Targeting Natural Resource Corruption

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Enrolling the Local: Community-Based Anti-Corruption Efforts and Institutional Capture

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Key takeaways

- Community-based anti-corruption efforts are often seen as a way to circumvent corrupt state actors, to empower those most affected by the negative consequences of corruption, and to build trust and legitimacy for such initiatives at the local level.
- However, evidence from community-based natural resource management programs around Makira Natural Park in northeastern Madagascar suggests that while community-based anti-corruption efforts may prove effective in cases where local resources and landscapes are of little interest to national-level actors, they are likely to fail when resources are highly valued by those actors for strategic and/or economic reasons.
- When lucrative natural resources are involved, institutional capture that effectively takes power away from local actors is a persistent challenge, requiring a multi-level approach to combatting corruption to increase chances for community-based management of natural resources to achieve desired results.

Challenges for community-based anti-corruption efforts

Corruption can affect natural resource management at many different levels, from local-level bribes for access to specific resources to national-level institutional capture backed by international economic interests. An individual villager, for example, may pay a forest guard to illicitly cut trees for small building projects, while at a much larger scale, the institutions and policies regulating the sustainable management of forests may be manipulated by vote buying, influence peddling, clientelism, or violence to allow for massive logging that serves private interests rather than those of the community.

Designing anti-corruption interventions holistically to account for these multiple layers of corruption has proven difficult. Indeed, even recognizing that these diverse layers exist and understanding how they interact and reinforce or undermine each other requires a multi-scale approach that many anti-corruption interventions in natural resource management lack. Rather, interventions to reduce corruption in natural

resource management typically focus primarily on either local- or national-level dynamics, but rarely both at the same time.[1]

At the local level, community participation has become a fundamental component of anti-corruption interventions in natural resource management (Burai 2020, Mullard 2017, Verdenicci & Hough 2015). The shift in favor of including communities in anti-corruption efforts has been part of the turn toward community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) more generally (Agrawal 2005, Dressler et al 2010, Robbins 2000). CBNRM programs typically formalize communities' rights to use or own specific areas of land and its resources and establish schemes for managing those resources. For example, community-based management might involve the creation of an official contract between a government agency (e.g. the Ministry of Forests), the identified communities, and an external third party (an NGO or other donor). Given this formalized arrangement, a certain degree of oversight and transparency is established so that tendencies toward corruption (imposing fines or soliciting bribes rather than taking legal measures) can be reduced. New or enhanced channels for individual community members to report suspicious or illicit activities are also a frequent feature of such programs.

This Brief examines community-based anti-corruption efforts in natural resource management in order to better understand their rationales, potentialities, and challenges—especially complications posed by the intersection of such initiatives with national-level dynamics of institutional capture. We present a case study from northeastern Madagascar in order to empirically explore such dynamics. We conclude with a discussion of how multi-level anti-corruption interventions might offer a promising way forward for reducing corruption in natural resource management for certain high-value landscapes or resources that might be subject to challenges connected to institutional capture.

Box 1. Key Concepts

Corruption: The abuse of entrusted power for private gain, including both economic enrichment and political advantage. In relation to natural resources, an example would be government officials accepting bribes to facilitate corporate access to protected species or landscapes.

Social accountability: "Those formal or informal mechanisms through which citizens engage to bring state officials or service providers to account" (Camargo 2018).

Community-based anti-corruption: An approach to combatting corruption that focuses on enrolling the participation of community members empowered to monitor and prevent corrupt practices in local contexts through a variety of tools and strategies. Examples include local monitoring, citizen charters, citizen assemblies, community report cards, participatory budgeting, open data programs, or integrity pacts (Burai 2020).

Institutional capture: A process by which institutions meant to advance the public interest are "captured" and instead made to serve the interests of certain groups or individuals, often including politicians, political parties, economic elites, and commercial actors. In the natural resource sector, an example would be the agency in charge of mining authorizations accepting payoffs from corporations in exchange for granting them permits despite those corporations' failure to meet certain administrative requirements or environmental standards.

[1] The tendency for interventions and analyses to focus on either the national or local level is discussed at length by both Burai (2020) and Fox et al. (2016), two publications from the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre that respectively aim to address challenges to community-based anti-corruption approaches and to propose "vertical integration" of civil society monitoring and advocacy programs.

The logic behind local participation in anti-corruption initiatives

Anti-corruption efforts that rely on local participation are rooted in a particular set of logics and assumptions regarding the effects that wider community involvement will have in terms of mitigating against corrupt practices. These logics have three key elements:

- the belief that local participation allows anti-corruption initiatives to circumvent corrupt state actors during the implementation process;
- the conviction that the best way to combat corrupt behavior is to empower those most affected by its negative effects to openly and collectively name and contest it; and
- the understanding that engaging community members directly builds trust and provides much-needed local legitimacy to on-the-ground anti-corruption efforts, enhancing chances for success.

The need to sidestep government channels and appeal directly to citizens and civil society to achieve appreciable reductions in corruption is based on a view of politicians and other government officials as having the most to gain from corrupt practices and thus the least incentive to fight against them (Dixit 2015). From this perspective, anti-corruption programs cannot rely on (potentially corrupt) state actors to undertake reforms that would ostensibly reduce their own opportunities to secure access to bribes and other material gains (Fritzen 2003). The solution, then, is to focus on empowering citizens and civil society organizations through local institutional reconfigurations that increase social accountability—defined as "formal or informal mechanisms through which citizens engage to bring state officials or service providers to account" (Camargo 2018)—while placing limits on the power of state actors (Robbins 2000). For example, such efforts might deploy tools and strategies like local monitoring, citizen charters, citizen assemblies, community report cards, participatory budgeting, open data programs, or integrity pacts (Burai 2020). Arguments in favor of community-centered approaches are often made in parallel with calls for state withdrawal from certain sectors of the economy, which some mainstream development discourse has cast as another essential anti-corruption measure (Alesina & Angeletos 2005; Tanzi & Davoodi 2000).

A distinct but related idea holds that giving voice and authority to community members—especially poor, disadvantaged community members deemed most afflicted by corrupt practices (Johnston 2005, Knox 2009)—will help force accountability on state actors by deepening democratic feedback loops and augmenting citizen capacities (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). This perspective assumes that empowered citizens are (or should be) both the most motivated and best situated to identify corrupt actors and processes, along with the most effective potential solutions (Verdenicci & Hough 2015). As local people tend to be well versed in existing "rules-in-use" (as opposed to formal rules) when it comes to perhaps-corrupt ways of doing and being, enabling them to take action against such norms and practices is viewed as an effective way to highlight existing problems and to determine the most suitable responses or resolutions (Gore et al 2013). Furthermore, if community members are fully aware of their rights as citizens, they will be well-placed to demand action from government officials vis-à-vis advancing anti-corruption measures (Mullard 2017).

Moreover, there is a widespread acknowledgement among development practitioners that local "buy-in" is necessary for anti-corruption efforts to have any chance at success (for example, see Fox et al 2016, Mullard 2017, and Burai 2020). This includes increasing community trust of interventions, cultivating of a sense of ownership over anti-corruption efforts by citizens and civil society organizations, and including local actors representing diverse perspectives such that no individual or group perceives that their interests have been ignored (Burai 2020). Consulting community members is the only way to generate a comprehensive understanding of the local context, including how external interventions are viewed and implemented in those settings (Harrison 2006). External actors interested in advancing anti-corruption initiatives

might also seek to ally themselves with civil society organizations that already have a strong, respected, and accepted local presence so as to couch their arguments and programs in more locally-recognized and salient forms (Mikuš 2017, Walton 2016).

Faith in the efficacy of such participatory approaches to anti-corruption efforts has resulted in significant investment by the World Bank and USAID (Mansuri & Rao 2012), as well as the strategies of international conservation NGOs, including WWF, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and Conservation International. However, there are many and varied potential pitfalls to engaging communities in anti-corruption efforts. These often mirror the challenges motivating community-centered approaches in the first place, and include project capture or cooptation; design flaws; lack of attention to local power structures and asymmetries; deficiencies in information, trust, feedback, and local capacities; inadequate implementation; and unsustainability (Burai 2020). Substantial disagreement also remains as to whether initiatives that are explicitly focused on combatting corruption—and that intentionally promote the aggressive and visible contestation of corrupt practices by citizens—are more effective than more generalized and less confrontational programs of "good governance" (Verdenicci & Hough 2015) or "social accountability" (Camargo 2018, Mullard 2017). In either case, community participation plays a fundamental role. Often, however—especially given the presence of high-value resources or landscapes that garner significant national or international interest—community-focused efforts risk being undermined by higher-level dynamics of corruption such as institutional capture (Burai 2020).

Institutional capture and local participation

Institutional capture refers to the subversion—or "capture"—of elements in a democratic political system by certain elite interests through corrupt means. Put differently, institutional capture exists when democratic processes are undermined or manipulated such that government policies and practices no longer favor the public interest, but rather those of private actors. In relation to the natural resource sector, for example, institutional capture might lead to a situation in which public goods—such as mineral or timber reserves on public lands, or the minerals and timber extracted for export—are illegitimately converted into private payoffs for an elite minority (Heidenheimer & Johnston 2002).

Private actors' ability to bend or shape state policies or practices to their advantage ultimately depends on their political power. Such power might be attained through democratic means, i.e. running for office, supporting campaigns, starting civil society organizations, or joining political parties. However, private actors might also acquire political power through corrupt channels such as vote buying, influence peddling, lobbying, patronage, nepotism, or violence. Because these latter mechanisms, by definition, exclude any sort of democratic accountability, their pervasive use is clear evidence of a captured system.

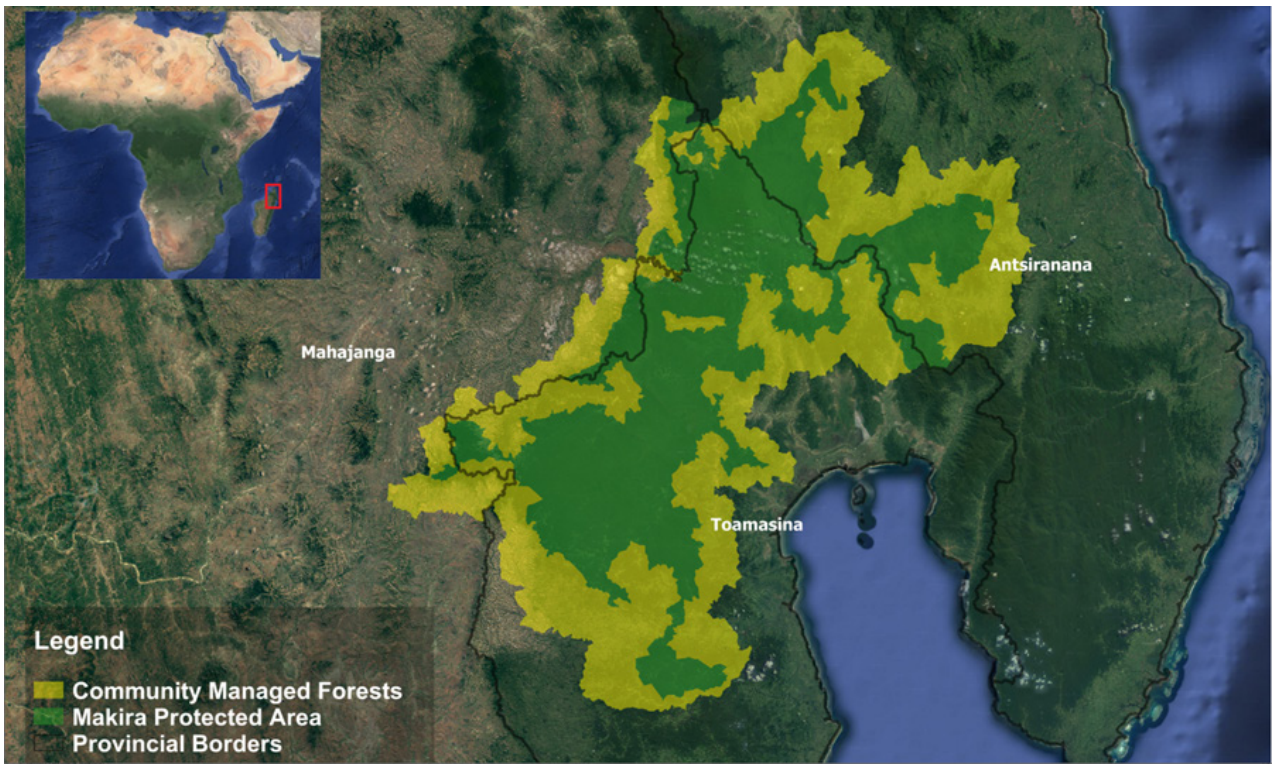
When state actors' power depends on the backing of corrupt elites rather than popular support and consent of citizens, policies and practices regarding access to and management of natural resources will favor the interests of such elites instead of those of the general population or the people living in the vicinity of these resources. It could be the case that resource extraction or exploitation is pursued by an elite few with little-to-no benefits going to local communities or society at large. Indeed, as was discussed in the previous section, it is precisely the prevalence of such circumstances that has fueled the turn to community-based approaches in anti-corruption efforts and environmental management—with some notable successes. Yet, as the case from northern Madagascar considered below will illustrate, community-based approaches can only go so far in circumventing the consequences of institutional capture. In contexts of institutional capture where elite interests in particular high-value resources or landscapes clash directly with those of communities, locally-focused CBNRM and anti-corruption initiatives will have a much more limited impact.

Case Study: Community-based conservation and rosewood logging in northeastern Madagascar

Madagascar provides an instructive example of the trend toward community-based conservation as a way to minimize impacts from corruption within governmental institutions. The country has witnessed a number of community-based conservation efforts over the past decades (Scales 2014, Reibelt and Nowack 2015, Harvey et al 2018). The success of community-based approaches in achieving good governance or reducing corruption in natural resource management, however, can be greatly undermined by dynamics of institutional capture. In this section, we look to the case of Makira Natural Park in northeastern Madagascar (Figure 1) to demonstrate how community-based approaches might be compromised by larger dynamics of corruption at the national level.

Established in 2012, Makira Natural Park is an iconic example of community-based conservation intended to foster good governance and transparency. Comprising a core protected area of 372,470 ha, Makira is the largest protected contiguous forest in Madagascar (Brimont et al 2015). It is a semi-private reserve managed by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and owned by the Malagasy government. It was established as a pilot project for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) and receives funding by generating carbon credits through avoided deforestation.[2] The park includes dozens of communities that have been designated to collectively manage 335,173 ha of land surrounding the core conservation area.[3]

Figure 1. Makira Natural Park in northeastern Madagascar, including its core protected area (green) and community managed forests (yellow). Source: https://makiraredd.wcs.org/



[2] Credits are certified through the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA) standards.

[3] Management rights and responsibilities are transferred to village-based associations called Communauts de Base (COBAs) or Vondron'Olona Ifotony (VOIs).

Given that a large number of people live within Makira's boundaries, community involvement is one of the main tenets of the park. WCS acts as a facilitator and manager, working with communities and the Malagasy government to establish contracts to manage the land. All interactions between communities and the government typically occur with WCS acting as an intermediary. For example, all government actors entering the park (federal officers, rangers, or environmental officials) are accompanied by WCS employees and get paid per diem by WCS for their trips in order to reduce the likelihood of bribes. Because of its support from carbon finance, Makira also has money to devote toward paying for community patrols and building community offices that house field reports and evaluations.[4] Consequently, Makira has been successful at reducing local-level corruption, such as rangers or environmental authorities soliciting bribes from community members engaging in illicit acts (e.g., slash and burn agriculture within park boundaries) rather than properly documenting the transgression and following established protocol for issuing penalties.

Yet, while Makira has demonstrated considerable success in reducing local-level corruption, this success has been overshadowed by wider national-level and even global dynamics that have come to impact the region. Since 2009, Makira and other parks in northeastern Madagascar have become the target of illegal logging triggered by increased global demand for a group of endangered hardwoods known collectively as "rosewood" (*bois de rose*). This particular group of precious hardwoods has become so valuable on global markets that many communities around Makira have become involved in illicitly logging the trees within park boundaries (Zhu 2017). In short, they joined the illicit trade rather than abiding by their land management plans with WCS.

Starting in 2009, when the logging boom began, through 2013, logging in Makira increased substantially, with 300 to 500 people transporting an average of three shipments of logs per day (Ratsimbazafy et al 2016). Some villagers participated in the rosewood economy directly through logging and trading, while others benefited indirectly by providing services to loggers and traders. Villagers surrounding the park also played a special role as "forest owners." Because of their local knowledge, some villagers were hired as guides to help loggers find trees. They were paid 20,000-50,000 ariary (USD 5-13) per day and, if considered "forest owners," they earned around 50,000 ariary (USD 13) per tree found (Ratsimbazafy et al 2016). These wages are of course small compared to the price of the timber as it travels down the supply chain, but still much larger than anything WCS can offer to local villagers for their conservation efforts.

Beyond encouraging communities to log rosewood rather than abide by their land management plans, the rosewood trade has played a fundamental role in institutional capture at the national level. Since 2009, only a small group of elite operators from the northeast have been permitted to export the wood (Global Witness and EIA 2010, Randriamalala and Liu 2010). By 2013 when the international trade in rosewood became restricted under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), overseas rosewood shipment confiscations indicated that the trade continued despite restrictions, likely through the channels of the same elite exporters. Earning what has been estimated at more than USD 1 billion in 2009 alone, these exporters have since leveraged their profits to become key political figures in the national government (Remy 2017, Anonymous 2018). After the country's elections in 2013, a number of rosewood operators were elected into parliament and ministry positions, where they may benefit from parliamentarian immunity. From their positions within the government, these exporters have lobbied to re-open the rosewood trade and have

[4] Although carbon finance funding has not reached the levels it was expected to be; see https://news.mongabay.com/2017/11/carbon-dreams-can-redd-save-a-yosemite-size-forest-in-madagascar/

also allegedly spread "rebel money" (*vola miodina*) in an attempt to destabilize the administration from within (Remy 2017, Anonymous 2018). The effect in northeastern Madagascar has been the continued logging and export of rosewood, despite clear prohibitions on logging within the region's protected areas. Community-based anti-corruption efforts have little possibility of stopping these wider dynamics of institutional capture at the national level.

Discussion: multi-level anti-corruption interventions and the vertical integration of social accountability

As demonstrated through the case of Makira Natural Park, enrolling local participation in natural resource management alongside strong international oversight (such as that provided by WCS) has the power to reduce certain local-level features of corruption, such as bribery by officials. In cases where national interests have a large stake in the resources or landscapes designated for community management, however, local empowerment efforts can prove extremely limited in reducing corruption and increasing good governance. The case of rosewood logging in Makira demonstrates such circumstances. Despite the establishment of community-based management around the park, institutional capture at the national level has enabled the proliferation of illicit logging and export, with many of the logs coming directly from this and other protected areas in the region.

The takeaway, then, is that resource management practitioners must carefully consider what stakeholders have an interest in the resources and landscapes targeted for management. Perhaps the land is a high biodiversity area, but not of high economic value at the national or international

Box 2. Political Economy Analysis

Political Economy Analysis (PEA): A structured approach to examining power dynamics and economic and social forces that influence development. PEA "involves reflection on foundational influences (such as history or geography); the impact of immediate events and actors (such as leadership changes or natural disasters); and the institutional framework (encompassing formal laws and informal practices) that shapes the behaviors and outcomes observed. … PEA investigates where locally driven opportunities for change may emerge and where constraints to such change may need to be addressed." (Menocal et al 2018) When applied to conservation projects in particular, PEAs provide a useful way to help understand the larger political context driving biodiversity loss and reflect on the theories of change underpinning the intervention.

Selected PEA resources for natural resource management and conservation practitioners:

- USAID Guidance: Thinking and Working Politically Through Applied Political Economy Analysis
- USAID Discussion Note: Thinking and Working Politically and Strengthening Political Economy Analysis in USAID Biodiversity Programming
- USAID Discussion Note 2.0: Thinking and Working Politically: Linkages and Lessons from Biodiversity Conservation
- USAID Supplemental Guide: Technically Strong and Politically Savvy - Enhancing Thinking and Working Politically When Practicing the Conservation Standards at USAID
- USAID Biodiversity planning How-to Guides based on Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (Conservation Standards)
  - Developing Situation Models
  - Using Results Chains to Depict Theories of Change
  - Defining Outcomes and Indicators for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

level. Then, community-based management efforts may help reduce corruption associated with local government actors. But if, on the other hand, the land contains resources that are the target of strategic national or private interests—likely due to considerable export value—community engagement alone will not suffice. In this case, a multi-level approach is needed. If the interests of community members and those acting at higher levels clash, empowering communities to manage their resources is likely to do little to minimize dynamics of corruption. Empowering communities to manage their resources and combat local-level corrupt practices must be paired with efforts to disrupt and dismantle national-level dynamics of corruption including institutional capture. There must be vertical integration of efforts to realize social accountability across scales (Camargo 2018, Fox et al 2016).

A multi-level approach to anti-corruption is a challenging option. At the local level, it requires all the elements of building community trust and inclusion that have made community-based natural resource management effective. Yet, at the national level, it also requires an explicit awareness of elite interests in the specified resources to be managed, as well as the higher-level political dynamics surrounding these elite interests. This means tackling head-on the national-level dynamics that most community-based approaches hope to circumvent entirely. In this regard, a project context or situation analysis should include mapping existing interests and potential conflicts among these (see Box 2), to structure interventions that will more effectively respond to real-life dynamics of corruption (Fritz, Levy & Ort 2014).

In addition to project-level efforts, national-level efforts to root democratic institutions, such as the rule of law, a healthy and vibrant civil society, a free press, a strong and independent justice system, and democratic culture generally (e.g. voting, the concept of public goods and of public service) will level the playing field, raising the cost of capturing the system. They offer a national-level focus that is not typical of community-based anti-corruption efforts. Together, national-level and community-based approaches comprise a holistic, multi-level approach to anti-corruption efforts that is much needed when it comes to certain high-value resources and landscapes.

Recommendations

To combat corruption in natural resource management, practitioners/policymakers should:

- Start with good context analysis: A PEA or similar analysis during the initial stages of project conceptualization or design can illuminate whether there are significant elite interests in the targeted resources or landscapes, as well as the presence and extent of institutional capture.

In conditions of **low institutional/elite capture**, where resources or landscapes are not of high political or economic value, such as a protected area with high biodiversity and mostly local resource pressures, practitioners/policymakers should:

- Be prepared to *surrender* some meaningful amount of decision-making power to local partners and community members given their knowledge of local circumstances. This should be both at the design and implementation phases and should be based on a participatory approach.
- Implement community-based anti-corruption projects grounded in local communities to help circumvent the potential corrupt influence of state actors and local elites (especially if third-party monitoring is possible with NGO or CSO partners).
- Establish communication networks that allow local people across jurisdictions to report environmental transgressions and suspicious or corrupt activities to higher-level authorities, where authorities are found to be supportive and capable of protecting potential whistleblowers.
- Help communities to build relationships with

local NGOs/CSOs, especially those focused on combatting corruption, support mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration, and assist communities to engage/partner with these organizations so as to increase their capacities and advance shared goals.

- Draw on the findings of the PEA to identify local authorities and community members who might be particularly helpful in communicating community ideas, needs, priorities, and challenges, and effective in conveying intervening actors' offers of support for combatting corruption and improving natural resource management.

In conditions of **high institutional/elite capture**, where elite involvement and institutional capture are pervasive (e.g., where there is intense national and/or international interest in a high-value landscape and/or its resources), in addition to the above practitioners/policymakers should:

- Design community-based anti-corruption projects with this broader context in mind.
- Integrate such efforts with wider interventions to strengthen democratic institutions at the national level, and/or multi-level interventions aimed at achieving the vertical integration of social accountability (Camargo 2018, Fox et al 2016).

When **program resources are too limited** to implement the recommendations for community-based anti-corruption programs mentioned above, practitioners/policymakers should at least:

- Start with a context analysis.
- Use a participatory approach to shape the community-based program.
- Support communities and local partners to create larger networks with regional/national CSOs and media (especially in contexts with high institutional capture).

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About Targeting Natural Resource Corruption

The Targeting Natural Resource Corruption (TNRC) project is working to improve biodiversity outcomes by helping practitioners to address the threats posed by corruption to wildlife, fisheries and forests. TNRC harnesses existing knowledge, generates new evidence, and supports innovative policy and practice for more effective anti-corruption programming. Learn more at tnrcproject.org.

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