



# Gender and Illegal Wildlife Trade

## A Summary of Recent Evidence



USAID DDI/BIODIVERSITY  
Combating Wildlife Trafficking  
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING GROUP



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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## **COVER PHOTO**

Black Mombas, a mostly female ranger unit founded in 2013 with the purpose of protecting wildlife in South Africa. Photo Credit: Black Mombas

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# INTRODUCTION

Overall, the gender dynamics of the illegal wildlife trade are not well understood. Most wildlife trafficking research has not focused on the different ways men and women may engage with the wildlife trafficking supply chain—whether as poachers, traders, consumers, or even conservationists.

However, researchers have explored this evidence gap within the last two years. This brief slide deck summarizes seven recent publications and notes how this new research applies to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programming and priorities for future research to which Agency programs may contribute.



Photo credit: Edudzi Nyomi



# GENDER AND ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE: OVERLOOKED AND UNDERESTIMATED

JONI SEAGER, WORLD WILDLIFE FUND (2021)

This critical report provides the first overarching synthesis and assessment of the gendered dynamics of the global illegal wildlife trade. The report concludes with a step-by-step approach that guides practitioners through examining the **a**ctors, **d**rivers, **i**mpacts, and **r**esponses to gender inquiry in illegal wildlife trade issues. This “A-D-I-R approach” can be applied across scales, topics, and approaches.

For a discussion of this report, see the International Union for Conservation of Nature and World Wildlife Fund webinar [“A Trade of Violence: Understanding the gendered dynamics and gender-based violence in the illegal wildlife trade.”](#)

Photo credit: Eva Blue, Unsplash

## Key findings include:

- Knowledge about the illegal wildlife trade is either “gender-blind or heavily gender-skewed,” and that skew is rarely recognized.
- Sexual violence and gender inequality facilitate the illegal wildlife trade along wildlife product supply chains.
- Enforcement actors are predominantly men, and, in some areas, field enforcement is becoming increasingly militarized. On the other side, some men may begin poaching as a result of masculinity-shaming.
- Male-dominated enforcement groups and actors are most likely to resort to violence or force, including violence against women.
- Economic inequality—an established driver of the illegal wildlife trade—is highly gendered. Men and women often view financial needs differently and have different opportunities to address these needs, including if and how to engage in the illegal wildlife trade.
- Consumers are gendered actors who purchase and consume different wildlife products for various purposes. Broadly, evidence suggests women primarily buy illegal wildlife products to enhance their beauty, and men purchase products to enhance their status and prestige with other men.
- Men also dominate most of the major organizations working to address the illegal wildlife trade, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, research institutions, and academia.



Photo credit: Northern Rangelands Trust

# WOMEN IN WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING IN AFRICA: A SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE

HELEN AGU AND MEREDITH GORE (2020)

Agu and Gore synthesized the relevant literature from 2010–2019 and developed a conceptual framework for women in wildlife trafficking that includes six primary and 31 secondary roles. They also consider how and where the roles of women in wildlife trafficking could be mainstreamed by practitioners, donors, and researchers.



## Key findings include individuals or groups related to wildlife trafficking fall into six primary roles:

- **Offenders:** Those doing criminal, harmful, or deviant behavior. Secondary roles of this type include poacher, seller, or transitor (someone who helps move trafficking products).
  - **Defenders:** Those with formal or informal authority to guard or protect people and animals across the trafficking supply chain. Secondary roles of this type include customs officials, police or rangers, and community guardians.
  - **Influencers:** Those linked to wildlife trafficking and with the ability to affect it. Secondary roles of this type include siblings, religious leaders, and teachers.
  - **Observers:** Those who eyewitness the activities of, and actors involved in, wildlife trafficking, either intentionally or unintentionally. Secondary roles of this type include researchers, the media, and donors.
  - **Person(s) harmed:** Those victimized and/or made vulnerable by wildlife trafficking. Secondary roles of this type include family members, orphans, and refugees.
  - **Beneficiaries:** Those who derive indirect or direct benefits from wildlife trafficking. The secondary roles are the type of benefits, including employment, empowerment, and prestige.
- Offender was the most commonly identified primary role for women in the reviewed literature. The most common secondary role was transitor.
  - Most sources only identified one or two secondary roles for women in wildlife trafficking, highlighting an underdeveloped understanding of African women's roles in supply chains.
  - Trafficking roles that specifically involve cross-border or international trade are typically dominated by men, as are most customs, police, and forest ranger roles.
  - Notably, the study did not find any literature on the role of women in the criminal justice system, in non-governmental organizations, or as military officers.

# MAPPING TERRA INCOGNITA: AN EXPERT ELICITATION OF WOMEN'S ROLES IN WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

HELEN AGU, CYDNEY ANDREW, AND MEREDITH L. GORE (2021)

This research built on Agu and Gore's 2020- literature review by implementing expert elicitation to explore perceptions of women's roles in wildlife trafficking in sub-Saharan Africa. Using survey responses from 215 conservation experts, the researchers identified key assumptions associated with women's primary and secondary roles. The resulting data can inform new solutions and future hypotheses and inferences on this topic.

## **Key findings include:**

- The survey asked participants to measure each primary and secondary role's level of involvement in trafficking on a scale of 1–100 to measure experts' perceptions of women's roles in wildlife trafficking.
- The survey also asked experts to rate how important it is to think about women in each of the six primary roles. Experts rated offenders as being the most important, followed by beneficiaries.



- Broadly, results suggest perceptions of women being more involved in consumer, seller, and enabler roles and less involved as poachers and intermediaries.
- Self-identified male and female respondents did not have significantly different perceptions of women's roles in wildlife trafficking.
- The surveyed experts also identified a range of other roles for consideration, including informants; supporters that provide safe houses; wildlife rehabilitation specialists; and political activists focused on land tenure.



# UNPACKING THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND COSTS OF INTEGRATING GENDER INTO CONSERVATION PROJECTS: VOICES OF CONSERVATION FIELD PRACTITIONERS

KAME WESTERMAN (2021)

Westerman conducted a survey across Conservation International project sites that have supported gender integration into conservation approaches since 2014. The research examined the barriers to and enablers of gender integration and practitioners' perceptions of the benefits and challenges involved. While the research does not explicitly address gender in wildlife trafficking, the broad findings about gender mainstreaming are relevant across conservation approaches.

Photo credit: Badre Bahaji

## Key findings include:

- Respondents identified three fundamental drivers for gender integration:
  - Funding requirements from donors;
  - Staff awareness about the importance of gender as a result of internal and/or external training; and
  - Availability of funds to support gender integration.
- The researchers grouped the identified benefits of gender integration into six categories:
  - Increased participation and empowerment of women in conservation activities and decision-making;
  - Contribution to potential conservation outcomes;
  - Increased staff awareness and changes to operations;
  - Gender normative change within project communities;
  - Strengthened partnerships for national implementation of environmental priorities; and
  - Increased ability to access and steward funding with gender requirements.
- The researchers grouped the costs or challenges of gender integration into four categories:
  - Insufficient funding for staff time and activities;
  - Inadequate knowledge and skills of key project personnel;
  - Lack of specific materials and technical support; and
  - Societal norms.
- Regardless of funding requirements, there is a lack of accountability for gender-responsive measures across relevant projects, regardless of funding requirements.



**A FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF WILDLIFE CRIME:  
THE GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF A POACHING  
ECONOMY AND ITS IMPACTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**  
FRANCIS MASSÉ, NICIA GIVÁ, AND ELIZABETH LUNSTRUM (2021)

Photo credit: Adobe Stock

The researchers build a feminist political ecology of wildlife crime, focusing on the illicit rhino horn economy along the Mozambique–South Africa border near Kruger National Park. They demonstrate how this research approach can build an understanding of and address poaching conflicts, wildlife crime, and illicit resource geographies.

## Key findings include:

- Local gender norms help understand motivations and victimization in rhino poaching.
- Deaths of male rhino poachers increase the vulnerability of women and households.
- Local marriages (often at a young age), reliance on subsistence agriculture for food, and low levels of education and literacy have created complex challenges for women when they lose their husbands to poaching. Many husbandless and fatherless households are going hungry in the study area.
- The poaching conflict and the militarization of enforcement have dramatically increased the rate at which men are dying in the area, particularly young men.
- The violence, deaths, and hardships created by militarized enforcement could create negative views of conservation in local communities, in turn driving more people into wildlife crime.
- The analysis supports arguments that if men have alternative sources of income, they may be able to increase their self-worth, and, as a result, they may be less likely to engage in risky poaching. Less interest in the rhino horn economy could then yield better conservation and socio-economic outcomes.
- The women interviewed for the study said that the solution to commercial rhino poaching is not in security or strengthened enforcement but in the root drivers: livelihoods and demand.



Photo credit: VZosk on Unsplash

# WOMEN AND WILDLIFE CRIME: HIDDEN OFFENDERS, PROTECTORS, AND VICTIMS

JESSICA S. KAHLER AND MARISA A. RINKUS (2021)

Kahler and Rinkus bring together knowledge from criminology and conservation studies to identify gaps in research about women and wildlife crime. Their study is informed by criminology literature on gender and offending, policing, and guardianship.



## Key findings include:

- An exploratory search of news articles mentioning women and wildlife crime found that 59 percent reported women as offenders, 26 percent discussed women in some type of guardianship or protection role, and 15 percent presented women as victims.
- Though the wildlife crime literature is heavily focused on offenders, few articles include the gender identity of those involved and fewer use gender as a lens for understanding these crimes.
- The criminology literature notes a gender gap in crime statistics that is influenced by law enforcement targeting men, which may extend to conservation.
- Gender hierarchies and gendered roles in economic markets and personal relationships with co-offenders can facilitate women's entry into wildlife crimes—these considerations are also relevant to understanding women's involvement in these crimes.
- There are many questions about women as formal protectors of biodiversity, including the risks they face, the benefits to communities, short and long-term efficacy, and their motivations, policing style, use of force, and conduct or misconduct.
- Women may experience “secondary victimization” when their husbands or sons are killed while poaching.
- Among the three types of roles explored—offenders, protectors, and victims—women as victims of wildlife crime is the least-researched area.

# WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN THE RANGER WORKFORCE

JONI SEAGER, GILLIAN BOWSER, AND ANWESHA DUTTA (2021)

The [Chitwan Declaration](#), a global agreement formulated at the International Ranger Federation's 2019 World Congress, details priorities for rangers around the world to work effectively and safely, including gender equity and better support for female rangers. This paper draws from ranger interviews, examines the gender imbalance in the workforce, and includes key recommendations for achieving the Chitwan Declaration's goals.

## **Key findings include:**

- Men and women experience ecosystems differently, and they bring that different knowledge to their work as rangers.
- Women in communities are often already key participants in conservation and conservancies in informal roles.
- Women rangers often de-escalate conflicts with poachers, using engagement rather than enforcement.

## **Obstacles to gender parity include:**

- Culturally entrenched gender norms, presumptions, and attitudes;
- Gender-based violence and harassment;
- Trends toward militarization that heighten the masculinization of the ranger workforce; and
- Lack of policy frameworks, accountability mechanisms, or expertise to shift existing gender dynamics. Few commitments to gender equality from ranger organizations, governments, and leaders.



Photo credit: Black Mambas

### **Recommendations include:**

- Making structural changes alongside organizational commitments;
- Building on international forums such as the World Ranger Congress to create greater connections among women in the ranger workforce;
- Developing enabling policies that establish gender equality as a priority for all ranger activities and workplaces;
- Identifying locally specific structural changes needed to create the conditions for better integration of women into the workforce;
- Creating safer environments for women rangers, including by prohibiting harassment, conducting anti-harassment trainings, and putting review and reporting mechanisms in place for accountability; and
- Engaging donors who can support these efforts.

# WHAT THIS MEANS FOR USAID COMBATING WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING PROGRAMS

When designing or managing a USAID combating wildlife trafficking program, there is the opportunity to incorporate this new evidence. Important questions to ask include:



Could the ADIR model (examining the actors, drivers, impacts, and responses for gender inquiry in illegal wildlife trade issues) be a helpful framework to review the role of gender and combating wildlife trafficking in a country's context?



Are the roles women and men play throughout the wildlife enforcement chain understood? Are women offenders, defenders, influencers, observers, persons harmed, or beneficiaries (Gore 2020)? Where does that knowledge come from? How might these different roles influence activities?

For a complete list of gender tools and resources, please visit the [Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Office's intranet page](#).



Do appropriate mechanisms exist to safeguard project staff and partners from sexual violence? Do activity implementers know who to report crimes to?



Since men and women experience wildlife trafficking in different ways, what opportunities are there to incorporate the unique perspectives of women in the work of the activity? Is there potential to support broader engagement of women in law enforcement or judiciary roles, for example?



How is the activity's monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan including gender dynamics as a priority? Is the activity able to respond to a gender and combating wildlife trafficking research priority?

# CONSOLIDATED FUTURE RESEARCH

Some recommendations for future USAID research, monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans:

## Joni Seager, World Wildlife Fund

- Scrutiny of the assertion that improved gender equality and improved environmental conditions reinforce each other.
- Case studies of men's and women's roles in specific illegal wildlife trade supply chains—from poaching through to consumption.
- How the disruption and closure of illegal wildlife trade value chains differently affects the lives of men and women.
- The intersection of research into how wealth drives illegal wildlife trade and research about wealth and income generation as gendered processes.
- The extent to which militarized enforcement fuels a cycle of violence, including gender-based violence, and how this is linked to the circulation of small arms.

## Gore 2020 and 2021

- Assessing the gaps and inequalities that are likely to affect women's participation in conservation interventions, leadership, or access to conservation programs that subject men and women to different risks and vulnerabilities associated with wildlife trafficking.
- How gender mediates opportunities for corruption across different roles in wildlife trafficking.
- The different ways in which men and women invest in and compete for access to wildlife trafficking networks.

## Masse

- How women can be involved in designing and conceptualizing solutions to poaching.



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