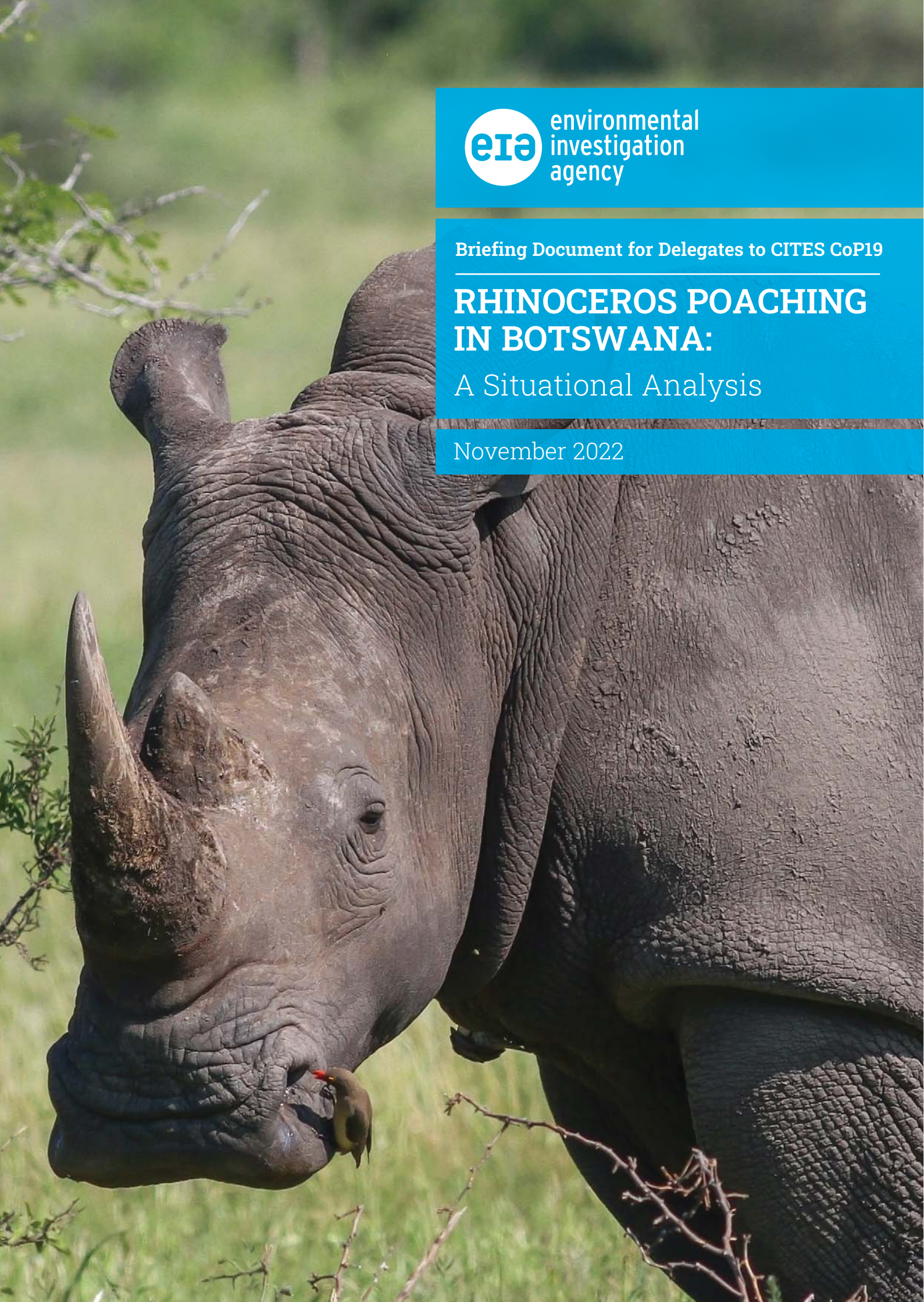


environmental investigation agency

Briefing Document for Delegates to CITES CoP19

RHINOCEROS POACHING IN BOTSWANA:

A Situational Analysis

November 2022

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Rhinoceroses in Botswana 2

Botswana's Anti-Poaching Response 4

Corruption Allegations and Politics 7

Botswana's Rhinos and CITES 9

Recommendations 10

References 11

©Christo Ras via Pixabay

ABOUT EIA

We investigate and campaign against environmental crime and abuse. Our undercover investigations expose transnational wildlife crime, with a focus on elephants, pangolins and tigers, and forest crimes such as illegal logging and deforestation for cash crops such as palm oil. We work to safeguard global marine ecosystems by addressing the threats posed by plastic pollution, bycatch and commercial exploitation of whales, dolphins and porpoises. Finally, we reduce the impact of climate change by campaigning to eliminate powerful refrigerant greenhouse gases, exposing related illicit trade and improving energy efficiency in the cooling sector.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EIA wishes to thank the Tilia Fund and other philanthropic organizations and individuals for their support of our work to protect rhinoceroses.

© Environmental Investigation Agency

Design: www.designsolutions.me.uk

Front cover: White rhinoceros ©Hans Veth via Unsplash

EIA US
PO Box 53343
Washington DC 20009
USA

T: +1 202 483-6621
E: info@eia-global.org
eia-global.org

EIA UK
62-63 Upper Street,
London N1 0NY
UK

T: +44 (0) 20 7354 7960
E: ukinfo@eia-international.org
eia-international.org

INTRODUCTION

Botswana is home to Africa's two species of rhinoceros: the white rhino *(Ceratotherium simum)* and the Critically Endangered black rhino *(Diceros bicornis)*. Until about five years ago, Botswana had experienced very few instances of rhino poaching.

This earned the country a reputation as a safe haven for rhinos in the midst of a poaching crisis that was affecting nearly all other rhino range states in Africa and Asia. In 2017, poaching started to increase in Botswana as poachers began killing rhinos in the vast Okavango Delta region in the northwest of the country.

Rhino poaching would continue to escalate in Botswana through at least 2020, the last year for which Botswana has released rhino poaching figures. The Okavango's rhino population was hit incredibly hard, and the killing continued seemingly unabated despite the government's anti-poaching interventions, which included aggressive militarization of the country's northern border and a major operation to dehorn the Okavango's remaining rhinos in the hopes of making the animals a less enticing target for poachers.

Despite the severity of the killing, Botswana has been reluctant to share critical details about the status of its rhinos and the outcomes of its anti-poaching and law enforcement interventions. Botswana is the only rhino range state that did not make its 2021 poaching figures available to the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group ahead of the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, and also declined to share updated population estimates and information on law enforcement outputs. At the 74th CITES Standing Committee meeting in March 2022, Botswana did not provide any information on its efforts to address rhino poaching and illegal trade in spite of a CITES Decision directed at all Parties to report on measures and activities they are conducting to address these crimes.

Given the paucity of information from Botswana, EIA produced this situational analysis in an effort to highlight some of the key issues facing Botswana's conservation sector. The situational analysis draws from a range of open-source material and personal communications shared with EIA.

RHINOCEROSES IN BOTSWANA

Overview of White and Black Rhinoceros Conservation Status

Africa's rhinos have weathered a poaching storm that has lasted for nearly 17 years. After more than a decade of peace, rhino poaching began to increase in Zimbabwe in 2006 before spreading to nearby South Africa and eventually consuming nearly every African (and Asian) rhino range state.[1] In many range states, things became worse before they started to improve. Rhino poaching peaked in Africa in 2015 which saw 1,349 rhinos killed for their horns.[2] Last year, 501 rhinos were gunned down across the African continent, bringing the total number of rhinos poached in Africa since the crisis began to 11,089.[3] However, the 2021 estimate is incomplete because Botswana did not release poaching figures for that year (see pg. 10).[4] Had Botswana done so, the 2021 total would have exceeded the 503 rhinos poached in 2020, marking the first time African rhino poaching did not decline compared to the previous year since 2015.

Above: Okavango Delta.

Below: White rhinoceros.

Today, there are an estimated 15,942 white rhinos left in Africa.[5] This is 25.2% fewer than there were approximately a decade ago. Kruger National Park in South Africa, which has historically been home to the world's largest wild white rhino population, has been ground zero for the poaching. In 2011 there were an estimated 10,621 white rhinos roaming throughout the park. Today, that number has plummeted by 77 per cent

to an estimated 2,458.[6] Now poachers are increasingly targeting Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, which is experiencing its worst year of rhino poaching on record with 207 rhinos killed so far this year as of 1 November 2022.[7]

Unlike other rhino range states, Botswana was until recently largely insulated from the killing. From 2006 to 2016, only six rhinos were reportedly poached in Botswana.[8] Botswana was considered to be such a safe haven that white and black rhinos were translocated from poaching hotspots in neighbouring South Africa and Zimbabwe to the vast wilderness of the Okavango Delta in northwest corner of the country. At least 77 rhinos were reportedly translocated to Botswana by 2018 from South Africa.[9] These translocations contributed to the rapid growth of Botswana's rhino population over the past 20 years, which reached an estimated 502 rhinos by the end of 2017 (approximately 450 white rhinos and 52 black rhinos).[10] However, that very same year rhino poachers descended on the Okavango Delta, bringing violence and devastation to this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Rhinoceros Poaching in the Okavango Delta

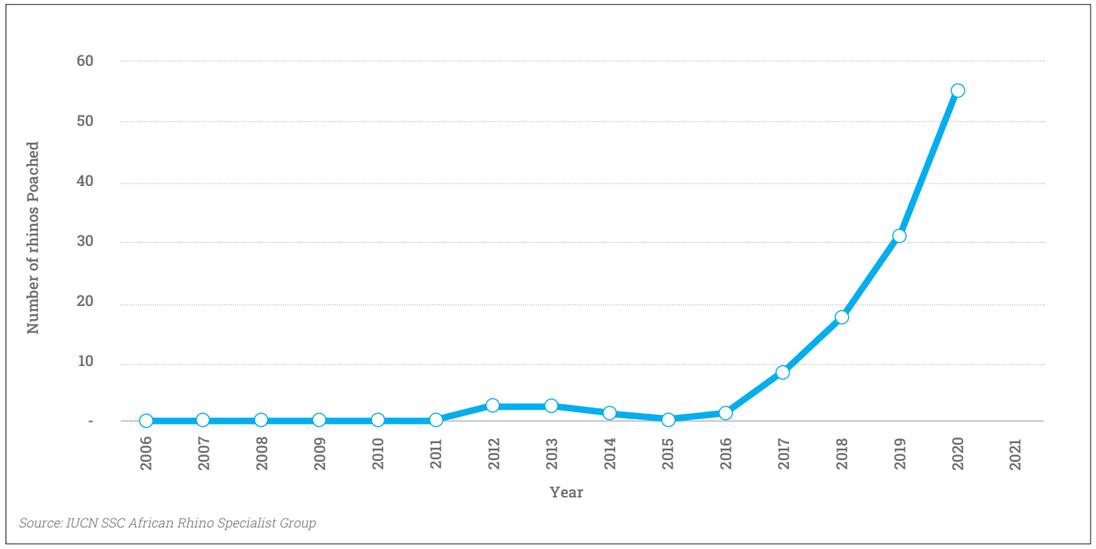
Of the approximately 502 rhinos located in Botswana by the end of 2017, roughly half were living in the Okavango Delta.[11] Rhino poaching began to increase that year, though this was only revealed when the IUCN SSC African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups (AfRSG) and TRAFFIC published a report on rhinoceros conservation, status, and trade (the IUCN/TRAFFIC Report) for the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19) to the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 2022.[12] Prior to the 2022 IUCN/TRAFFIC report it was previously understood that rhino poaching began to increase in the Okavango in 2018.

According to the IUCN/TRAFFIC Report to CoP19, 18 rhinos were reportedly poached in Botswana in 2018.[13] That number would jump up to 31 in 2019, then 55 in 2020. The Government of Botswana has refused to release rhino poaching figures for 2021 and 2022, though reports of rhino poaching continued to emerge during this time.[14] While Botswana has not released official population figures, the IUCN AfRSG relied on the data that has been made available to estimate that Botswana's white rhino population stood at 242 and its black rhino population stood at 23 as of the end of 2021.[15] This represents a 46 per cent decline in Botswana's white rhino population and a 54 per cent decline in its black rhino population. The actual number of rhinos poached is certainly higher than reported given the lack of available data for 2021 and 2022, and consequently the true nature of the population crashes is worse than reported.

Most of the poachers targeting Botswana's rhinos appear to be from neighbouring countries, such as Zambia.[16] Indeed, Zambian nationals have been apprehended in possession of rhino horn and elephant tusks just over the Botswana border in the Zambezi region of Namibia (which does not have any rhinos).[17] According to Namibia's Blue Rhino Task Team, poaching syndicates are operating between Zambia, Botswana, and Namibia.[18]

There is a high likelihood that the Okavango Delta is now completely devoid of rhinos. Poachers are now targeting rhinos located in more tightly patrolled, fenced reserves[19] and appear to be turning their sights to rhinos farther afield from the Okavango to Namibia, which has experienced a surge in rhino poaching this year.[20]

Figure 1: *Rhinos Poached in Botswana*



Source: IUCN SSC African Rhino Specialist Group

BOTSWANA'S ANTI-POACHING RESPONSE

There are four government departments that are primarily responsible for addressing rhino poaching and trafficking in Botswana: the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), the Botswana Defence Force (BDF), the Directorate of Intelligence and Security (DIS), and the Botswana Police Service (BPS).

The DWNP is in charge of the management of Botswana's white and black rhinos as part of its mandate to "conserve and manage fish and wildlife resources and their habitats in consultation with local, regional and international stakeholders for the benefit of present and future generations."[21] The DWNP is one of more than half a dozen departments that full under the authority of the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism.

The BDF is the military of Botswana. The BDF's mission is to defend Botswana's territorial integrity, sovereignty and national interests to ensure national security and stability.[22] The DIS is Botswana's domestic intelligence agency and is responsible for inter alia detecting and identifying threats or potential threats to national security. The DIS was established in 2008 is housed within the Office of the President.[23]

The BPS is Botswana's main law enforcement agency and prosecuting wildlife crime falls under its purview together with the Department of Public Prosecutions. The BPS has a special unit specialized in dealing with Narcotics, Fauna and Flora Investigations (NFFI). The NFFI works together with the DWNP to address wildlife crime.

These four entities, ideally, work together to combine their specialized skills and capacity to prevent poaching and eliminate the organized criminal networks involved, though in the past there have been miscommunications which suggest they are not always on the same page.[24] Botswana also has a national anti-poaching strategy that was reviewed as recently as October 2021 with an aim of addressing organized crime.[25] It is unclear if the strategy was revised after completion of the review and what changes, if any, are planned or have been implemented.

Militarization of the Border

The BDF is the foundation of Botswana's anti-rhino poaching strategy. The BDF has been tasked with patrolling Botswana's borders to intercept foreign nationals who cross illegally to poach wildlife and has not hesitated to take lethal action. More than two dozen alleged poachers have been killed by the BDF since 2018 and at least one BDF soldier has been killed in one of these confrontations near the border.[26]

The BDF's aggressive defense of Botswana's border appears to have had little impact on preventing poachers from killing the Okavango's rhinos. Rhino poaching incidents increased dramatically each year from 2017 through 2020, the last year that poaching figures were made available by Botswana. Not only did poaching continue seemingly unabated, but the presence of the BDF has also resulted in increased tensions with local communities[27] and has even caused a minor diplomatic crisis between Botswana and Namibia (see box). Local communities have complained that law enforcement never engages with them about anti-poaching efforts[28] and have reported cases of harassment, intimidation and even assault by BDF soldiers.[29] In one case, four safari guides claimed they were assaulted by BDF soldiers after being discovered with a cooler full of fish despite not having a fishing license. Upon learning that the guides were considering suing the BDF over the incident, one of the guides claims he was offered money by the BDF soldiers to drop the accusations.[30]

Above: Poached rhino carcass in Botswana.

Namibian Fishermen Incident

On the night of 5 November 2020 BDF forces set out on the Chobe River looking for poachers attempting to cross over the border into northeastern Botswana on a poaching expedition when they spotted two canoes with four people on board. The exact details of what happened next will never be known, but at some point shortly after spotting the canoes the BDF opened fire, killing all four individuals.

The four men killed that evening were related. Three were brothers from Namibia – Tommy Nchindo, Martin Nchindo, and Wamunyima Nchindo – and the fourth was their cousin, Sinvula Munyeme who resided in Zambia. The Nchindo brothers' mother, Alphonsina Mubu, tragically died four days later, allegedly from shock and stress.[31]

The family and community members of the four men say the Nchindo brothers and their cousin were merely fishermen and possessed no firearms. According to the BDF, the men in the canoes were armed poachers who fired on them first, and the BDF was forced to return fire.[32] No evidence of firearms or ammunition was recovered in either of the canoes, and a dive team that searched the river as part of a multi-national joint investigation after the incident did not find any guns.[33]

The incident generated large demonstrations in Namibia with protesters demanding an apology from Botswana's President Mokgweetsi Masisi, a complete investigation into the killings and an end to the BDF's alleged 'shoot-to-kill' policy (the Government of Botswana denies that the BDF has an official "shoot-to-kill" policy).[34] Amnesty International condemned the killings and called on authorities to "launch an independent and impartial investigation into the killings and ensure that suspected perpetrators are brough to justice."[35]

The Namibian, Namibia's largest independent daily newspaper, published a scathing editorial in which it warned that "Botswana's extrajudicial execution of alleged trespassers from neighbouring countries will never stop until several multinational solutions are put in place. Unless [Namibian] president Hage Geingob and the Namibian government come to terms with their limitations, expect the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) to continue killing and torturing Namibians they claim are poachers with the kind of impunity for which there are no loopholes in international law."[36]

The intense public outcry forced action at the presidential level. Presidents Masisi and Geingob spoke to each other on the phone and eventually pledged to conduct a joint investigation by both governments into the incident.[37]

In November 2021, the Kasane Magistrate's Court in Botswana acquitted the BDF soldiers of any criminal activity.[38] The magistrate who presided over the case, Taboka Mopipi, determined that there was no evidence to suggest that the BDF soldiers had set out intentionally to kill the fishermen and that they were responding to being fired upon first (despite no firearm ever being recovered from the crime scene). She also based her ruling on three elephant tusks submitted as evidence and the testimony of a Botswana Police Service investigator who claimed that three tusks were found inside one of the canoes after the BDF turned over the crime scene to the police.[39] There have been allegations that the BDF planted the tusks at the crime scene, but no evidence has been provided to back up this claim.[40]

The family of the slain fishermen have said they plan to challenge the ruling by the Kasane court. Meanwhile, the Namibian civil society organization Caprivi Concerned Group has submitted a request to the International Criminal Court in The Hauge, Netherlands to investigate the incident, and in particular President Masisi and the commander of the BDF Lieutenant Placid Segkogo.[41]

Dehorning and Evacuation

In early 2020, the DWNP initiated an operation to locate, immobilize and dehorn all remaining white rhinos in the Okavango Delta in an effort to discourage poachers from targeting the rhinos.[42] Rhinoceros dehorning is a veterinary procedure in which a rhino is tranquilized and the majority of its horns are removed with a chainsaw. The horns are cut above the growth plate and nerve endings in order to allow horn regrowth and avoid causing any pain to the animal. However, this means that some horn remains which poachers may still try to obtain, especially if they perceive the chance of getting caught is low enough to take the risk.

This scenario appears to have played out in the Okavango Delta for Botswana's white rhinos. Reports emerged that carcasses of dehorned rhinos were being found in the Delta, with what little stump of horn had remained after the dehorning operation hacked off by poachers.[43] The continued targeting of the dehorned rhinos prompted the government to take the drastic step of rounding up all remaining white rhinos in the Okavango Delta and relocating them to undisclosed, fenced reserves where they could be more closely monitored in October 2021.[44] The government has not disclosed how many rhinos were moved in the relocation operation.

The white rhino relocation was precipitated by the evacuation of the Okavango's remaining black rhinos in April 2020.[45] Once again, few details have been released by the DWNP and it is unclear how many of Botswana's Critically Endangered black rhinos, which numbered only 50 at the end of 2017, were successfully moved in the operation.

©Ingo Stiller via Unsplash

Dehorning and translocating rhinos require teams of veterinarians, rangers, helicopter pilots and other wildlife management professionals. These are expensive procedures, particularly on the scale that the DWNP undertook them in the Okavango, and they are not without risk, placing the target animal under extreme stress and increasing the risk of fatality as a result of anesthesia. Former President of Botswana Seretse Khama Ian Khama has alleged that several rhinos died in the DWNP's rhino translocation operations.[46]

Dehorning also results in additional complications vis-à-vis rhino horn stockpiling. The white rhino dehorning operation would have resulted in security and storage responsibilities for dozens of raw rhino horns. Securing rhino horn stockpiles is costly and the risk of theft is ever-present. Indeed, rhino horn thefts have occurred in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Vietnam and South Africa in recent years with hundreds of horns moved onto the black market since 2012.[47] DNA samples should have been taken from each rhino during immobilization and submitted to the Rhino DNA Indexing System (RhODIS) in South Africa, but it is unclear whether this occurred.

The DWNP has released few details about the operations to dehorn the Okavango's white rhinos and evacuate the remaining white and black rhinos to enclosed reserves. Some information, such as the location of the relocated rhinos, may reasonably not be disclosed for security reasons. However, there are many additional details that the DWNP has so far not made public that could be shared to shed some light on the effectiveness of these anti-poaching activities and the current status of Botswana's white and black rhino populations.

Above: White rhinoceros after undergoing dehorning.

Criticism and Response

The Government of Botswana routinely insists that it is taking all the necessary steps to protect rhinos, elephants, and other wildlife from poaching, trafficking and other threats to their survival. Suggestions to the contrary, presentation of evidence that calls the government's assertions into question and requests for increased government transparency are consistently met with combative responses by the government.

The ire of the Botswana government over critiques of its wildlife conservation policies are not limited to foreign NGOs. In 2019, Botswana revoked the research permit of Dr. Mike Chase, the Director and Founder of Elephants Without Borders and a citizen of Botswana, after a 2018 aerial survey of elephants in northern Botswana revealed an increase in elephant poaching.[48] The government labeled the peer-reviewed survey's findings as "false and misleading".[49]

Though Botswana has shared some data on annual rhino poaching figures, this practice ended in 2021. No poaching data has been released from the government for 2021 or 2022 purportedly because there are operational issues that cannot be shared with the public. According to the Director of the DWNP, "We are not going to be apologetic…That decision was taken owing to the gravity of the problem we are dealing with."[50] The best available population estimates from the IUCN AfRSG are based primarily on past population estimates that are nearly five years old and the available poaching figures.

Government officials have sent mixed messages on the status of Botswana's rhinos. At times, poaching has been

©EIA

Elephant Poaching in Botswana

The aerial survey conducted by Elephants Without Borders revealed that the number of fresh elephant carcasses increased by 593% from 2014 to 2018.[54] These findings aligned with similar reports from the IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group 2016 African Elephant Status Report which identified the "poaching of elephants by armed gangs" as an increasing threat in northern Botswana and a "notable increase" in the carcass ratio since 2012.[55] The Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Report for CoP18 also reported an increase in the proportion of illegally killed elephants for Southern Africa since 2016, particularly in Botswana's Chobe National Park.[56]

Above: African elephants in Chobe National Park, Botswana.

Since 2019, little information has been published about elephant poaching in Botswana, however the MIKE report to CoP19 reveals that elephant poaching increased in Southern Africa in 2021 compared to 2020. Poaching continues to be a major threat to all elephant populations, including in Botswana and the greater Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, as a result of demand for and illegal trade in elephant ivory. Despite the ongoing poaching problem and the substantial body of evidence indicating that ivory trade fuels poaching and illegal trade, Botswana, along with other Southern African countries, continues to seek to reopen the international ivory trade and sell its ivory stockpiles through proposals to CITES.

acknowledged as "[rising] at an alarming rate"[51] and President Mokgweetsi Masisi has also identified poaching as the greatest threat to Botswana's biodiversity.[52] However, on other occasions the government has responded defensively to questions about the poaching situation. In one instance a senior DWNP official made the bewildering assertion that "the conservation status of both elephants and rhino remains very positive in the country."[53]

The highly politicized nature of wildlife policies in Botswana, together with the government's reputation for retaliatory responses to criticism, has generated a climate of fear in Botswana. Based on information received by EIA, scientists, conservationists and local communities in Botswana are reluctant to speak out and share information that may be useful in countering the illegal wildlife trade but would also be critical of the government. Improved governmental transparency and an environment where civil discourse about data, policies and strategies can be held by all relevant stakeholders is essential to bring together all available expertise and resources that can assist Botswana address its current problems with poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS AND POLITICS

In the nearly six decades since Botswana secured its independence it has gained a reputation for being one of the most stable and democratic countries in Africa. In recent years, however, public trust in government has declined, corruption allegations have been lodged against government agencies and officials, and the political feud between the current and former administrations continues. Taken together, these trends paint a troubling portrait of a country that has historically been seen as a model for other young democracies around the world.

Botswana's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) fell to "a historic low in 2021, recording a significant decline from a score of 65 in 2012."[57] The CPI was developed by Transparency International and relies on perceived levels of public sector corruption to rank countries on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Botswana's most recent score of 55 is based in part on Transparency International's 2019 Global Corruption Barometer survey, which indicated that most citizens believed corruption had increased in Botswana, and concerns about the lack of accountability for high-level government corruption.

Afrobarometer, a "pan-African, non-partisan survey research network", obtained similar findings on public attitudes about government corruption in its 2020 report Corruption Crossroads? Rising perceptions of graft weaken citizen trust, threated Botswana's democratic standing.[58] According to Afrobarometer, half of all citizens of Botswana believed the overall level of corruption in the country had increased from the previous year. Thirty-five per cent of Batswana said that "most" or "all" officials in the Presidency are corrupt, which is four times greater than the nine percent of the population who felt this way in 2019. Perhaps most concerningly, 70 per fent of Batswana say there is a risk of retaliation if corruption is reported to the authorities.

Corruption Allegations and the Wildlife Conservation Sector

Several of the government agencies tasked with implementing anti-poaching activities and conducting law enforcement investigations into the wildlife trafficking networks involved in the poaching and illegal trade in Botswana's wildlife have faced allegations of corruption, including reports of "a suspicion that military and intelligence officials are conniving with [the poachers]."[59]

As part of its mandate to identify threats to national security, the DIS gathers information on rhino poachers and rhino horn traffickers; however, corruption within the DIS has reportedly resulted in the leaking of intelligence to poachers. In July 2020, the Director General of the DIS, Brigadier Peter Magosi, admitted that poaching syndicates had gained access to the DIS when questioned by the Public Accounts Committee of the Botswana Parliament. Magosi was blunt in his assessment of the situation: "It's a fact, we are infiltrated."[60]

Earlier that same year, the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism, Oduetse Koboto, alluded to poachers obtaining critical information from the government, stating that "[i]n some cases, they [poachers] may even infiltrate our operations to try to get information about what we are planning."[61]

In 2020 the BDF found itself on the receiving end of allegations that members of its Special Forces Unit were willfully allowing rhino poachers to operate in the Okavango because they were unhappy with salary adjustments from the previous year. The BDF's Director of Protocol and Public Affairs, Colonel Tebo Dikole, denied the allegations, labelling them "absurd" and nothing more than "conspiracy theories".[62]

Below: Black rhinoceros.

©Martin Diepeveen licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Masisi vs. Khama: Accusations of harassment, intimidation, and attempted assassination

The feud between current President Mokgweetsi Masisi and former President Ian Khama extends far beyond wildlife policies in Botswana and has grown increasingly serious. Former President Khama has alleged that he, his family and members of his administration have been subjected to harassment and intimidation by the Masisi administration, and that he himself has been the victim of assassination attempts on no less than three occasions.[64]

The attempted assassination allegations are being investigated by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard. In a preliminary report dates 26 March 2021, the Special Rapporteur writes that "Three intelligence agencies from States outside of Botswana have issued credible warnings of threats to Mr. Khama's life."[65] The report goes on to provide details on "three planned attempts on Mr. Khama's life, including the use of biochemical poison in two cases."

Khama's brothers, Tshekedi and Anthony (and Tshekedi's wife) were detained for multiple days by the DIS apparently without charge. Tshekedi served as the Minister of Environment, Conservation, Natural Resources and Tourism under President Khama. Former President Khama alleges this detention was illegal and "a continuation of the harassment and persecution that my family is being subjected to since the fabrication of accusations made against me." Khama further alleged that the DIS was operating on direct orders from Masisi.[66] At time of writing Khama has left Botswana and is living in South Africa.

Former President Khama has also been subject to a DIS investigation ostensibly over stolen firearms that Khama allegedly took and retained after his final presidential term ended.[67] Khama and his family are also the subject of a Financial Intelligence Agency investigation into alleged misappropriation of government funds by Khama and his family.[68] Khama has denied any wrongdoing and has characterized the investigations as witch hunts and continued harassment by the Masisi administration.[69]

For its part, the Masisi administration has labeled Khama's allegations as "outrageous" and issued a statement to say that "The narrative that the former president and his family members are being persecuted is devoid of any truth."[70]

Politicization of Wildlife Conservation in Botswana

Wildlife conservation has been subject to extreme politicization in Botswana, particularly regarding the management and protection of rhinos and elephants. This is in large part a result of the feud between current president Mokgweetsi Masisi and former president Ian Khama.[63] The two were once close allies, but after Masisi took the reins as President in 2018 their relationship quickly soured. Both Khama and Masisi have taken a strong interest in Botswana's wildlife and have personally directed changes to core policies and national government positions regarding the management of species like rhinos and elephants.

Masisi and Khama have traded barbs over changes to Botswana's trophy hunting policies, the equipping of DWNP rangers with firearms and the effectiveness of anti-poaching activities. The local media has closely covered their combative rhetoric which has in turn fueled an increasingly hostile divide between those in the camp of Masisi's Botswana Democratic Party and others aligned with Khama and his Botswana Patriotic Front.

As a result, wildlife policy decisions have become personal and uncompromising in Botswana. Support for the current administration's policies is amplified and used to reinforce the implementation of the policies, while criticism and evidence suggesting that a different course of action may be more prudent and effective is met with hostility from the government and often dismissed as politically-motivated.

BOTSWANA'S RHINOS AND CITES

At CITES CoP18 the Report of the Standing Committee and Secretariat on Rhinoceroses (CoP18 Doc. 83.1) highlighted the uptick in rhino poaching in Botswana in 2018 compared to previous years.[71] By the end of 2018 there were at least 18 reported incidents of rhino poaching in Botswana, and the CoP19 IUCN/TRAFFIC report revised the 2017 poaching total from zero rhinos poached to nine rhinos poached in Botswana that year, suggesting rhinos were being targeted by poachers in Botswana earlier than the Government of Botswana originally acknowledged.[72]

EIA and other NGOs present at CoP18 urged Parties to include Botswana among the decisions directed at other Parties affected by rhino poaching and rhino horn trafficking. This was in order to secure oversight and any assistance that may have been helpful to Botswana in light of the reported increase in poaching in the Okavango. CITES Parties ultimately elected not to direct any CoP18 decisions pertaining to rhinos toward Botswana. This effectively endorsed the Secretariat's recommendation for Botswana "to keep the matter under review to ensure that measures implemented to prevent and combat rhinoceros poaching remain effective and are quickly adapted to respond to any new trends."[73]

However, CoP18 did adopt Decision 18.110, which directed all Parties to report any activities implemented to address the illegal killing of rhinos and illegal trade in rhinoceros specimens. Despite this, Botswana did not provide any updates on its activities to address rhino poaching and illegal trade to the Standing Committee in the intersessional period between CoP18 and CoP19.

Botswana's continued failure to provide basic information on rhino populations, poaching, and anti-poaching response to CITES is also evident in the CoP19 IUCN/TRAFFIC report.[74] Botswana was the only African rhino state for which poaching figures were not made available for 2021. The report's authors relied on poaching figures from previous years and other data inputs to estimate that another 53 rhinos were killed in Botswana in 2021, though this estimate was not applied to the total estimated poaching figures for 2021 in the IUCN/TRAFFIC report. Botswana also failed to make black and white rhino population data available to the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group and did not provide information on law enforcement and legal sanctioning outputs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR CITES CoP19:

- **Adopt decisions directing Botswana to:**
  - **Provide the most recent white and black rhino population estimates, rhino poaching figures for 2021-2022, and details on law enforcement outputs, including prosecutions, seizures, and financial investigations, to the Secretariat for consideration by SC77.**
  - **Strengthen its engagement with Namibia, Zambia, and any other Parties as appropriate, undertaking joint operations and strengthening information sharing and intelligence exchange to build upon shared efforts to expand collaboration to address illegal rhinoceros horn trade, and to report to the Secretariat on any activities conducted in this regard for consideration by SC77 and SC78.**
  - **Provide information on the outcomes of its rhino dehorning and translocation operations to the Secretariat for consideration by SC77 including inter alia the number of rhinos successfully translocated from the Okavango Delta; the number of rhinos that may have perished in the dehorning and translocation operations, if any; the total number of horns obtained from dehorning rhinos; and confirmation that rhino DNA samples where obtained and shared with RhODIS during the dehorning and/or translocation operations.**
  - **Provide an update on the status of its national anti-poaching strategy and report on its implementation with respect to rhino and elephant poaching to the Secretariat for consideration by SC77.**
- **Reject Proposals 2, 3, and 4 which seek to amend the CITES Appendices to weaken protections for rhinos and elephants, including to allow for international commercial trade in rhino horn and ivory.**

FOR BOTSWANA:

- **Prioritize the implementation of intelligence-led investigations into the organized criminal groups conducting the poaching and trafficking of Botswana's rhinos and elephants. Such investigations should be conducted jointly with other rhino range states, transit countries and consumer countries to share information and expertise in order to improve chances for success and maximum impact.**
- **Task the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime to investigate the allegations of corruption that have been made against government agencies responsible for conducting anti-poaching and anti-wildlife trafficking operations and investigations, and take any action deemed appropriate to eliminate any elements of corruption that may be uncovered. The results of such an investigation should be made available to the public.**
- **The DWNP should institute quarterly updates on the status of rhinos in Botswana. Such updates should include, at a minimum, population estimates, poaching data, major conservation management activities (e.g. dehorning, translocations, etc.), and information on law enforcement interventions (e.g. prosecutions, convictions, seizures, etc.). These updates should be provided in person by the Director of the DWNP and open to media to provide opportunities for follow-up questions and to maximize transparency.**
- **Engage local communities in the Okavango Delta region and other areas affected by intense levels of poaching in the development and implementation of anti-poaching strategies.**

REFERENCES

1. CITES CoP19 Doc. 75 (Rev. 1) Annex 4. Available at: https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-75-R1.pdf
2. Id.
3. Id.
4. Id.
5. Id.
6. The Witness. (2022). DA Concerned over decline in rhino numbers at Kruger National Park. The Witness. Available at: https://www.citizen.co.za/witness/news/da-concerned-over-decline-in-rhino-numbers-at-kruger-national-park/
7. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife http://www.kznwildlife.com/
8. CITES CoP19 Doc. 75 (Rev. 1) Annex 4
9. Oak Foundation. (2018). Forty rhinos moved to Botswana. Available at: https://oakfnd.org/forty-rhinos-moved-to-botswana/
10. https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/doc/E-CoP18-083-01.pdf
11. Somerville, K. (2020). Botswana's rhino poaching crisis: COVID-19 increases the pressure. Global Geneva. Available at: https://global-geneva.com/botswanas-rhino-poaching-crisis-covid-19-increases-the-pressure/
12. CITES CoP19 Doc. 75 (Rev. 1) Annex 4
13. Id.
14. Id.
15. Id.
16. Nkala, O. (2021). Southern Africa: Botswana Rhino Poaching Worsens As Government Dithers. New Zimbabwe. Available at: https://allafrica.com/stories/202105160101.html
17. Kooper, L. (2019). Man nabbed for possession of elephant tusk, rhino horn. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/191972/archive-read/Zambian-nabbed-for-possession-of-elephant-tusk-rhino-horn
18. Three Years of Blue Rhino in Namibia. (2021). Available at: https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/74/E-SC74-37-A2.pdf
19. Motlhoka, T. (2022). Rhino killed at Khama Sanctuary? Sunday Standard. Available at: https://www.sundaystandard.info/rhino-killed-at-khama-sanctuary/
20. Vatileni, E. (2022). Rhino poaching cases on the rise. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/116683/read/Rhino-poaching-cases-on-the-rise
21. Government of Botswana website https://www.gov.bw/ministries/ministry-environment-natural-resources-conservation-and-tourism
22. Government of Botswana website https://www.gov.bw/ministries/botswana-defence-force
23. Laws of Botswana. The Intelligence and Security Act. Available at: https://botswanalaws.com/alphabetical-list-of-statutes/intelligence-and-security-service
24. Baaits, D. (2020). BDF hits at police over poaching incident. Weekend Post. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20201001005534/https://www.weekendpost.co.bw/25004/news/bdf-hits-at-police-over-poaching-incident/
25. Rantsimako, S. (2021). Masisi and DWNP Give Contradictory Statements on Wildlife Poaching. The Botswana Gazette. Available at: https://www.thegazette.news/news/masisi-and-dwnp-give-contradictory-statements-on-wildlife-poaching/
26. Records available upon request.
27. Mmana, F. B. (2020). BDF Soldiers Clash With Ditshiping Residents. The Voice. Available at: https://news.thevoicebw.com/bdf-soldiers-clash-with-ditshiping-residents/
28. Tjinyeka, S. (2022). Residents in Botswana's Okavango Delta want to be included in anti-poaching efforts. Ink24. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/campaigns/giantsclub/botswana/botswana-antipoaching-b2038018.html
29. Dipholo, K. (2021). Namibians Live in Fear of BDF. The Voice. Available at: https://news.thevoicebw.com/namibians-live-in-fear-of-bdf/ ; The Patriot. (2020). Soldiers terrorise Okavango residents. The Patriot. Available at: https://thepatriot.co.bw/soldiers-terrorise-okavango-residents/
30. The Voice. (2020). UNDECI Guides unsure whether to sue 'abusive' soldiers. The Voice. Available at: https://www.pressreader.com/botswana/the-voice-botswana/20200814/282029034587257
31. Tlhage, O. (2020). Mother of Slain Men Dies, Sister Hospitalised. Namibian Sun. Available at: https://www.namibiansun.com/news/mother-of-slain-men-dies-sister-hospitalised2020-11-12/
32. Kooper, L. (2022). 'Fishermen shot first'. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/6217285/archive-read/Fishermen-shot-first
33. Kooper, L. (2021). Botswana cop claims fishermen had ivory. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/6215621/archive-read/Botswana-cop-claims-fishermen-had-ivory
34. Ngutjinazo, O., Kooper, L. and Mbathera, E. (2020). Chaos at border as slain Namibians arrive home. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/96549/read/Chaos-at-border-as-slain-Namibians-arrive-home
35. Tlhage, O. (2020). Mother of Slain Men Dies, Sister Hospitalised. Namibian Sun. Available at: https://www.namibiansun.com/news/mother-of-slain-men-dies-sister-hospitalised2020-11-12/
36. The Namibian. (2020). Botswana's Border Aggression is a Regional Security Issue. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/206294/archive-read/Botswanas-Border-Aggression-is-a-Regional-Security-Issue
37. Government of Botswana. Office of the President press release. (2020). Available at: https://www.facebook.com/148228411926492/posts/3506591019423531/?d=n
38. Kooper, L. (2022). 'Fishermen shot first'. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/6217285/archive-read/Fishermen-shot-first
39. Kooper, L. (2021). Botswana cop claims fishermen had ivory. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/6215621/archive-read/Botswana-cop-claims-fishermen-had-ivory
40. Kooper, L. (2022). 'Fishermen shot first'. The Namibian. Available at: https://www.namibian.com.na/6217285/archive-read/Fishermen-shot-first
41. Tjitemisa, K. (2022). Masisi reported to ICC over Nchindo Killings. New Era. Available at: https://neweralive.na/index.php/posts/masisi-reported-to-icc-over-nchindo-killings
42. Department of Wildlife and National Parks. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1278444545659575
43. Botswana Safari News. (2020). Okavango Delta Poachers Now Target White Dehorned Rhinos. Botswana Safari News. Available at: https://botswanasafarinews.blogspot.com/2020/06/okavango-delta-poachers-now-target.html
44. Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism. (2021). The History of Rhino and Elephant Poaching in Botswana. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/www.mewt199.co.bw/photos/pcb.4558700737540895/4558698134207822
45. Maron, D. F. (2020). Botswana is evacuating black rhinos amid poaching threat. National Geographic. Available at: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/botswana-evacuates-black-rhinos-amid-poaching-and-coronavirus
46. The Botswana Gazette. (2022). Khama Accuses govt of Cover-Ups in Rhino Poaching. The Botswana Gazette. Available at: https://www.thegazette.news/news/khama-accuses-govt-of-cover-ups-in-rhino-poaching/
47. CITES CoP17 Doc. 68 Annex 5. Available at: https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/WorkingDocs/E-CoP17-68-A5.pdf
48. Schlossberg, S., Chase, M.J. and Sutcliffe, R., 2019. Evidence of a growing elephant poaching problem in Botswana. Current Biology, 29(13), pp.2222-2228. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S096098221930675X
49. Leithead, A. (2019). Botswana elephant poaching 'no hoax'. BBC. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47321241
50. Keakabetse, B. (2022). Botswana's Imported Rhino Poaching Crises. Okavango Express. Available at: https://www.okavangoexpress.com/news/botswanas-imported-rhino-poaching-crises/
51. Phys.org. (2020). Nearly 50 rhinos killed in Botswana in 10 months as poaching surges. Phys.org. Available at: https://phys.org/news/2020-02-rhinos-botswana-months-poaching-surges.html
52. Rantsimako, S. (2021). Masisi and DWNP Give Contradictory Statements on Wildlife Poaching. (2021). The Botswana Gazette. Available at: https://www.thegazette.news/news/masisi-and-dwnp-give-contradictory-statements-on-wildlife-poaching/
53. Xinhua. (2021). Botswana appeals for wildlife conservation support. Xinhua. Available at: https://newsghana.com.gh/botswana-appeals-for-wildlife-conservation-support/
54. Schlossberg, S., Chase, M.J. and Sutcliffe, R., 2019. Evidence of a growing elephant poaching problem in Botswana. Current Biology, 29(13), pp.2222-2228. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S096098221930675X
55. IUCN. 2016. African Elephant Status Report 2016: An update from the African Elephant Database.
56. CITES CoP18 Doc. 69.2 Report on Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE).
57. Transparency International. (2022). CPI 2021 For Sub-Saharan Africa: Amid Democratic Turbulence, Deep-Seated Corruption Exacerbates Threats To Freedoms. Available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2021-sub-saharan-africa-amid-democratic-turbulence-deep-seated-corruption
58. Afrobarometer. (2020). Corruption crossroads? Rising perceptions of graft weaken citizen trust, threaten Botswana's democratic standing. Available at: https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ab_r8_policypaperno68_botswana_corruption.pdf
59. Nkala, O. (2021). Southern Africa: Botswana Rhino Poaching Worsens As Government Dithers. New Zimbabwe. Available at: https://allafrica.com/stories/202105160101.html
60. Adamson, K. (2020). Moles Penetrate DIS – Magosi. The Voice. Available at: https://www.pressreader.com/botswana/the-voice-botswana/20200724/281513638474343
61. Mguni, M. (2020). Gov't buys more body bags as war against rhino poachers intensifies. Mmegi. Available at: https://www.mmegi.bw/news/govt-buys-more-body-bags-as-war-against-rhino-poachers-intensifies/news
62. Baaitse, D. (2020). BDF refutes rhino poaching Special Forces Unit sabotage. Weekend Post. Available at: https://www.weekendpost.co.bw/24914/news/bdf-refutes-rhino-poaching-special-forces-unit-sabotage/
63. Konopo, J. (2022). How will the conflict between Masisi and Khama end? Ink Center for Investigative Journalism. Available at: https://inkjournalism.org/2573/how-will-the-conflict-between-masisi-and-khama-end-%EF%BF%BC/
64. Good Governance Africa. (2022). Former President Ian Khama on assassination attempts. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIfPw-iLJ2A&ab_channel=GoodGovernanceAfrica
65. United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. (2021). Available at: https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26272
66. Ndebele, L. (2022). Ian Khama claims his twin brothers have been detained by Botswana's state security. News24. Available at: https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/ian-khama-claims-his-twin-brothers-have-been-detained-by-botswanas-state-security-20220318
67. du Plessis, C. (2022). Ian Khama summonsed to appear in Botswana court on firearm charge. Daily Maverick. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-04-20-ian-khama-summonsed-to-appear-in-botswana-court-on-firearm-charge/
68. Mpuang, L. (2022). DISS freezes Accounts of the Khamas. The Botswana Gazette. Available at: https://www.thegazette.news/news/diss-freezes-accounts-of-the-khamas/#.Yil6ezMI-Q
69. Tlhankane, M. (2022). Khama vs DIS: Witchhunt or necessary measure? Mmegi. Available at: https://www.mmegi.bw/news/khama-vs-dis-witchhunt-or-necessary-measure/news
70. Ndebele, L. (2022). 'Outrageous' – Botswana dismisses ex-president Khama's claims of an assassination plot. News24. Available at: https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/outrageous-botswana-dismisses-ex-president-khamas-claims-of-an-assassination-plot-20220504
71. CITES CoP18. Doc. 83.1 Annex 2. Available at: https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/doc/E-CoP18-083-01.pdf
72. CITES CoP19 Doc. 75 (Rev. 1) Annex 4
73. CITES CoP18 Doc. 83.1
74. CITES CoP19 Doc. 75 (Rev. 1) Annex 4

environmental investigation agency

EIA US
PO Box 53343
Washington DC 20009 USA
T: +1 202 483-6621
E: info@eia-global.org
eia-global.org

EIA UK
62-63 Upper Street,
London N1 0NY UK
T: +44 (0) 20 7354 7960
E: ukinfo@eia-international.org
eia-international.org