

Cracking down on corruption

Saving rhinos isn't just about rangers patrolling to monitor and protect rhinos, or developing campaigns to change perceptions about the use of illegal rhino horn. It's also about tracing illicit money flows across the world, tracking down international fugitives, and combining all the evidence you've got to bring a case before a judge. After all that hard work, the last thing you want is to face a battle against corruption.

Emma Pereira | Communications Manager

The illegal wildlife trade is the fourth-most lucrative international crime, behind drugs, human trafficking and counterfeiting, estimated to be worth £15 billion annually. Rhino horn is one of the highest valued illegal wildlife products, making the illegal trade in horn – and the poaching that comes hand-in-hand with it – a prime market for international criminals. When the reward is so high, no one wants to get caught, and corruption is rife.

With the chance of significant extra income, the temptation to act differently (or illegally) can be great, particularly for anyone taking a job as, say, a field ranger, simply because it was a form of income, rather than because of a love of wildlife. Rangers may turn poacher themselves, or provide inside information to poaching gangs; crucial evidence may be 'lost', and court cases delayed when defence attorneys repeatedly fail to attend court hearings. Similarly, a presiding judge or magistrate may be bought off by a poacher's defence team, or the prosecutor may be persuaded to only bring minor charges.

Fortunately, there are ways that we can reduce, and work towards stopping, corruption. One approach is to maintain an individual's motivation against rhino poaching. By keeping rangers and the judiciary motivated to act in the best interest of rhinos, the chances of successful arrests and convictions are higher. Often, this can be achieved through simple means.

If a ranger is happy in their job; if they are paid well, and if they have enough support from their team and manager, they are less likely to undermine their rhino conservation efforts. That's why so much of our work at Save the Rhino focuses on improving ranger morale: providing effective equipment, offering regular training, and rewarding exceptional service. With more than 100 wildlife rangers killed on duty each year, it is important that they and their family feel supported while working in extraordinarily dangerous circumstances.

For magistrates and law enforcement personnel that aren't on the ground, it can take more than job satisfaction. Individuals must be able to recognise the impact of corruption on the people and wildlife that they are there to protect. This often means more training for those convicting suspected poachers and their associates, as well as strong anti-corruption policies, and independent teams put into place to scrutinise anything that seems suspicious.

All of this takes a huge amount of resource, commitment, and capacity. Given that

the crimes most at risk of corruption are often performed at huge scales and across borders, it also takes a significant amount of collaboration at an international level.

While none of this can happen overnight, it's critical to boost our efforts and work together with others to stop corruption at all levels. Given the high stakes – the possibility of species' extinctions – we can't afford to ignore it.



MKOMAZI RHINO SANCTUARY