods and industries they support. Indirectly, the trafficking of wildlife fuels poverty and inequality, hampers development, and breeds environmental and security challenges (Abotsi et al., 2016). Set in the larger context of immense and ongoing high economic productive pressures on the environment, such processes contribute to the further loss of biodiversity on the African continent (Lynch et al., 2017).

In parallel, there is a significant legal and regulated trade in wildlife. This legal trade is “worth billions” and includes “hundreds of millions of plant and animal specimens”. In an effort to ensure that this trade does not threaten the survival of wild species, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was adopted in 1975 (CITES, 2019). It is this same framework that is used to control, limit and criminalise illegal wildlife trade (Abotsi et al., 2016). Its 183 member states are bound to implement the permitting schemes, which include “imposing penalties and providing for confiscation of illegal specimens or return to the state of export” (Abotsi et al., 2016, p.424).

The problem with this regulatory framework is that it requires governments across the African continent (and elsewhere) to enact and forcefully implement the necessary legislation and regulatory measures, to train and equip law enforcement and customs officers and others, while they are already severely under-resourced and often lacking the required expertise (Abotsi et al., 2016). Altogether, this makes for a fertile ground for the flourishing of IWT with dire local and global ecological, economic and social consequences (Moreto & Matusiak, 2017).

3 Drivers and facilitators of IWT

3.1 Drivers: formal rules and informal social norms

There are many international and continental agreements that aim to curb the illegal trafficking of wildlife. However, efforts to strengthen the enforcement of formal rules do not address the underlying drivers that motivate individuals to engage in trafficking in the first place and accordingly may not influence their behaviour or increase compliance (Travers et al., 2017). This is because social, cultural or other behavioural factors also influence the decision-making process of individuals, which means that people do not necessarily base their decisions on cost-benefit calculations.

Scholars as well as development and law enforcement practitioners increasingly recognise the importance of acknowledging the role of the social context. This includes social norms and shared understandings about what constitutes appropriate and acceptable behaviour, as well as other factors associated with culture, collective modes of thinking, mental shortcuts, and environmental cues, which are all important anchors for decision-making (World Bank, 2015). These factors may not present themselves in neat boxes, but are invariably complex and comprise layers of motivating factors that come together to influence individuals to engage in trafficking.

A review of the literature indicates three main assumptions that drive, and more importantly justify, individuals’ decisions to engage in wildlife crime:

- Trafficking engenders wealth and status.
- Trafficking is a victimless crime.

- Appropriating wildlife is moral.

3.1.1 “Trafficking engenders wealth and social status”

This perspective sees protected wildlife simply as a commodity that allows individuals to derive a financial benefit. An example of this is found in the study by Harrison, et al., (2015, p.20) in which one of several factors motivating households to engage in wildlife crime was economic, namely, “to generate a monetary income or to be used as a currency” in order to meet local, national, or international demands. Indeed wildlife can be viewed as a “high-value natural resource” (Douglas & Alie, 2014).

Wealth is not acquired just for oneself; it trickles down to the social network and community. Hübschle shows in her study on rhino horn trafficking that local heads of poaching groups in Mozambique and South Africa fulfil important social welfare functions. Many of the young poachers in the study bought modern houses in the village, while others bought luxury cars and cattle. This shows the many layers that undergird this behaviour; the individual attains recognition and prestige, and at the same is legitimised because of the spill-over effects to the local community (Hübschle, 2016; Felbab-Brown, 2018).

These dynamics associated with sociality do not only serve as end goals of acquiring wealth but also spur them. In a study on ranger misconduct, one ranger noted that they would “close one eye because of [their] relative” (Moreto et al., 2014, p.372). This indicates that close relationships with relatives and friends can drive public officials (in this case, park rangers) to turn a blind eye towards illicit behaviour. Going one step further, the same study noted that rangers would supplement their income by conniving with villagers.

In this way, these social dynamics also enter the workplace, thereby creating a situation in which such inappropriate behaviour is tolerated, if not expected (Moreto et al., 2014). These complex dynamics underscore that engaging in trafficking is not only driven by the wish to attain wealth and status but that these monetary goals are also highly social.

3.1.2 “Trafficking is a victimless crime”

For many around the world, wild animals are viewed as sources of food or nuisances that destroy one’s livelihood and can pose a threat to personal security. This creates a general feeling of discontent among local people and fuels negative perceptions and attitudes towards wildlife (Abotsi et al., 2016). This can be illustrated by a recent case, where between 2009 and 2014 nearly 1,360 kg of elephant ivory had gone missing from a storage room of the Uganda Wildlife Authority. A whistle-blower went to the police as part of the investigations and reportedly received the following response from the officers: “Who cares? These are just dead elephants” (Cakaj & Lezhnev, 2017, p.13). Similar sentiments may also be at play in the background when public officials perceive certain goods or actions (for instance wildlife crime) as “less illegal” and therefore control them less vigilantly (Runhovde, 2018).

This is in line with “street-level-bureaucracy” theory, which suggests that public officials find ways to bridge the gap between what is expected of their job and what they are realistically able to do (Lipsky, 2010). In that sense, considering wildlife as commodities and products permits public officials (such as customs agents) to discount the associated harm and as such “rationalise their own norm-breaking behaviour” (Runhovde, 2018, p.5). Denying injury and framing the trade in wildlife as a victimless crime are important neutralisation techniques (Rizzolo et al., 2017) and may be employed by those engaging in trafficking and others assigned to curbing it. For instance, police officers may hinder an investigation (in this case of ivory) by asking for a bribe (Moreto et al., 2014) and may feel justified because this is not an “important or real crime”.

3.1.3 “Appropriating wildlife is moral”

The advent of colonial rule in most African countries marked a critical turning point in environmental governance, generating ecological imbalances that persist until this day (Kimani, 2010). One of the colonial legacies was creating enclosures for sport hunting and safaris and removing the right to subsistence hunting by local communities. This partly explains resistance to legislation protecting wildlife on the grounds that it criminalises the right to access and use wildlife as had been done for generations (Duffy et al., 2016).

Hübschle’s research on rhino horn trafficking illustrates this succinctly as follows: “Poaching is portrayed not merely as a matter of economic necessity but a means of claiming reparations for the loss of land that was designated as an environmental area and which they can no longer access for economic opportunities, such as grazing, logging, hunting, and agricultural production” (Hübschle, 2016) in (Felbab-Brown, 2018, p.132).

Historic or normative grievances may influence the perception of laws being unjust and wildlife crime as a form of (anticolonial) resistance and self-empowerment (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Similarly, public officials may turn a blind eye to illicit behaviour because they would empathise with the plight of community members and their own social perceptions of moral legitimacy, which may outweigh the legitimacy of formal rules (Moreto et al., 2014).

While the illicit behaviour is framed as constituting “reparations”, it is also further justified as being a longstanding convention. A study on the sellers of protected wildlife in Peru shows that they are motivated by “familiarity”, “cultural traditions” and “customs” (among others) (Leberatto, 2017). Tradition was also discussed in the above-mentioned study on ranger misconduct, which noted that some rangers would engage in poaching because such behaviour ‘has been in their family’ (Moreto et al., 2014, p.371).

3.2 Facilitators: socio-economic and political context

3.2.1 Socio-economic context

Poverty and efforts to improve one’s livelihood are central themes in the socio-economic reality of many. In this regard, limited economic employment opportunities make involvement in the informal and illicit trade in wildlife a labour option “for otherwise law-abiding citizens” (Leberatto, 2017, p.1367). For instance, the study of Harrison et al. (2015) finds that an important underlying motive for households to engage in wildlife crime is to address basic needs and thus subsistence (Harrison, et al., 2015).

To explain the normalcy of this, a study into poaching in Uganda finds that 40% of households living adjacent to two national parks had been involved in illegal hunting for local sale and consumption (Travers et al., 2017). Similarly, public officials living in difficult socio-economic conditions may tolerate, condone or actively participate in the illegal trade in order to supplement low salaries (Moreto et al., 2014). Thus, poverty is an important facilitator of wildlife trafficking and sets the stage for individuals to look for alternative financial opportunities.

Nevertheless, these opportunities would not exist without the demand for wildlife products from abroad, which ultimately and ironically is driven by the increasing wealth of buyers (Duffy & St. John, 2013).

3.2.2 Political context

Fragility and weak governance are central themes that characterise the political context in countries where the trafficking of wildlife occurs. Violent conflicts often take place in biodiversity hotspots. Accordingly, militants and terrorist groups have engaged in wildlife trafficking in order to fund their operations. Examples of this includes the Lord's Resistance Army (poaching of elephants in Uganda, Congo and Sudan) and the Janjaweed Arab militia of Sudan (poaching of elephants in Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic) (Felbab-Brown, 2018).

But the relation between conflict and wildlife trafficking is not one way. Conflict may also force people to flee into protected areas where – in order to survive – they engage in different forms of wildlife “crime”. Conversely, peace may result in easier and thus greater access to valuable natural resources (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Moreover, a context of weak governance and constrained public institutions, where formal anti-trafficking legislation may be present but enforcement limited or non-existent, is a crucial facilitator of wildlife trafficking (Titeca, 2019).

3.3 Drivers and facilitators are intertwined

The drivers and facilitators of wildlife trafficking, while neatly separated here, should not be viewed as such. Rather, the drivers and facilitators of the trade are a self-reinforcing cycle through which wildlife trafficking occurs in a precarious local context and because of the benefits that may be derived from engaging in it (see Figure 1). Or put differently, the context increases and facilitates the propensity for individuals to engage in trafficking; whereas the drivers help explain the underlying motivations and justifications individuals may adopt to actually engage in trafficking.

This is succinctly explained by Leberatto (2017) noting that “personal circumstances are intertwined with the seller’s cultural and socioeconomic realities which results in overlapping motivations into this illegal commerce” (Leberatto, 2017, p.1366-67). Focusing on the underlying social determinants is therefore useful to better understand and address wildlife trafficking (Wittig, 2015).

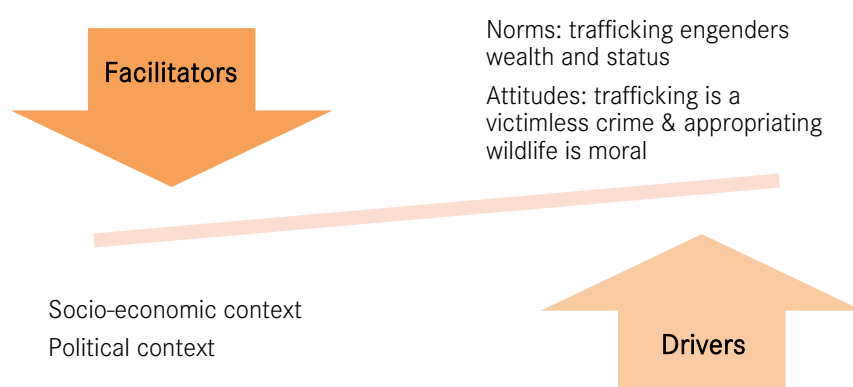


Figure 1 Drivers and facilitators of wildlife trafficking

4 Wildlife trafficking networks

4.1 Local and global structures

As a result of the ever-growing demand for wildlife products, IWT has become more sophisticated and professional. Globalisation and transnational hyper-connections have also played a relevant role in this transformation (Costa, 2018). The signifier for the professionalisation of the trade is the size of shipments intercepted and seized, which indicate to many that highly organised criminal networks must be involved. The illicit and highly valuable trade in wildlife is attractive for criminal organisations as they can use their existing operational structures and modus operandi (methods of smuggling, concealing commodities, falsifying documents and transport) to venture into this new market (Abotsi et al., 2016).

Literature and empirical findings are discordant with respect to the organised or opportunistic nature of IWT (Haas & Ferreira, 2015; Hübschle, 2017; Pires et al., 2016; Wittig, 2016). While many continue to emphasise that the trade is mostly run by transnational criminal organisations, others argue that this picture may be imprecise. Indeed, Leberatto (2017) notes that studies that rely on secondary sources (for instance other documents) connect the trade to transnational criminal organisations, whereas studies that rely on primary sources collected through fieldwork commonly describe that “ordinary citizens” are involved in the trade (Leberatto, 2017). This is succinctly explained by Wittig (2016) as follows:

“virtually every detailed empirical study of wildlife trafficking networks, regardless of precise location or species, indicates a more complex reality in which smaller organised crime networks and individual facilitators work together within a diversified, horizontally integrated value chain for illegal wildlife products” (Wittig, 2016, p.94).

Others note that informal and disorganised networks of individuals still require a level of organisation but this may not constitute what is commonly referred to as a criminal organisation or organised crime (Wyatt 2013) in (Runhovde, 2018). In a similar vein, it is suggested to view the transnational nature of organised crime by focusing on the manner in which it manifests locally, as organised crime groups operate both at the global and the local level (Costa, 2018; Hobbs, 1998; Strathern, 2012; Robertson, 1995; Runhovde, 2018).

Widespread as a local phenomenon for generations, it is clear that IWT has now become a significant cross-border crime (Passas, 2003). Changes in communication and transportation, having become more available and cheaper than in previous decades, presumably contributed to this evolution. Hence, global and local spaces are interlaced through complex relations.

The illicit trade in ivory, rhino horns, pangolin scales and other wildlife goods likely runs along a local-global chain established by local and cross-border networks connecting crime syndicates and rings, traffickers and exporters, poachers and middlemen, all located in different towns, regions, countries and continents. Despite geographical distance and fractionalisation, these cross-border networks enable the movement of illicit wildlife goods around the globe (Passas, 2003; Williams, 1994). Often, these wildlife goods are mixed up with other illegal products, such as drugs, weapons, smuggled electronic products, dangerous waste, and humans (Titeca, 2019; Wittig, 2016).

4.2 Roles and functions

Illicit networks are governance tools created by individual and collective actors to solve problems and reach fixed goals, such as the transport of illicit wildlife products from where they are sourced to the final markets where they are consumed. The networks perform important functions in terms of co-optation, control and camouflage (Baez-Camargo and Koechlin, 2018; Baez-Camargo and Ledeneva, 2017), but also in regulating the dynamics of conflict, cooperation and bargaining that characterise interactions between different elements of the network (Costa, 2018; Costa, 2017).

Trafficking networks comprise different layers of functional roles (Wittig, 2016). The roles can be operationalised as buyers, smugglers, sellers (Titeca, 2019) or that of poachers, local middlemen, transporters, urban middlemen, exporters and powerful criminal businessmen (Rossi, 2018). Each functional role is essential to a particular element of the IWT value chain, which is briefly summarised in the following section.

4.2.1 From source to port

After being sourced (i.e. in the case of animals, poached), wildlife goods are smuggled towards the final exit point, such as an airport or container port. Particularly for landlocked countries, this often involves crossing borders to a transit country through either the formal checkpoints (either by hiding or under-declaring) or alternatively through the “ant trade” comprising smuggling routes through unofficial border crossings (for instance by bicycle, motorcycle or boat) (Titeca, 2019).

Moving illegal wildlife products across a country to their final exit point requires adopting various sophisticated methods of concealment and fraud in the transport chain (Jancsics, 2019; Koser, 2008), including stockpiling, repackaging and organisation in preparation for the exit.

Illegal wildlife products can be moved alongside legal products with the use of forged species identification labels, permits and other official documents. Live animals may be altered in appearance and products may be falsely declared and/or hidden in transport (Abotsi et al., 2016; Runhovde, 2018). Parallel trafficking is another option, i.e. moving environmental contraband along the same route as other illicit goods (Runhovde, 2018). Moreover, the transport chain is highly fractionalised, with actors using a variety of different exit routes and means of transport including air, ship, rail and road (Koser, 2008).

4.2.2 Local, regional and global levels

Likely, both organised and opportunistic dynamics play a role at different stages in the illicit trade (Titeca, 2019). For example, actors at the local level – such as poachers and local/border authorities, small-scale and cross-border traders, traffickers and exporters, middlemen, politicians and public officials – can opportunistically participate in IWT. Located near natural parks, state borders and local communities, these actors perform basic early-stage tasks such as poaching, preparatory processing of wildlife goods, intra- and cross-border transport through ant-trade strategies (Runhovde, 2018; Jancsics, 2019), bribery of local/border authorities, control prevention strategies, preliminary stockpile accumulation and consolidation, and the sale of wildlife goods.

In contrast, the operations of the logistics networks established by regional and global actors could be regulated by organised crime rings operating at the national and global levels. Regional actors can include national crime rings established by criminals, regional and national politicians, law enforcement agents and their families, medium-size ivory traders, exporters and export firms, medium-size traffickers and smugglers, high-level bureaucrats and middle-ranking public officials. These actors live in spaces where

local and global dimensions come together, such as large cities, trading hubs, federal and regional capitals, and areas adjacent to airports or maritime/fluvial ports. They connect the local and global spheres.

Global actors comprise foreign communities and criminal rings based within a country (Tilly, 2005), international traders, large-scale traffickers and medium/large export firms. Transnational crime organisations also play a role, operating between several countries thanks to cartels, cross-border networks and on the basis of an international division of labour. Owing to their international reach, these global actors enable the illicit wildlife goods to be shipped to the consumer markets abroad.

Regional and global actors buy the wildlife products upstream in the supply chain, accumulate them and consolidate them into stockpiles within warehouses, safe houses or exporting firm headquarters. Organised rings and traffickers can also add value at this point by arranging for the raw products to be processed into products more suited to the end consumers. Finally, regional and global actors can re-sell the products downstream to other brokers and buyers, who then manage the delivery to the final markets.

4.3 Social infrastructures

Contrary to conventional assumptions, the central aspect of IWT is not the products themselves but the social infrastructure that connects different actors (Titeca, 2018) in the trafficking chain. The social infrastructure comprises the personal connections, or informal social networks, between the traffickers and other actors. Titeca (2018) finds for instance that strong power differences between the ivory traders in his research relate to their distinct level of connections and entry points in different stages of the trade, and in particular the connections enjoyed with government officials who can aid the illicit process. It is their distinct personal ties that allow traders to operate either at a fairly local level or extend their geographical sphere to the wider region (Titeca, 2018).

The reason for this is the illicit nature of the trade. Traders are forced to operate in flexible coalitions, relying on their personal connections with different actors to move wildlife commodities from one point to the next (Titeca, 2018). Social ties in criminal relations (similar to “normal” social relations) are founded upon trust (van Uhm & Wong, 2019) and dark social capital (Numerato & Baglioni, 2012; Mastropaolo, 2009). Hübschle’s (2016) study on rhino horn trafficking notes that trusted members of the network may introduce a potential buyer to a dealer (Hübschle, 2016) in (van Uhm & Wong, 2019).

Trust creates an insider-outsider system, where social conventions are upheld through measures of control such as reputation and status (van Uhm & Wong, 2019). Trust is easily forged through established personal kinship ties, such as those exemplified in family and friendship relations and with individuals that share similar ethnic or religious identities, and solidified through repeated personal experiences and encounters (van Uhm & Wong, 2019).

These social ties are often shaped by traditionally and socially defined informal norms, habits and customs, which are created by actors and communities in their reciprocal interactions (Axelrod, 1986; Binmore, 2011; Binmore, 2010; Ostrom, 2011; Ostrom, 2000). Proximity, repetition and long-term relations transform corruption and illicit trade into a social and economic exchange characterised by institutionalisation of procedures and informal social norms (Cartier-Bresson, 1997; Gupta, 1995; Haller & Shore, 2015; Hipp & Lawler, 2010; Ruud, 2000; Taube & Lambsdorff, 2004; Vannucci, 2011). Consequently, the informal social norms are developed along ethnical and/or religious meta-structures, making more effective their sharing, learning and reproduction between criminals, crime rings and brokers (van Uhm & Wong, 2019).

As a result, the informal social networks that underpin the trafficking networks are highly resilient, or in other words, stable and able to adapt in the face of adversity (Ayling, 2013).

4.4 A more nuanced approach to understanding IWT networks

Wildlife trafficking networks stretch along a spectrum from local opportunistic hunting and trafficking driven by subsistence needs to cross-border crimes conducted by loosely organised local criminal groups and transnational criminal organisations (Douglas & Alie, 2014); (Wyatt 2013) in (Runhovde, 2018).

It is clear that solely framing IWT as being run by criminal organisations invokes the notion of an irreconcilable problem (Wittig, 2016) and creates a “‘over-homogenized’ discourse surrounding transnational organized crime” (Edwards, 2005) in (Titeca, 2019). It is more useful to unpack and understand the characteristics and social mechanisms of the networks involved in wildlife crime in order to address them effectively (Ayling, 2013); van Uhm & Wong, 2019; Titeca, 2019); This is succinctly summarised by Titeca, 2019 as follows:

“It is the connectedness, created through the degree of connectivity between groups and individuals, which constitutes the structural in ‘organized crime’, operating on a transnational scale. In other words, connectivity is key in this debate: it are particular connections between different levels of crime that make a particular crime transnational.” (Titeca, 2019, p.29).

5 Corruption as a cross-cutting theme

5.1 The nexus between corruption and IWT

While corruption is slowly taking centre stage in the global wildlife conservation agenda, research on the problems and solutions to IWT – and even on the types, mechanisms and modalities – from an anti-corruption perspective is still scarce (Williams et al., 2016).

This gap in knowledge urgently needs to be filled, because corruption fuels IWT in many ways. In its simplest and most obvious manifestation, when corruption is pervasive, trafficking networks are able to easily build informal relations with public officials using corruption (for instance, bribes and gifts) that facilitate (buy a service/omission of duty) the illicit movement of goods across the country (Douglas & Alie, 2014). In the context of IWT, this is a critical factor “in the sourcing, transfer and sale of wildlife specimens and products, as well as the laundering of the proceeds from the illegal wildlife trade” (Abotsi et al., 2016, p.435).

Important complicit actors include “politicians and high-level public officials (e.g. members of the judiciary), law enforcement, anti-poaching and customs officers, military personnel, forest and wildlife department officials, pastoralists, farmers, private hunting firms, local elites, hunters, poachers, traders, as well as conservation organizations” (Williams et al., 2016, p.4). This building of informal relations can amount to co-optation. An example of this was the alleged involvement of Tanzania’s Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism and the secretary general of Tanzania’s ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi political party in wildlife trafficking (Anderson & Jooste, 2014).

Corruption can take various shapes such as: “(...) bribery, rent-seeking, patronage, local elite capture, embezzlement, collusion, payoffs, political corruption, customs mis-declarations, policy and legislative capture, kickbacks, cronyism, nepotism and fraud” (Williams et al., 2016, p.4). This is succinctly explained by Abotsi et al. (2016) as follows:

“Corruption may facilitate many of the crimes along the wildlife trade route, from poaching (e.g. illegal payments to issue hunting licenses, bribery of forest patrol officers), to trafficking (e.g. bribery of customs officials, illegal payments to issue export certificates, etc), to law enforcement (e.g. bribery of police officers and prosecutors to avoid investigations; illegal payments to manipulate court decisions). In addition, corruption and weak regulatory frameworks may offer several opportunities to criminal organisations to launder the proceeds of crime.” (U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre) in (Abotsi et al., 2016, p.436).

This relationship is evident in the study of Lemieux and Clarke (2009), who find a correlation between the taking of ivory and state corruption (in Douglas & Alie, 2014). Corruption within the very institutions tasked to enforce wildlife legislation is a major reason why IWT is so difficult to curb (Abotsi et al., 2016). Crucially, this relation also holds true in the reverse, as IWT fuels corruption too. Indeed, the multibillion-dollar illegal trade in wildlife is an important source of revenue to finance the bribing of public officials and weaken important state institutions such as the police and military (Anderson & Jooste, 2014).

Addressing corruption as a cross-cutting theme (as both a symptom and driver of the problem) is therefore crucial for understanding wildlife trafficking and important given the “interconnectedness of corruption, development, poverty and environment” (Smith & Walpole, 2005, p.254; Williams et al., 2016). Similarly, focusing on understanding the role of corruption in light of “social and cultural norms, functions and relations” may also help explain its persistence in the wildlife trade (Ayling, 2012) in (Musing et al., 2019, p.18). This conceptual framework is visualised in Figure 2:

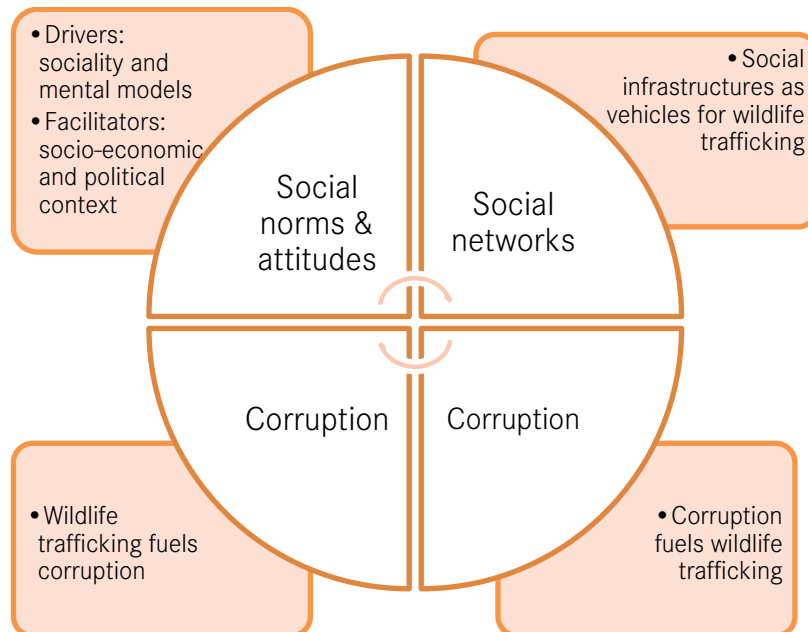


Figure 2 Conceptual framework

6 Wildlife trafficking in transit countries: the special case of Uganda

6.1 Wildlife trafficking in Uganda

East Africa is an important centre for the trafficking of elephant tusks, pangolin scales, hippo teeth, and other wildlife products (Cakaj & Lezhnev, 2017). The illegal trafficking of ivory is particularly significant, as 80% of ivory seizures on the continent were made in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya (Clarke & Babic, 2016). Uganda in particular has been identified as a “trafficking hotspot”. According to CITES, Uganda is an “an important entrepôt/export centre in East Africa” (CITES 2016) in (Cakaj & Lezhnev, 2017, p.8).

Corruption creates significant challenges in Uganda, including “(...) within government institutions charged with protecting wildlife, and by political and economic elites in these countries, including ivory stock thefts, and various judicial failings such as ordering the release of seized ivory or suspects on bail, or imposing mediocre penalties.” (CITES, 2016) in (Cakaj & Lezhnev, 2017, p.8-9). Runhovde (2018) attributes the prevalence of ivory trafficking across the country to its geographical position and weak governance. The study identifies similar key issues; “(...) limited investigative success, lenient penalties, inability to control the borders sufficiently and corruption compromising well-intended efforts.

In an effort to curb wildlife trafficking in Uganda, a new Wildlife Bill was passed in 2017 and a court specifically dedicated to wildlife crimes has been established. An intergovernmental committee, the National Wildlife Crime Coordination Task Force, has also been set up to co-ordinate anti-poaching activities and curb wildlife trafficking across the country.

While Uganda is also a source country for products including elephant tusks, pangolins, tortoises and sandalwood, the main focus of attention is currently its vulnerability to being exploited by transnational trafficking networks. As such, it faces the challenges of other transit countries in that it is “neither offender nor victim and frequently falls between gaps in responsibility” (Gosling 2014) in (Runhovde, 2018, p.3).

6.2 Analytical model

The analytical model presented below provides a first iteration of a visual conceptualisation of wildlife trafficking in Uganda. It provides an analytical framework to understand:

- the operation of trafficking networks at different stages (from horizontal and loosely organised informal networks to larger and vertically organised criminal networks);
- the functions and roles of trafficking networks at different stages (from moving small amounts of commodities across formal and informal borders into Uganda and the shipment of processed and large amounts of commodities through sea, land and air out of Uganda);
- the role of corruption in facilitating the trafficking of commodities at different stages (from petty corruption to grand-scale collusion and co-optation of political actors);
- the role of drivers and facilitators of wildlife trafficking at different stages (constrained socio-economic environment and weak governance result in socially accepted opportunistic behaviours of both citizens and public officials).

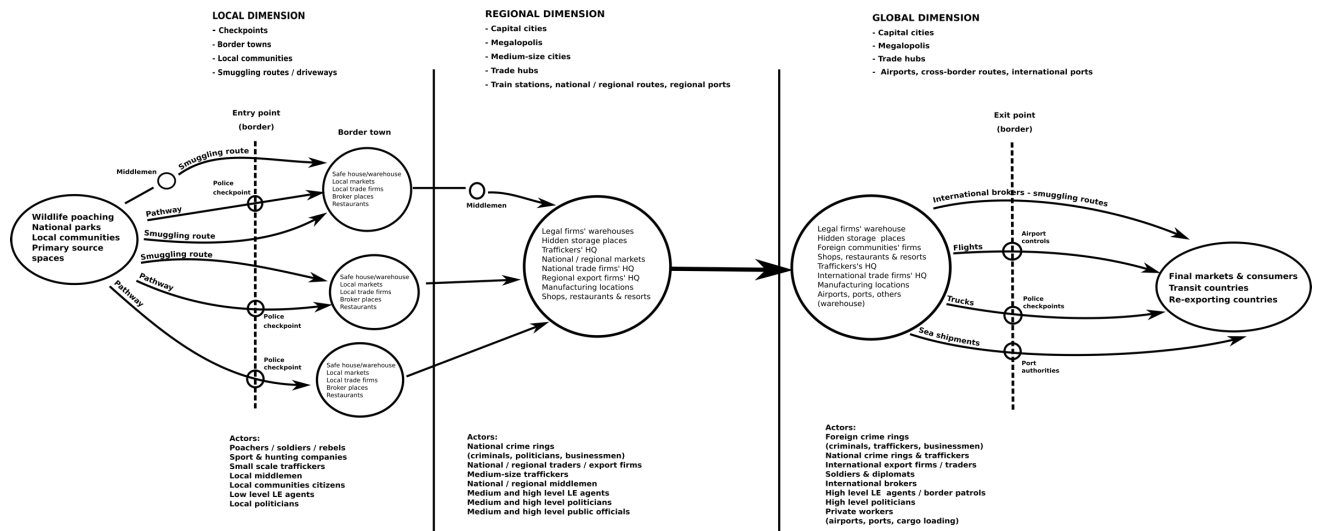


Figure 3 Analytical model representing wildlife trafficking through Uganda. (Jacopo Costa 2018)

This analytical model provides an anchor for social network analysis and field research in East Africa, in particular Uganda.

Insights derived from research analysing why and how wildlife trafficking happens can provide important stepping stones for the development of novel contributions towards approaches aimed at curbing IWT.

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