



Lancaster
Environment Centre



Conservation Enforcement in Nepal

Exploring enforcement-based reposes to wildlife trade

Summary Report

Conservation Enforcement in Nepal: Exploring enforcement-based reposes to wildlife trade, a high-level policy event, was held on January 10, 2018 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The event, organized by Greenhood Nepal and the Lancaster Environment Centre (UK), explored contemporary debates about enforcement-based approaches to conservation and illegal wildlife trade (IWT).

Globally, there is mounting debate about the benefits and limitations of increasingly enforcement-based approaches to conservation. For example, the militarization of protected areas, investments into new detection technologies, and calls for increased sanctions against perpetrators have, in some cases, resulted in positive conservation outcomes. However, they have also fueled concerns about long-term sustainability, unintended social impacts, and justice. These debates are important to Nepal, which has a uniquely strong conservation enforcement: protected areas are patrolled by thousands of military, it has wildlife crime enforcement efforts across several agencies, and domestic penalties for wildlife crimes are relatively high. This first-of-its-kind event, sought reflection on, and lessons from Nepal's conservation experiences.

The event was attended by more than 100 conservation stakeholders, including from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Department of Forest, Central Investigation Bureau, Nepal Police, Nepal Army, academicians from three universities, practitioners and media. The 3-hour program included presentations on the global debates about conservation enforcement, followed by a panel discussion with leading government agencies and conservation groups.

Summary of Presentations

Prof. Rosaleen Duffy, leader of the [BioSec Programme](#) at Sheffield University, shared a video address that provided context about the global debate on militarized conservation, and the future work needed to improve conservation practice in ways that are effective and equitable. Dr. Jacob Phelps, [Lancaster Environment Centre](#), highlighted results from the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group's work on "[Beyond Enforcement](#)". This emphasized the potential for unintended consequences from enforcement-based conservation, and the scope for enhanced community engagement—especially to improve the fairness and long-term sustainability of conservation.

Mr. Kumar Paudel, Co-founder of [Greenhood Nepal](#), presented initial findings from his research [interviewing](#) 116 prisoners arrested for participating in illegal wildlife trade in Nepal. This study highlighted social issues important to improving the effectiveness and fairness of conservation enforcement. For example, he explained that, while most people he interviewed

were fully aware that wildlife trade was illegal, few of them knew about Nepal's high fines and long prison terms for wildlife crimes. Further, he explained IWT was often opportunistic and motivated by the need for extra money, but not necessarily poverty to meet basic household needs. His presentation considered how for these issues could inform future enforcement efforts, such as by better communicating about enforcement approaches with local populations.

Summary of Panel Discussion

The Panel discussion included:

- Dr. Maheshwar Dhakal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation
- Mr. Anupam Rana, DSP, Central Investigation Bureau, Nepal Police
- Mrs. Sushma Rana, Under Secretary, Wildlife Crime Control Unit, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
- Mr. Santosh Mani Nepal, Senior Director, WWF Nepal
- Moderator: Kumar Paudel, Greenhood Nepal

Key insights from the Panel:

➤ **A long history of enforcement-based conservation in Nepal.**

The panel highlighted that enforcement-based conservation is not new in Nepal. **Dr. Maheshwar Dhakal** provided a summary of Nepal's history of enforcement-based conservation, noting that military patrols to control rhino poaching first started in the 1960's. He added, since then, the Government has shifted from species-based conservation approach to one that recognizes the importance of trans-boundary conservation and an eco-regions approach, and involvement of local people, while explaining that enforcement remains a key part of conservation in Nepal.

The Panel also identified how enforcement has evolved and strengthened over time. For example, **Mrs. Rana** explained that DNPWC now has 23 Wildlife Control Unit in 25 districts of Nepal. **Mr. Nepal** highlighted WWF's efforts to support the Government and domestic NGO's, and successes such as Nepal's "zero poaching" of rhinos; the provision of 50km of optical fiber with real-time CCTV installation in key protected areas, and the introduction of sniffer dogs to detect illegal wildlife trade.

➤ **Do more to consider the social impacts of enforcement**

The discussants widely noted that more can, and should be done to consider the social impacts of conservation enforcement on perpetrators. For example, **Dr. Dhakal** pointed out that Nepal's conservation laws are often very complex, and should be simplified so that all citizens can clearly understand and better comply with them. He also mentioned about the need to harmonize IWT regulations and sanctions across South Asia. **Dr. Dhakal** and **Mr. Nepal** further added that focus should be on reintroduction of conservation prisoners into society, including providing alternative livelihoods for their communities to discourage participation in illegal wildlife trade.

➤ **Better engage the public in conservation enforcement**

The panel considered a range of initiatives, opportunities and challenges to engaging local residents, and the wider public in conservation enforcement. **Mrs. Rana** added that park rangers and the Wildlife Control Unit have worked with local youth groups, such as Community Based Anti Poaching Units to gather intelligence and control IWT. **Mr Nepal** explained WWF's work

to co-ordinate and support the Government, enforcement agencies, NGOs and communities in local-level conservation monitoring and reporting.

However, **DSP Rana** also pointed to the challenges of local engagement in conservation enforcement. For example, he pointed to gaps in the reliability of locally-collected information and that these often lead to IWT middlemen, while the primary perpetrators remain undetected. He explained that many arrestees are not forthcoming with information to the police, which makes it difficult to pursue broader trade networks.

➤ **Fill the social science research gap**

The panel highlighted the need to collect more data on wildlife crime, and about the benefits of social science research to help improve conservation practice, but noted that both are uncommon in Nepal. For example, **Mr. Nepal** and **Mrs. Rana** agreed that, while ecological research is increasingly common in Nepal, there has been little substantial research on the related social dimensions, which remain a huge gap that could inform future practice. **Dr. Dhakal** explained that Nepal has a lot to do to strengthen domestic research and publications in the field of conservation, and has much to learn from international conservationist and researchers.

➤ **Strengthen enforcement data sharing and coordination**

Dr. Dhakal explained that the collection and upwards reporting of wildlife crime data is very weak, and could be better managed to help inform future research and action. However, **Mrs. Rana** also explained that good coordination among the governments' line agencies and with communities have already generated many success stories. **DSP Rana** also explained that the Nepal Police Central Intelligence Bureau is currently conducting an evaluation of how to improve information sharing to control IWT.

Overall, the event made it clear that global debates about conservation enforcement are relevant to Nepal, and that there is growing interest in efforts to better understand and address the complex social aspects of conservation. However, it was also clear that strong enforcement-based responses to conservation have a long history, and are widely supported in Nepal.



Figure 1: High-level Panel on Conservation Enforcement with (left to right) Mr. Anupam Rana, Mrs. Sushma Rana, Dr. Maheshwar Dhakal, Mr. Santosh Mani Nepal, Kumar Paudel.



Figure 2: More than 100 people attended the "Conservation Enforcement" event