

Blurred lines - Indigenous state rangers:

An exploratory assessment



Cover photos (clockwise from top left): A community ranger's wife looks for water near Elangata Enderit village in lower Loita, Kenya. © Ami Vitale / WWF-UK; A portrait of Musa, a community ranger. Elangata Enderit village in lower Loita, Kenya. © Ami Vitale / WWF-UK; Portrait of Musa with his father and son, Ryan aged three. Elangata Enderit village in lower Loita, Kenya. © Ami Vitale / WWF-UK; Gudjuda Ranger Dianne Smallwood out on the water near Bowen, Australia. © WWF-Aus / Leonie Sii; Rangers in Bhutan prepare breakfast. © Emmanuel Rondeau / WWF-UK

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We carried out this assessment under the auspices of the Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA). We are thankful to the URSA Steering Committee for their guidance and technical advice on improving the research design and content of the report. We are grateful to the reviewers who took considerable time in providing feedback and guidance on the draft of this document. We are thankful to Rangers Associations and URSA's partner organizations in different regions and countries for providing incredible support of coordination with rangers for interviews, translations and interpretations, without them it would have been impossible to conduct this research. We are grateful to the anonymous rangers and experts who participated in the interviews.

PROJECT TEAM

William Moreto, Richard Elligson, Rohit Singh and Hamera Aisha

SPECIAL THANKS

Chris Galliers, International Rangers Federation; Cliff Cobbo, WWF-Australia; Dilys Roe, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED); Dr. Jimmy Borah, Aaranyak; James Slade, Re:wild; Jose Louise, Wildlife Trust of India; Madhav Khadka, WWF-Nepal; Mahima Sharma, Wildlife Trust of India; Mike Appleton, IUCN WCPA; Mónica Alvarez Malvido, International Rangers Federation; Rupak Maharjan, Government of Nepal.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSAL RANGER SUPPORT ALLIANCE (URSA)

Supporting rangers today, conserving the world for tomorrow.

URSA is a global coalition of conservation organisations building a network of well-supported, professional, and capable rangers, who can act effectively as custodians of the natural world. We advocate for the creation of inclusive and effective teams at the forefront of protecting nature, people, and the planet. Our priorities include representation, recognition, and resources for rangers around the world. Join us at ursa4rangers.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND PROJECT TEAM

William Moreto

Will Moreto, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Central Florida. He has published extensively on wildlife crime, conservation crime science, crime prevention, and conservation law enforcement.

Richard Elligson

Richard Elligson is a doctoral candidate in the Criminal Justice Department at the University of Central Florida. His research interests include wildlife law enforcement, police culture, and police organizations. He has published in Crime and Delinquency, the International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice, and the Journal of Primary Prevention.

Rohit Singh

Rohit Singh has over 15 years' experience in wildlife law enforcement, anti-poaching and ranger related work. He is the Asia representative of the International Ranger Federation.

Hamera Aisha

Hamera Aisha has been working on wildlife conservation including on poaching and illegal wildlife trade for over 10 years in Pakistan.

CITATION

Moreto, W., Elligson, R., Singh, R., & Aisha, H. (2023). Blurred lines - Indigenous state rangers: An exploratory assessment (Rep.). Universal Ranger Support Alliance.

Published in January 2023

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	6
DATA AND METHODS	8
SAMPLING	8
DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURES	8
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS	10
BENEFITS OF BEING AN INDIGENOUS RANGER	13
CHALLENGES OF BEING AN INDIGENOUS RANGER	15
PERCEPTIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT & COMMUNITY AWARENESS INITIATIVES	19
DISCUSSION	20
REFERENCES	22

Executive Summary

Indigenous rangers play an important role in local conservation efforts given their ability to operate in distinct settings and communicate with different individuals in a manner that non-indigenous rangers may not be able to. However, little is known about the perceptions of indigenous rangers as well as how they perceive community relations and interpersonal relations with their colleagues and supervisors.

This exploratory study provided an initial assessment of indigenous state rangers' attitudes and experiences from multiple countries around the world. The target group for this study was government-employed Indigenous rangers who qualify for the definition of Indigenous Peoples provided by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The researchers used a combination of sampling strategies to identify participants following pre-defined criteria. A total of 21 study participants, mostly male, were included in the study, representing several countries around the world, including Australia, India, Nepal, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, the United States, South Africa, Mexico, Pakistan and Peru.

The findings of the study provide insights into the benefits and challenges of the engagement of Indigenous people in the ranger profession. This preliminary study has identified several benefits to including Indigenous people within the ranger workforce. These benefits include the ability to communicate, empathize, and understand local Indigenous communities. Indigenous rangers also assist and educate their non-Indigenous colleagues, which results in wider organizational dissemination of insight and knowledge of Indigenous customs, traditions, and knowledge. Several challenges, however, were also highlighted such as difficulties with enforcing laws and regulations in the very communities Indigenous rangers are from, as well as difficulties in recruitment and promotion. Participants also admitted to complications with having to do their job in the communities they grew up, or currently live, in. In other words, while there are important benefits in being from a nearby community (e.g., ability to speak the language, familiarity with the culture), significant challenges arose from the same benefits as well.

Future research should focus on developing a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous rangers, both government-employed (the focus of this exploratory study) and non-government. Importantly, future research should also investigate rangers' attitudes towards the definition and terminology reflected in the term "Indigenous". Indeed, throughout the course of this study (as well as other research), discussion on the appropriate use of the term was highlighted by several study participants.

The findings of the study provide insights into the benefits and challenges of the engagement of Indigenous people in the ranger profession.



Gudjuda Ranger Dianne Smallwood out on the water near Bowen, Australia. © WWF-Aus / Leonie Sii

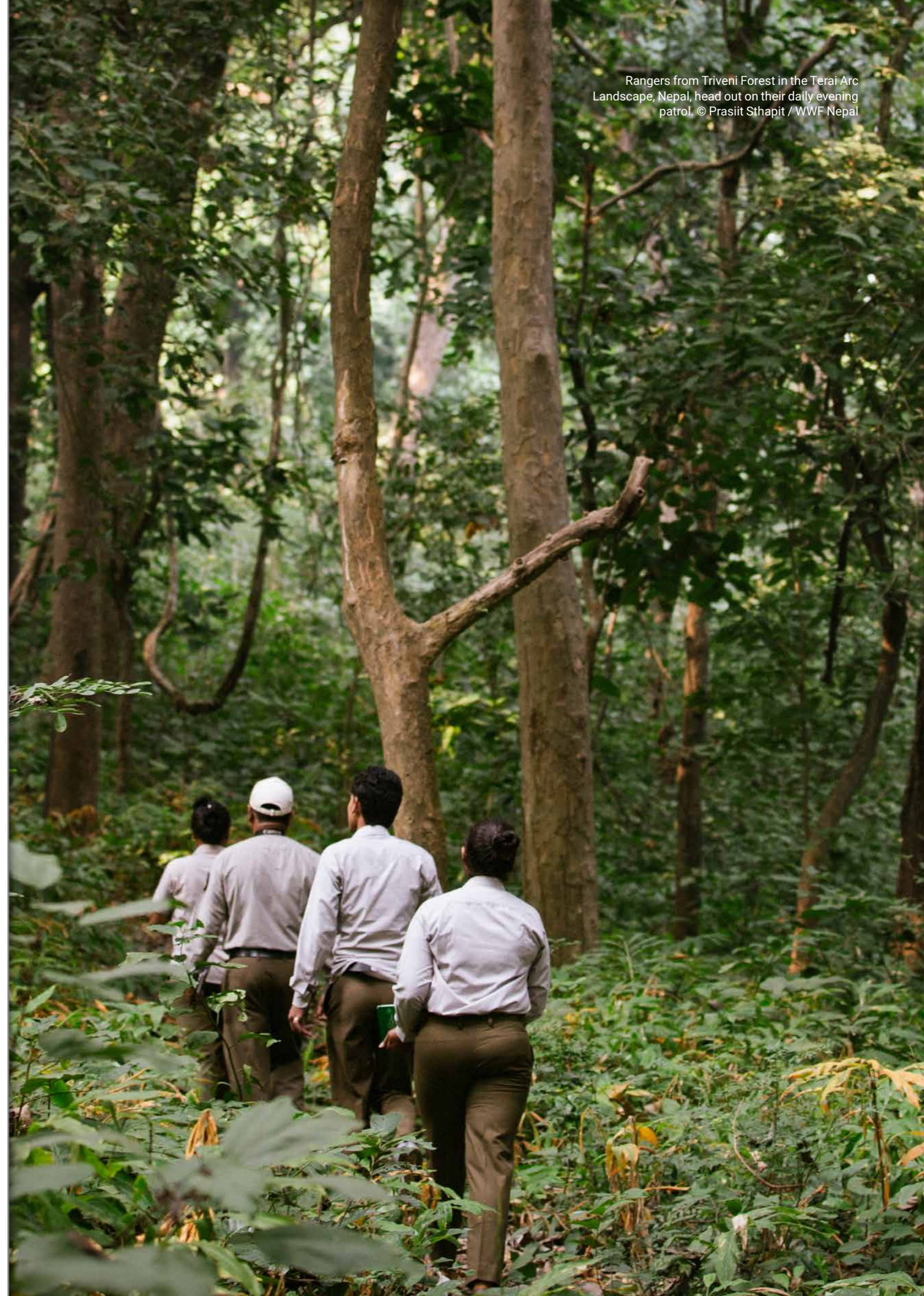
Indigenous rangers can play a considerable role in local conservation efforts given their ability to operate in distinct settings and communicate with different individuals in a manner that non-Indigenous rangers may not be able to.

Introduction and background

Increased recognition of the importance of the human dimensions of conservation science has highlighted the value of social science research (Bennett et al., 2017). Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have begun to explicitly acknowledge the importance and value of understanding the experiences and perceptions of those who are directly impacted by conservation initiatives, projects, laws, and regulations, including local communities and authority figures. Researchers have explicitly focused their attention on examining the perceptions of rangers (Moreto, 2016; Belecky et al., 2019) and community members, including Indigenous peoples (Coria & Calfucura, 2012). Indeed, the establishment and management of protected and conserved areas, and the need to incorporate, and support Indigenous peoples have recently been in the forefront of conservation debate and practice.

Largely lacking from this literature, however, is the explicit focus on the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous rangers (Wright et al., 2021). As individuals who may fulfill overlapping (and at times conflicting) societal, cultural, and legal roles and spaces, understanding their unique experiences may unravel important insight on the future of local conservation efforts. In other words, indigenous rangers can play a considerable role in local conservation efforts given their ability to operate in distinct settings and communicate with different individuals in a manner that non-Indigenous rangers may not be able to. Additionally, little is known about indigenous rangers as it relates to how they feel about their role and identity as rangers, as well as how they perceive community relations and interpersonal relations with their colleagues and supervisors.

Rangers from Triveni Forest in the Terai Arc Landscape, Nepal, head out on their daily evening patrol. © Prasiit Sthapit / WWF Nepal



Data and methods

Sampling

The target population for this study was government employed Indigenous rangers. While various definitions of Indigenous people exist, this study used the definition provided by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN)**.

According to the IUCN Indigenous Peoples can be defined as:

1. People who identify themselves as 'Indigenous.'
2. Tribal peoples who social, cultural, and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.
3. Traditional peoples not necessarily called Indigenous or tribal but who share the same characteristics of social, cultural, and economic conditions that distinguish them from other sections of the national community, whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions, and whose livelihoods are closely connected to ecosystems and their goods and services.

The researchers used a combination of sampling strategies to identify participants. First, the research team employed criterion sampling. To be included in the study participants needed to be 18 years of age, identify as a government employed indigenous ranger, or be a subject matter expert that works directly with government employed indigenous rangers. The identification of the first set of study participants was initialized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Ranger Federation. From here, snowball sampling was

incorporated to identify additional potential study participants. Notification and invitation to participate in the study was also sent to the World Ranger Congress participant list of the 9th World Ranger Congress held in Nepal in 2019. Finally, subject matter experts were also approached to participate in the study.

In total, there was **a total of 21** study participants in the study. Most study participants were interviewed via Zoom or WhatsApp, with four study participants providing written responses to the interview questionnaire. To help facilitate confidentiality given the relatively limited number of Indigenous rangers in some of the settings, we will provide minimal demographic information. Study participants were from several countries around the world, including Australia, India, Nepal, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, the United States, South Africa, Mexico, Pakistan and Peru. The majority of respondents identified as male.

Data collection and procedures

To collect data, the research team collaborated with representatives from the WWF to create a semi-structured interview guide. This collaboration was crucial, as it helped to ensure areas of interest were covered by the guide, questions were clear, and that appropriate terminology was used. Most data were collected online, via video conferencing software (e.g., Zoom and WhatsApp). However, due to the often remote and isolated working conditions of rangers, some participants could not establish a stable internet connection to participate in a virtual interview. To accommodate these rangers, the research team allowed participants to complete an e-mail version of the interview. Interviews lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. During interviews, the research team took field notes, as well as digitally recorded the interview. Following each interview, the recorded audio was automatically transcribed using a computer software, and subsequently edited for accuracy.



We separate our findings into the following sections: benefits and challenges as an Indigenous person as it relates to being a ranger, and their perspectives on law enforcement and community engagement initiatives.

Preliminary findings

We now turn to presenting the preliminary findings of the present study. As the focus of the current report is on the perceptions of Indigenous rangers as it relates to their distinct experiences as Indigenous persons working within the ranger profession, we separate our findings into the following sections: benefits and challenges as an Indigenous person as it relates to being a ranger, and their perspectives on law enforcement and community engagement initiatives.

Before we present this information, however, it should be noted that most respondents described their roles and responsibilities involving some level of enforcement, community engagement and education, and data collection and wildlife monitoring. This echoes prior research that has shown that rangers roles are multi-faceted and involve multiple responsibilities (Moreto & Matusiak, 2015). Study participants emphasized their role in educating and interacting with the local community, attending local meetings, and engaging and collaborating with community elders. One respondent, who was a community ranger and was largely responsible for community engagement and education, explained how they work with law enforcement rangers to assist them in their job, while also working with Indigenous communities to help inform them of laws and regulations:

We work very closely with rangers and the communities outside the forest. Indigenous communities, many of these people are dependent on natural resources. When those resources are used up, it's a problem. And the law enforcement rangers, we work closely with them. There are initial warnings for regular persons. That's how we are working closely. (Respondent 1)

Study participants emphasized their role in..

-  Educating and interacting with the local community.
-  Attending local meetings.
-  Engaging and collaborating with community elders.
-  Educating and engaging youth.

It should be noted that the respondent numbers mentioned in this section and their reflections correspond to unique codes that were randomly assigned to the rangers and experts who participated in the study.

Notably, some respondents commented on how community engagement and education strategies needed to be tailored for specific audiences.

Respondent 1 explained how they “have a team that do dramas” and how “they will dress up as animals or birds.” They added, how “the people learned a lot from these dramas; it was a big way to reach the community.” Moreover, respondents often noted that awareness strategies were targeted on specific groups of people, especially youth. Participants perceived youth as more open to learning about the importance of conservation compared to adults who were more set in their ways. Importantly, educating youth was not only seen as a means of sensitizing future generations to conservation concerns, but also as means of altering the behavior of parents:

[We have] local level meetings, and at those meetings we always use to raise awareness about wildlife, raising the importance of wildlife. We are here to help you (local communities). Those near our park area, we go there and make the students aware. Students can play key roles to make their parents aware. To not go in the park. To not kill the animals. Animals are not our property. One day students will grow up to an older age, and they can make other people aware. They play that role to make others aware. (Respondent 3)

Changing the minds of kids is important because you can't change the minds of adults. It's one of the main responsibilities. Sometimes he would take them to activities such as camera traps. He makes them honorific rangers. [...] he found a family that was hunting a small wild cat, he had the option of putting a fine to the family. He said I'm not going to do it, the fine is going to cost these people so much more, it wouldn't make sense. He explained to them, they should not be doing that, they are putting themselves at risk. He says he understands and puts himself in their shoes. They hunted the cat for example, because the cat ate the chicken. He invites them to not do it and focuses on environmental education. (Respondent 24)

Another participant described how recent efforts to expand the role of rangers beyond law enforcement had helped change attitudes and expectations of rangers in local communities. This was especially important given historical and generational challenges associated between rangers and local communities, as well as ensuring input was provided from community leaders. For instance, **Respondent 17** described how “regular meetings with elders and directors” were designed to “update them (elders) on program projects and to encourage their input in project outcomes”. As further supported by the following study participant:

The presence of rangers in the community, at the beginning, it was only to arrest people. If they found you, they arrested you. But now, the presence of rangers is not only for arrests, but to satisfy people doing local things. Working with local leaders, participating in local government activities. Understanding the mentality of the new generation. Some of the older people they understand quickly. They know that there is positive examples and positive change. Really there is a good change. (Respondent 9)

QUOTES FROM RESPONDENTS

“...he found a family that was hunting a small wild cat, he had the option of putting a fine to the family. He said I'm not going to do it, the fine is going to cost these people so much more, it wouldn't make sense... he invites them not to do it and focuses on environmental education.” (Respondent 24)

“One day students will grow up to an older age, and they can make other people aware. They play that role to make others aware. (Respondent 3)

“The presence of rangers in the community, at the beginning, it was only to arrest people...But now, the presence of rangers is not only for arrests, but to satisfy people doing local things...Really there is a good change.” (Respondent 9)

SELECTION OF QUOTES

RESPONDENT 9

Normally, when someone is sent to local communities, they are accompanied by us. So, we are always there, to translate, because of our presence, and the way that we translate, really there is not a problem. In case a new man goes there alone, it would not work. If they do not know the language, they need us to go together, then everything works well.

RESPONDENT 7

Point is that they understand what the expectation is, and what they value. If there are other rangers, they might not understand it. [...]

RESPONDENT 5

Because Indigenous rangers easily connect. We know the value of Indigenous people. We grow in the Indigenous community from inside. So, we know how they live in forest and everything [...]

RESPONDENT 9

We know their mentality, we know the culture, we know what to say, and what is the way we have to approach them. It is not difficult for us[...]

RESPONDENT 6

All the knowledge, if we put Indigenous people in conservation, then the conservation will succeed. People will have more support for conservation. Wildlife will benefit as well.

RESPONDENT 1

They don't understand the values that communities have for the forest. So, if [Indigenous] rangers are part of it, they can share it with other rangers. They discuss, and their perspective can encourage change. So, definitely, yes. It can [change] perspective of non-IP (Indigenous Person) rangers.

BENEFITS OF BEING AN INDIGENOUS PERSON IN THE RANGER PROFESSION

Benefits of being an Indigenous person in the ranger profession

Overwhelmingly, most respondents believed that the most beneficial aspect of being an Indigenous ranger was their ability to connect with local communities more readily. Study participants described how they “can understand the local language” (Respondent 3) and believed that Indigenous community members were likely to “listen more” to them (Respondent 4). Furthermore, the ability to empathize and understand the context in which Indigenous communities live in was another reason why “understanding the culture is important” (Respondent 7) and was helpful in “sharing and educating our own people” (Respondent 18).

Others echoed this sentiment as well when they offered:

Because Indigenous rangers easily connect. We know the value of Indigenous people. We grow in the Indigenous community from inside. So, we know how they live in forest and everything [...] The reason that it is difficult for non-Indigenous, they don't really understand their connection to nature. For example, the Indigenous community has been in the forest forever. And a really long time. It's easier for [Indigenous rangers] to understand that connection. They (non-Indigenous rangers) don't understand the context. (Respondent 5)

First, I am interacting and communicating with them, I am using the same language. They know that I am theirs. I came from there, before being ranger. I cannot really send them bad messages. They think I cannot really tell them the bad things, even if I am working, I belong to that community [...] Working with the community can be difficult, if not appropriate techniques are used. We know their mentality, we know the culture, we know what to say, and what is the way we have to approach them. It is not difficult for us[...]

Normally, when someone is sent to local communities, they are accompanied by us. So, we are always there, to translate,

because of our presence, and the way that we translate, really there is not a problem. In case a new man goes there alone, it would not work. If they do not know the language, they need us to go together, then everything works well. (Respondent 9)

So, rangers who might not be from the community, because we are Indigenous its easier for us to convince them. Point is that they understand what the expectation is, and what they value. If there are other rangers, they might not understand it. [...] We have a community people called [name of tribe] they have this traditional way of wearing headgear. It's mounted with a beak. It's a species under forest law. So, for a long time, you shouldn't be using these beaks. It's illegal to hunt them. But their community, it's a pride for them to wear it. So, one initiative we took is to create a fiberglass hornbill beak. We started showing it to villagers. If everyone starts wearing hornbill, if everyone wears it, no more hornbills. Instead let's provide you fiberglass and be beautiful. Also, the color will be brighter, etc. initially, we were uncertain about it. Then we started distribution. But it worked wonderfully. Now, its accepted. The same community now runs hornbill nest program. It's a provision where the tourists that visit the area, they donate and contribute money for adopting a hornbill nest. That money is paid to the villagers. The villagers what they do, is they look for nesting trees. They then report to us, and take responsibility of protecting that tree until the next hatching. They will protect and go around and make sure the tree has not been disturbed. That's why understanding the culture is important. Some rangers who are not from the tribe, they might not understand (Respondent 7).



Overwhelmingly, most respondents believed that the most beneficial aspect of being an Indigenous ranger was their ability to connect with local communities more readily.



Conservancy rangers Musa, Daniel, Solomon and WWF Kenya's Peter Loketeler on early morning patrol at Elangata Enderit village in lower Loita, Kenya. © Ami Vitale / WWF-UK

Additionally, Indigenous rangers described how they are able to also assist their non-Indigenous colleagues' rangers better understand the culture and values of local communities. Indeed, **Respondent 1** described how they would be able to help fellow rangers "faster than *organization training*."

They added:

They don't understand the values that communities have for the forest. So, if [Indigenous] rangers are part of it, they can share it with other rangers. They discuss, and their perspective can encourage change. So, definitely, yes. It can [change] perspective of non-IP (Indigenous Person) rangers.

Understanding and communicating with Indigenous communities was not limited to the need to effectively transfer knowledge regarding laws, regulations, and conservation-centered education, but was also important in incorporating insight from the communities as well. In other words, respondents described one of the benefits of being an Indigenous ranger was their ability to better integrate Indigenous knowledge and tradition:

All the knowledge, if we put Indigenous people in conservation, then the conservation will succeed. People will have more support for conservation. Wildlife will benefit as well. IP community with ranger will have more benefit and will benefit wildlife more. From perspective of conservation, we need Indigenous rangers [...] This traditional knowledge should be recognized. Provide the space for traditional knowledge in the profession as well. (Respondent 6)

— “

Indigenous rangers described how they are able to also assist their non-Indigenous colleagues' rangers better understand the culture and values of local communities.

Challenges of being an Indigenous Person in the Ranger Profession

Despite the various benefits identified by study participants, there were also a few challenges, including difficulties associated with enforcing conservation-related laws and regulations. Participants admitted to complications with having to do their job in the communities they grew up or currently live in. In other words, while there are important benefits in being from a nearby community (e.g., ability to speak the language, familiarity with the culture), significant challenges arose from the same benefits as well. As described by the following participants:

It's very easy for me to do law enforcement activities in other parts or other villages. In my town, it's very difficult for me to do law enforcement activities, because I actually know them. And they are looking for me. Looking for me to lead them. For me it's very difficult to do law enforcement for my community, in my town, in my ethnic group. I know them. We have close relationships, so that's why. They ask me to leave them [alone]. So, as a government officer, I have to do that work properly. If being too close to my ethnic group, I will not be able to do that legal role properly. (Respondent 3)

I come from tribal community. Our entire population has always been connected with nature. They have been hunting and gathering and have dependent on the forest for resources. [I now] enforce laws which keep the tribal people away from the same forest. This is difficult to convince them. Because these communities have always been connected to forest and dependent on forest. So, it can be awkward and difficult to convince the same people these are the forest laws. That is one interesting unique part. Very awkward sometimes. (Respondent 7)

Most challenging is the implementation of the laws, enforcing laws and protecting the culture, respecting the accountability of the tribe, that's the conflicting part. I am always sandwiched between them as I have told you because I have I've been a part of that tribe. I respect my culture. And then in my profession, I try to make the people understand the law. So that is a difficult spot. But really, [...] I go beyond the law to keep the things good. And my theory is save nine, let the tenth go. But, I have to save the nine. And in the future let those things go because we cannot disrespect the culture of the tribe. And unless, until and unless the people understand it from the floor of the heart. Law cannot protect anything. Because law is law. Unless it is from heart and soul it cannot be implemented. So, we try to, not by forcing them suddenly, but we try to understand them the consequence of using the wildlife and the environment and then minimize it. **(Respondent 2)**

There are certain things that, you know, on the Navajo reservation, you know, sometimes those tribal police will go out and, you know, what they call shadow dancing [...] tribal police will have to go out there and treat that as if it's a crime in progress. But it's actually a spirit that visits the Navajo homes. So, you have to explain that to somebody who doesn't quite understand that or believe that they think you're a little bit of a character, you know what I mean? **(Respondent 25)**



I come from tribal community. Our entire population has always been connected with nature. They have been hunting and gathering and have dependent on the forest for resources. [I now] enforce laws which keep the tribal people away from the same forest. This is difficult to convince them.

In general, study participants were mixed on whether they felt they were treated differently by their non-Indigenous co-workers. Some respondents believed that they had strong camaraderie with their colleagues and were treated fairly by their supervisors. Others described challenges associated with language barriers, and issues related to discrimination. It should be noted, however, that respondents who described situations of discrimination highlighted the intersectionality of their status as an Indigenous person and their gender (female):

*This is relevant to her being a woman and an indigenous woman. The seniors in the department, she feels that seniors and fellow rangers ignore them. Not listen to concerns and needs. Often times, she speaks about something and it's undermined. But it changes from individual to individual. I quite frustrating. Her way to cope with this is being alone. Cries her heart out. Then understands that her people would not want her to do this. She wouldn't want them to do that. Continue to support her community at her work. **(Respondent 5)***

*There has always been discrimination. For example, when covid happened, she does not feel that equality was applied. She is not sure if she feels that way because she is indigenous or because she is a woman, but she feels that she is treated differently by her supervisor. **(Respondent 12)***

Finally, study participants highlighted challenges associated with recruitment and promotion for Indigenous rangers. Namely, respondents commented on the difficulties with recruiting Indigenous peoples due to unrealistic criteria and education requirements.

Despite this, respondents did believe that higher levels of education were helpful for the job itself. As such, respondents commented on the need to bolster educational opportunities for Indigenous communities to meet basic requirements, while also ensuring that standards for the profession

SELECTION OF QUOTES

RESPONDENT 3

In my town, it's very difficult for me to do law enforcement activities, because I actually know them. And they are looking for me. Looking for me to lead them. For me it's very difficult to do law enforcement for my community, in my town, in my ethnic group. I know them. We have close relationships, so that's why. They ask me to leave them [alone]. So, as a government officer, I have to do that work properly. If being too close to my ethnic group, I will not be able to do that legal role properly.

RESPONDENT 2

Most challenging is the implementation of the laws, enforcing laws and protecting the culture, respecting the accountability of the tribe, that's the conflicting part. I am always sandwiched between them as I have told you because I have I've been a part of that tribe.

RESPONDENT 6

My concern is first we have to increase their education and bring them into higher positions. Make sure they are able to be promoted but also in a position to get promotions and be in a leadership role.

RESPONDENT 12

There has always been discrimination. For example, when covid happened, she does not feel that equality was applied. She is not sure if she feels that way because she is indigenous or because she is a woman, but she feels that she is treated differently by her supervisor.

RESPONDENT 5

This is relevant to her being a woman and an indigenous woman. The seniors in the department, she feels that seniors and fellow rangers ignore them. Not listen to concerns and needs. Often times, she speaks about something and it's undermined. ethnic group, I will not be able to do that legal role properly.

CHALLENGES OF BEING AN INDIGENOUS PERSON IN THE RANGER PROFESSION



Costa Rican ranger Sofía Chavarría Chinchilla speaking on the importance of leadership from indigenous people in her work at the World Ranger Congress 2019. The event was attended by over 500 rangers from 70 countries, 40-50% of which were women. The Chitwan Declaration was unanimously endorsed by all rangers in attendance. © Ranjan Ramchandani

were maintained. Moreover, higher levels of education would help Indigenous rangers in their professional aspirations and provide a pathway for promotion:

One thing is we can decrease these criteria, but sometimes it will be very low positions like frontline only. But even frontline need knowledge and all these things. My concern is first we have to increase their education and bring them into higher positions. Make sure they are able to be promoted but also in a position to get promotions and be in a leadership role. (Respondent 6)

Provide opportunities to have relevant education. They need a forestry degree. Making the access easier is important [...] There are two aspects. One is culture. No tradition of getting a higher education in Indigenous community. Expensive to pursue degree [...] Limited availability in the departments, in the senior level, requires a degree to join. (Respondent 5)

Benefits

Most respondents believed that the most beneficial aspect of being an Indigenous ranger was their ability to connect with local communities more readily. The ability to empathize and understand the context in which Indigenous communities live in was another identified benefit.

Challenges

Participants admitted to complications with having to do their job in the communities they grew up or currently live in. In other words, while there are important benefits in being from a nearby community (e.g., ability to speak the language, familiarity with the culture), significant challenges arose from the same benefits as well.

Perceptions of law enforcement and community awareness initiatives

Study participants recognized the value of community awareness strategies, particularly in comparison to law enforcement.

Perceptions of law enforcement and community awareness initiatives

Some study participants were asked their thoughts on the effectiveness of law enforcement and community awareness strategies. Once again, opinions were mixed, however, it was clear that study participants recognized the value of community awareness strategies, particularly in comparison to law enforcement. As illustrated by the following:

If I had to choose one thing, I would choose awareness. Actually, many people are unaware about the importance of nature and wildlife. That's why awareness plays an important role. That's why I think awareness is more important than law enforcement. I do not think we should avoid law enforcement. Law enforcement is needed in some cases for illegal actions. (Respondent 3)

Law enforcement: the place where I am posted now. They did not have a very good rapport. Because when they look at you as enforcement, there is a sense of hostility. The role of ranger is way more diverse. Enforcement is part of it, but then again reaching out to the community people. It might be different in other places. Because we come from same community, creating general awareness [...] It's not just enforcement, but also reaching out to the people. Dealing with human animal conflict. Creating a middle way. Where they are also supportive. We can't ranger properly without support. That is the way we should work. (Respondent 7)



But even frontline need knowledge and all these things. My concern is first we have to increase their education and bring them into higher positions. Make sure they are able to be promoted but also in a position to get promotions and be in a leadership role.

As shown in this initial study, future research is needed to better understand the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous rangers.

Discussion

The current exploratory study provided an initial assessment of indigenous rangers' attitudes and experiences from multiple countries around the world. Findings from this preliminary study have identified several benefits to including Indigenous people within the ranger workforce. These benefits include the ability to communicate, empathize, and understand local Indigenous communities. Additionally, Indigenous rangers can assist and educate their nonIndigenous colleagues, which results in wider organizational dissemination of insight and knowledge of Indigenous customs, traditions, and knowledge. Several challenges, however, were also highlighted including difficulties with enforcing laws and regulations in the very communities' Indigenous rangers are from, as well as difficulties in recruitment and promotion.

As shown in this initial study, future research is needed to better understand the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous rangers. Moreover, as this study focused on government rangers, future studies should explore non-government Indigenous rangers.

Importantly, future research should also investigate rangers' attitudes towards the definition and terminology reflected in the term "Indigenous". Indeed, throughout the course of this study (as well as other research), discussion on the appropriate use of the term was highlighted by several study participants. For the present study, this was best illustrated by **Respondent 13** when they said:

First, it's a political category. In my job, we use "Indigenous", but for other people it's not something they relate to. They prefer to be called native, aboriginal, or a tribe. It's a political category. All of these communities are recognized that they have different rights in the international level. And we have to fight for that. When communities have problems, we go to this international level to recognize our rights. Some communities may then identify as Indigenous because of the law. It means we are communities with a collective way of life, from previous conquerors in a lot of territories. We have our own culture,



Findings from this preliminary study have identified several benefits to including Indigenous people within the ranger workforce. These benefits include the ability to communicate, empathize, and understand local Indigenous communities. Additionally, Indigenous rangers can assist and educate their nonIndigenous colleagues, which results in wider organizational dissemination of insight and knowledge of Indigenous customs, traditions, and knowledge.



Liliana Alzogaray, a 29 year old ranger in Copo National Park, is standing in a field of native Chaco grasslands. When the park was formed her father became a ranger there. © Jason Houston / WWF-US

specific language, music, way of life. Specific cultural expressions and languages. And that is very broad, within that we are very diverse. One of the characteristics related to legal term, we do not have states. We do not have official states at the global level, and a lot of the times, we were under another country's rule. Another state took our territory, lands, and changed our way of life [...] Currently, now we have work with some projects that are not Indigenous. Understanding that all our communities, at the personal level, we are trying to talk about identity. That is very difficult, for some people like myself, the identity conversation began in my parent's generation. Other people are just now recognizing that belonging to a different culture is not bad. Understanding that we are all at different levels and in a different moment. There needs to be a recognition of how people recognize themselves.

The literature on rangers has increasingly grown in recent years and has expanded to better understand and reflect the various individuals who comprise such a diverse occupation. This study contributes to this overall goal, while also reinforcing the need for additional research.

References

- Belecky, M., Singh, R., & Moreto, W. D. (2019). Life on the Frontline 2019: A global survey of the working conditions of rangers. World Wildlife Fund.
- Bennett, N. J., Roth, R., Klain, S. C., Chan, K., Christie, P., Clark, D. A., Cullman, G., Curran, D., Durbin, T. J., Epstein, G., Greenberg, A., Nelson, M. P., Sandlos, J., Stedman, R., Teel, T. L., Thomas, R., Veríssimo, D., & Wyborn, C. (2017). Conservation social science: understanding and integrating human dimensions to improve conservation. *Biological Conservation*, 205, 93-108.
- Coria, J., & Calfucura, E. (2012). Ecotourism and the development of indigenous communities: the good, the bad, and the ugly. *Ecological Economics*, 73, 47-55.
- Moreto, W. D. (2016). Occupational stress among law enforcement rangers: insights from Uganda. *Oryx*, 50(4), 646-654.
- Moreto, W.D., & Matusiak, M.C. (2017). "We fight against wrong doers": Law enforcement rangers' roles, responsibilities, and patrol operations in Uganda. *Deviant Behavior*, 38, 426-447.
- Wright, A., Yap, M., Jones, R., Richardson, A., Davis, V., & Lovett, R. (2021). Examining the Associations between Indigenous Rangers, Culture and Wellbeing in Australia, 2018-2020. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18, 3053.

Rangers from Bhutan warm up by a fire after an evening patrol © Simon Rawles / WWF-UK

URSA

SUPPORTING RANGERS

TODAY.

CONSERVING THE WORLD FOR

TOMORROW.

JOIN US: [URSA4RANGERS.ORG](https://www.ursa4rangers.org)



FORCE FOR NATURE



ZSL
LET'S WORK FOR WILDLIFE

