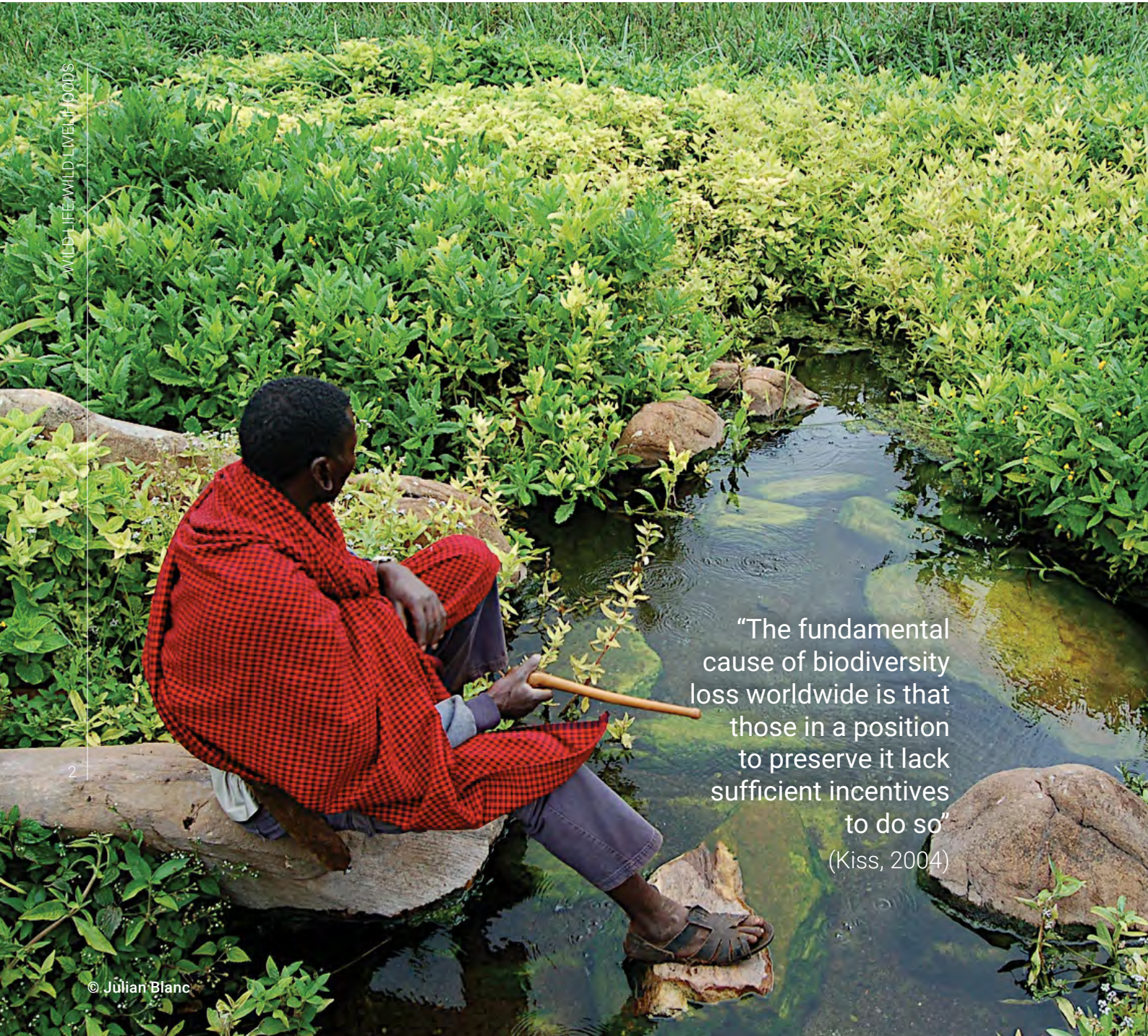
UN environment

WILD LIFE, WILD LIVELIHOODS

Involving communities in sustainable wildlife management and combating illegal wildlife trade



"The fundamental cause of biodiversity loss worldwide is that those in a position to preserve it lack sufficient incentives to do so"
(Kiss, 2004)

© Julian Blanc

Abstract

UN Environment Assembly Resolution 2/14 on *Illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products* calls for an analysis of international best practice with regard to involving local communities in wildlife management. In response to this resolution, UN Environment has commissioned the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the International Institute for Environment and Development to prepare this report. The report summarizes insights from decades of research on community wildlife management, and draws lessons from new analyses focused specifically on engaging Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in combating the illegal trade in wildlife (ITW). Based on a recognition of the importance of community "voice" in enabling sustainable and effective outcomes, it goes on to survey the opportunities and constraints for IPLCs in terms of their participation in key international policy forums that influence wildlife management (specifically, the Convention on Biological Diversity; the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; the Convention on Migratory Species; the United Nations Environment Assembly; and the Inter-governmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services).

The long history of experience in community wildlife management remains crucially relevant for current efforts to combat the ITW crisis, but has been largely overlooked in the race for solutions emphasizing a top-down and increasingly militarized approach. In particular, effective enforcement requires community support for conservation and cooperation with authorities. The community wildlife management literature indicates when this is most likely to be forthcoming, and when it is not. Efforts to address unsustainable use and ITW often pay lip service to these lessons but fail to reflect them in the design and implementation of new programmes. Community-based approaches are frequently written off as ineffective, even before the necessary effort has been made to put in place the conditions that will make them effective. Building robust opportunities for IPLCs to be heard and to exercise their rights at all levels is critical in promoting more effective and equitable wildlife conservation strategies.

Executive summary and policy implications

This report responds to Resolution 2/14 passed at the second meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly in May 2016, calling for "…an analysis of international best practices with regard to involving local communities in wildlife management as an approach to addressing the unsustainable use of and illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products […]". This resolution was motivated by concerns about the recent upsurge in the illegal trade in wildlife (ITW), against a background of widespread unsustainable use of wildlife (covering fauna and flora, and including timber and fisheries).

This report synthesizes insights and lessons from decades of experience in community wildlife management (CWM), supplementing this with insights from more recent work focused on community-level responses to tackling the current ITW "crisis". Building on the insight that community "voice" is a critical determinant of a policy regime that supports their effective engagement, the report further reviews the opportunities for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs)[4] to participate in key relevant international deliberations and decision-making arenas, and the barriers they face.

The key findings are as follows:

1 Lessons learned, lessons forgotten

Best practices in fostering community wildlife management as a means to reduce unsustainable and illegal use and trade of wildlife have emerged consistently and clearly from decades of work, and many are well reflected in government policy commitments. However, there has been a consistent failure to implement key insights, particularly the devolution of rights by national governments to IPLCs to manage and benefit from wildlife conservation and sustainable use.

2 Boots on the ground can run in the wrong direction

Partly as a result of an increased militarization of poaching, the response to the current ITW crisis has involved, in many places, the resurgence of a top-down protectionist approach emphasizing fences and

© Andrea Moroni

fines, guns and boots. However, unless accompanied by strengthened accountability measures, this can lead to – and has led to – human rights abuses, restricted livelihood options, and hardship for IPLCs. These approaches can also backfire in conservation terms, driving disenfranchisement, resentment and anger. They also undermine the potential for collaborative approaches, such as increased IPLC participation in combatting ITW.

3 It ain't what you do – it's the way that you do it

Success in any site-level intervention against unsustainable use and ITW relies critically on the approach adopted and relationships. Local ownership of conservation interventions is an important part of success. Building trust, moving slowly, and allowing the long timescales necessary to develop cooperative relationships and understand community needs and priorities are also important. Building on traditional uses, practices, rules and governance institutions can enhance effectiveness where these are perceived as legitimate and equitable by community members. Livelihood options and ways to benefit from wildlife need to be chosen by community members themselves in accordance with their cultural and socio-economic values, and not imposed by external actors. This also applies to enforcement interventions – these will be more effective where they are "co-created", i.e. where communities have a say in the setting of rules and penalties for breaking them, where traditional authorities are respected, and relations of trust between the enforcement authorities and communities have been built.

4 Effective enforcement, engaged communities: two sides of the same coin

Effective enforcement against ITW and community engagement can – and should – be mutually reinforcing. In any setting, good enforcement relies critically on support from communities, particularly through the provision of intelligence. On the other hand, communities need strong and reliable backup when their interests or resources are threatened, and it would endanger them to combat such threats themselves. Currently, however, enforcement is often poorly targeted and ineffective.

It is often focused on communities and individuals who gain only a tiny fraction of the profits from ITW, are battling acute subsistence needs, and who are unaware of the extent or impact of ITW, while "kingpins" or other powerful players go unpunished.

5 It's the incentives, stupid (but it's not only money)

Community members need realistic incentives to support and actively engage in conservation, including anti-poaching. Rights and benefits are both important, though each may be inadequate alone. Empowerment of communities to manage their own resources through strengthened land and resource rights can be a strong motivating force. The overall benefits from conservation need to outweigh the costs of conserving it. This is particularly challenging given the high payoffs (to a few) of high-value ITW. Although benefits need not necessarily be financial, where people are facing acute subsistence needs – or where living with wildlife imposes significant costs – financial incentives may be critical. Ways for communities to benefit financially from wildlife include tourism based on viewing or hunting wildlife, harvesting of and trade in non-timber forest products (NTFP), payments for ecosystem services (PES), and wildlife-related employment (e.g. as guards or guides). These different options must be culturally appropriate and self-chosen by local people. CWM is more challenging when land has high agricultural or development potential and/or where wildlife is migratory, difficult to view or monitor, scarce or degraded, or where the use of species is restricted by national or international restrictions.

Elite capture (the inequitable capture of benefits by more powerful individuals) is a constant threat that can undermine the potential engagement of the community as a whole. Communities are made up of individuals with different priorities and motivations, and interventions need to understand these in order to target the right people. Including women as direct beneficiaries and key stewards of natural resources is critical.

So-called "alternative livelihood" initiatives are often deployed as a mechanism to reduce unsustainable and/or illegal use of wildlife by IPLCs. However, the evidence-base for the effectiveness of these initiatives is very limited. Many suffer from poor design, and outcomes can even undermine conservation in the long term.

6 Think systems, not sites

Individual site-level projects can be very appealing as they promise direct action, but in the long term creating an environment of governance, policy and partnerships that fosters and supports communities to be active participants in conserving wildlife is likely to have far greater impact. CWM needs a supportive governance framework with enabling policy and regulation at local, national and international level, and one that is straightforward for communities to negotiate. National and international policy often restricts rights to use and manage wildlife to such an extent that it leaves little or no economic value for local people, thereby removing their incentive to conserve it. The removal of traditional hunting, gathering or grazing rights sparks resentment and perpetuates illegal behaviour. Far from resulting in non-use, the lack of rights to use wildlife frequently translates in practice into unmanaged, unmonitored and often unsustainable illegal use. Establishing clear, secure and enforceable rights (including land tenure) for communities to sustainably use, manage and benefit from conservation and wildlife is a fundamental basis for effective community-based wildlife

management. Communities therefore need support and help in securing the transfer of, and respect for, land and resource rights at national level. International restrictions imposed via multilateral agreements or import restrictions should be based on very careful consideration of how these will affect community wildlife management at the local level.

Policies often ignore the benefits of using land for wildlife, and favour agricultural, extractive or other commercial development. This drives loss of wildlife and can restrict community rights and interests. Wildlife policy needs to be integrated into sectoral and development policies and land-use planning.

Research has shown a strong correlation between the high prevalence of ITW and high levels of corruption. Corruption hampers CWM and facilitates ITW. Because tackling corruption is a complex and monumental task, a common response is to do nothing. But small anti-corruption steps that are integrated into wildlife-related initiatives can prove beneficial.

Building the technical, financial and managerial capacity of communities often requires initial support from external sources, including community-based organizations, NGOs, donors, government agencies and the private sector. When supporting and building these partnerships, however, it is critical to avoid domination by potentially conflicting agendas.

7 Think globally, govern locally

Effective community governance requires clarity on who constitutes the community doing the managing. Legitimate institutions need to be developed within and by these communities to ensure equitable benefit sharing and effective resource management, based on respect for legitimate traditional institutions where these exist. These power structures must be accountable to the community. Attention must be paid to understanding the diverse and heterogeneous groups within communities and how power and benefits are shared.

8 Local voices should be the loudest voices

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, communities need greater voice in decision-making as well as in the development of policies that affect them. This applies at every level, from local to global. Despite well-established policy commitments on the importance of IPLCs in conserving wildlife, IPLCs have little or no influence in conservation and wildlife management decision-making at the national level. At international level their influence is highly variable – from well integrated to virtually absent. Clear "entry points" for IPLC input; the support of the secretariats of relevant international policy-making bodies; functioning IPLC networks; and the provision of dedicated funding are crucial to enable their meaningful participation and contribution to debate.

[4] The terms "communities" and "IPLCs" differ according to context: We generally use "communities" when referring to local, site-level conservation activities (e.g. "community-based wildlife management"); and "IPLCs" where the rights and interests of many groups and peoples are concerned e.g. "IPLC engagement in international policy").

WILD LIFE, WILD LIVELIHOODS

IUCN CEESP SSC Species Survival Commission

SULi Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group

iied International Institute for Environment and Development

UN environment

Contact
Julian Blanc
Ecosystems Division
UN Environment
julian.blanc@un.org
unenvironment.org

© Diana Robinson