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**EVALUATING THE EFFICIENCY OF DATA PROTECTION AND INTER-AGENCY
COLLABORATION IN THE BLUE RHINO TASK TEAM**

By

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Abstract

This study evaluated the efficiency of data protection and inter-agency collaboration within Namibia's Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT), a multi-agency enforcement initiative targeting high-level wildlife trafficking. Anchored in institutional theory and the collaborative governance model, the research examined how structural, normative, and relational factors influence secure intelligence management in a resource-constrained, high-risk enforcement environment. A qualitative design was employed, using a structured open-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to 31 BRTT-affiliated participants. Thematic analysis identified patterns relating to governance structures, institutional behaviours, communication systems, and inter-agency coordination. Findings indicated that while informal trust-based mechanisms supported operational agility, the absence of formalised data protection protocols, inconsistent institutional mandates, and unequal resource distribution undermined efficiency and long-term collaboration. Technical disparities and fragmented communication systems further impeded secure, real-time data sharing. Nevertheless, a shared commitment to conservation goals and emerging efforts toward institutional harmonisation revealed latent potential for more cohesive collaboration. Theoretically, the study extended the application of institutional theory and collaborative governance frameworks into the under-researched field of conservation enforcement in the Global South. Practically, it highlighted the need for targeted capacity-building, digital system integration, and trust-enhancing mechanisms. At the policy level, the study called for the enactment of a national data protection framework and the formalisation of inter-agency agreements to strengthen collaborative governance. By offering context-specific insights into the interplay between institutional structures, technological tools, and multi-agency coordination, this study provides a foundation for improving the effectiveness of conservation enforcement initiatives in similar contexts.

Keywords: Collaborative governance, institutional theory, data protection, inter-agency collaboration, wildlife law enforcement

Declaration

I hereby certify that this research is entirely my original work. The Harold Pupkewitz Graduate School of Business at the Namibia University of Science and Technology accepts it as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration. This work has never been submitted to any other institution for a degree or examination. I further affirm that all necessary approvals and consents were obtained to carry out this study.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my beloved son, Petrus Kapiya. May this work serve as a lasting inspiration for you to pursue your dreams with courage, discipline, and purpose. I also dedicate this thesis to the dedicated members of the Blue Rhino Task Team and its associates, whose tireless efforts in the fight against wildlife crime provided the foundation upon which this research was built.

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This thesis is as much yours as it is mine.

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Abbreviations

BRTT	Blue Rhino Task Team
MEFT	Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism
NamPol	Namibian Police
PRD	Protected Resources Division
NDF-SF	Namibian Defence Force – Special Forces
NamRa	Namibian Revenue Agency
RT	Rooikat Trust
IIU	Intelligence and Investigation Unit
IWT	Illegal Wildlife Trade
AWCT	African Wildlife Conservation Trust
FIC	Financial Intelligence Centre
C4ADS	Centre for Advanced Defence Studies
OPG	Office of the Prosecutor General
CDR	Call Data Records
INWCDBN	Integrated National Wildlife Crime Database of Namibia
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Wildlife crime has evolved into a highly organised form of transnational criminal activity, posing significant threats to biodiversity conservation, regional stability, and national security (Esmail et al., 2020; Karanja & Matsui, 2018). In response, many countries have adopted intelligence-led, multi-agency strategies to combat the illegal wildlife trade (IWT). In Namibia, the Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT), launched in July 2018, represents a flagship initiative formed through a formal collaboration between the Namibian Police Force (NAMPOL), the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT), and supported by donor agencies, including the Rooikat Trust. The BRTT functions as a dynamic, intelligence-driven enforcement unit focused on combating rhino poaching and trafficking. The effectiveness of the BRTT hinged on its ability to foster inter-agency collaboration, ensure timely intelligence sharing, and uphold robust data protection practices. Drawing on the expertise of its constituent agencies, the task team integrates innovative technologies, centralised coordination, and field-based intelligence to combat wildlife crime (Rooikat Trust, 2022). Nonetheless, as with many multi-agency models, BRTT is confronted with challenges such as institutional fragmentation, role ambiguity, and inconsistent data governance, which can undermine the operational coherence and long-term impact of its work (Ruijter, 2021; Voets et al., 2021).

The study is anchored in Institutional Theory (Scott, 2005), which provides a framework for examining how formal rules, norms, and institutional cultures shape agency behaviours related to data governance. Collaborative Governance Model supports the exploration of inter-agency dynamics, shared decision-making, and network accountability (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Voets et al., 2021). Additionally, Intelligence-Led Policing (ILP) (Carter & Fox, 2019) offers insights into how data-driven decision-making enhances enforcement effectiveness. The study also draws on emerging data protection principles (Weippl & Schrittwieser, 2024) and digital tools such as federated databases (Ruijter, 2021a) to assess how ethical and technological considerations influence information-sharing practices among BRTT. This study is timely and significant. While growing literature recognises the role of inter-agency collaboration in combating wildlife crime (UNODC, 2020), there remains limited

empirical evidence on how institutional arrangements and data protection mechanisms interact in operational contexts such as Namibia's BRTT. This study aimed to fill this gap by examining the intersection of governance, digital security, and law enforcement within a conservation framework. Namibia's experience offers a unique lens to assess how institutional norms and technological tools merge to enhance or hinder efficiency in multi-agency wildlife protection strategies. Against this background, this study investigated how institutional norms, inter-agency collaboration, and data protection practices shape the operational efficiency of the BRTT.

1.2. Problem statement

Despite growing efforts to combat wildlife crime through multi-agency enforcement teams, the operational efficiency of such collaborations remains constrained by fragmented institutional frameworks, inadequate data protection practices, and uncoordinated inter-agency mechanisms (Kirimi, 2022; Dubey, 2022). In Namibia, the BRTT, a multi-agency initiative tasked with addressing wildlife crime, faces critical challenges in balancing the need for real-time information exchange with the absence of a national data protection law and harmonised operational protocols (Eiseb, 2024). While informal coordination tools and relational trust have facilitated short-term responsiveness (Stöckl & Struck, 2022), these methods are not institutionalised and raise concerns around data security, sustainability, and equitable agency participation (Florek-Paszkowska & Ujwary-Gil, 2025; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

The BRTT, comprising law enforcement, environmental authorities, and civil society partners, operates within a multi-layered institutional structure, marked by diverse mandates, procedural norms, and accountability mechanisms. While the initiative has achieved notable success, such as increased arrests and deterrence of rhino poaching, ongoing issues with data handling, institutional coordination, and uneven resource distribution threaten the sustainability of its impact (Chisika et al., 2024; Rooikat Trust, 2022). International and regional literature underscores a persistent disconnect between policy design and practical execution within multi-agency enforcement settings (Phythian et al., 2024; Leone, 2024). Key obstacles include a lack of data interoperability, institutional mistrust, and ambiguous governance frameworks, which contribute to fragmented intelligence systems and inefficiencies in

response coordination (Ruijter, 2021; Voets et al., 2021). Furthermore, emerging data protection challenges, such as safeguarding sensitive information, addressing jurisdictional tensions, and adhering to evolving privacy legislation, complicate information-sharing across agencies (Weippl & Schrittwieser, 2024). Despite its strategic importance, the BRTT remains under-examined in scholarly research, particularly regarding inter-agency coordination efforts. Moreover, existing literature seldom captures the interaction between structural and behavioural factors in such environments, and few studies explore these dynamics within the Namibian context (De Schrevel et al., 2025). The lack of empirical research on how institutional norms, legal gaps, and inter-agency collaboration affect operational outcomes in wildlife enforcement thus presents a significant knowledge and policy gap. This study responded to that gap by investigating the efficiency of data protection practices and collaboration mechanisms within the BRTT, offering insights into the broader discourse on intelligence-led conservation enforcement in Southern Africa.

1.3. Objectives of the study

1.3.1. The main objective

To evaluate the efficiency of data protection and inter-agency collaboration mechanisms within the Blue Rhino Task Team in Namibia.

1.3.2. Sub-objectives

1. To explore how institutional norms, policies, and structures influence data protection practices in the BRTT.
2. To examine the nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration among stakeholders with the BRTT.
3. To identify factors that enhance or hinder the efficiency of data handling and inter-agency collaboration within the task team.

1.4. The research questions

1.4.1. Main research question

How efficient are the existing data protection practices and inter-agency collaboration mechanisms in supporting the operations of the BRTT in Namibia?

1.4.2. Sub-questions

1. How do institutional norms, policies, and structures influence data protection practices in the BRTT?
2. What is the nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration among stakeholders in the BRTT?
3. What factors enhance or hinder the efficiency of data handling and inter-agency collaboration within the task team?

1.5. Significance of the study

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance in the context of wildlife law enforcement and multi-agency governance. Theoretically, it contributes to the academic discourse on institutional theory (Scott, 2005) and collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008) by examining how institutional norms, organisational mandates, and governance structures influence inter-agency collaboration and data protection in a high-stakes law enforcement setting. Through its focus on the BRTT, the study adds empirical depth to existing literature by exploring how abstract theoretical constructs manifest in practice, particularly in the context of conservation and intelligence-led policing. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for enhancing the operational efficiency of inter-agency wildlife crime task forces. It identifies enabling and constraining factors in data sharing, role coordination, and institutional trust, offering policy recommendations to improve collaboration, secure data governance, and law enforcement outcomes. These findings have relevance for decision-makers within Namibia, such as the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, the Namibian Police Force, and supporting NGOs such as the Rooikat Trust. More broadly, the study also contributes to global efforts aimed at strengthening cross-sectoral responses to transnational wildlife crime. Its lessons may inform policy development, strategic planning, and operational design in similar multi-agency task forces across Africa and beyond. By addressing an important but underexplored intersection between data governance, inter-agency cooperation, and biodiversity protection, this study responds to the global call for integrated, secure, and adaptive models of conservation enforcement.

1.6. Justification of the study

The justification for this study lies in the growing global concern over transnational wildlife crime and the increasing reliance on intelligence-led, multi-agency approaches to combat it. Despite the establishment of the BRTT as a model for integrated wildlife law enforcement in Namibia, limited empirical research exists on how inter-agency collaboration and data protection are implemented and managed within such teams. Most available studies focus on outcomes like arrest or prosecutions, with insufficient attention to the institutional processes and information governance systems that support those results. This study is, therefore, essential to unpack how institutional norms and governance structures influence data handling and operational efficiency. The use of Namibia's BRTT as a case study offers a timely opportunity to explore a unique initiative in the Southern Africa context, one that combines law enforcement, conservation, and digital security in a single operational model. Given the global push for improved wildlife crime enforcement and digital accountability, the study's findings can be useful not only to Namibian stakeholders but also to international policy makers, law enforcement agencies, and conservation practitioners seeking to replicate or improve multi-agency task forces.

1.7. Delimitations of the study

This study is delimited to the operations of the BRTT in Namibia, with a specific focus on institutional norms, inter-agency collaboration, and data protection practices within the task team. It does not aim to assess the broader effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement efforts in Namibia as a whole, nor does it involve comparative analysis with similar anti-poaching initiatives in other countries. The research is further confined to selected participants from key stakeholder institutions that are directly engaged in the operations of the BRTT. These include members of the NAMPOL, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism – Intelligence and Investigation Unit (MEFT-IIU), Data Analysts, Investigators, Policymakers, Donors, Etosha National Park Management members, and Rhino Custodians. The sample is purposefully drawn to capture rich, insider perspectives from individuals actively involved in data handling, coordination, and operational decision-making. Moreover, the study adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on generating in-depth, context-specific insights rather than statistical generalisations. Only primary and secondary data that were accessible

and available during the designated data collection period were included in the analysis.

1.8. Limitations

While this study aimed to provide in-depth insights into data protection and inter-agency collaboration within the BRTT, it is subject to certain limitations. First, the study focused on a single case within Namibia, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other countries or regions with different institutional contexts. However, the findings are expected to offer transferable lessons that may be adapted elsewhere. Second, access to sensitive data and operational details may be restricted due to the nature of law enforcement and security operations, potentially limiting the breadth of empirical insights. The study mitigates this using triangulation with secondary documents and stakeholder interviews. Lastly, as qualitative inquiry is reliant on purposive sampling, the study reflects the views and experiences of selected participants. While efforts were made to include diverse perspectives within the BRTT, this study may not have captured the full complexity of all inter-agency dynamics or internal disagreements.

1.9. Scope of the study

This study is confined to the investigation of institutional norms, inter-agency collaboration, and data protection practices within the operations of the BRTT in Namibia. It specifically focuses on how institutional structures, policy environments, and collaborative arrangements among key agencies influence data handling and operational effectiveness in wildlife law enforcement. The study targeted personnel directly involved in intelligence sharing, data management, and inter-agency coordination, including members of NAMPOL, MEFT-IIU, Rooikat Trust, and affiliated partners. The temporal scope spans from the inception of Operation Blue Rhino in 2018 to its projected continuation through mid-2025. Although the study acknowledges broader conservation efforts in Namibia, it did not examine unrelated wildlife enforcement programmes or general biodiversity policy. As a qualitative study, its findings are context-specific and intended to provide depth of understanding rather than statistical generalisation.

1.10. Assumption of the study

This study was guided by several key assumptions. Firstly, it assumed that participants from the BRTT would provide honest and accurate accounts of their experiences, perceptions, and practices regarding data protection and inter-agency collaboration. It is also assumed that the institutional structures, policies, and collaborative arrangements described by participants reflect their actual day-to-day operations and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the study assumed that institutional norms and collaboration dynamics significantly influence the effectiveness of data handling and enforcement efforts within BRTT. Lastly, it was assumed that the research methods employed, particularly semi-structured interviews and document analysis, were appropriate and sufficient for capturing the complexity and contextual differences of the research setting.

1.11. Structure of the study

This study is organised into five chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction, including the background, problem statement, research objectives and questions, significance, scope, delimitations, assumptions, and the overall structure of the thesis. Chapter Two presents a detailed literature review, offering theoretical and empirical insights related to institutional theory, collaborative governance, and data protection within multi-agency law enforcement settings, particularly in the context of the Blue Rhino Task Team. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, including the research philosophy, approach, design, population, and sampling techniques, data collection methods, and measures of trustworthiness. Chapter Four presents the findings and analysis, drawing from primary and secondary data to explore emerging themes. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the results of the literature, concludes the study, and offers practical recommendations and suggestions for future research.

1.12. Conclusion

In summary, this study aims to investigate how institutional arrangements and inter-agency collaboration influence data protection practices within Namibia's Blue Rhino Task Team. By focusing on institutional theory and collaborative governance, the research will generate insights into how policies, norms, and cooperation dynamics contribute to or hinder efficient law enforcement operations in wildlife conservation. The findings are expected to contribute meaningfully to both academic literature and

policy reforms, strengthening Namibia's capacity to combat wildlife crime in an increasingly data-driven enforcement landscape.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter is a review of literature relevant to institutional norms, inter-agency collaboration, and data protection practices in wildlife law enforcement, with a specific focus on the BRTT in Namibia. Furthermore, it explores theoretical frameworks such as Institutional Theory and Collaborative Governance Model and examines key challenges and enablers of multi-agency collaboration, particularly in intelligence-led conservation enforcement. Like other African nations, Namibia faces growing pressure to strengthen both wildlife protection and data security mechanisms in its enforcement efforts. The BRTT was established to coordinate multi-agency responses to wildlife crime. The effectiveness of such teams depends heavily on inter-agency collaboration and robust data protection practices. This chapter aims to situate the study within the broader scholarly discourse and identify knowledge gaps that the current study intended to address.

2.2. Definitions

2.2.1. Data protection

Data protection refers to the set of legal, technical, and organisational measures ensuring confidential handling, secure storage, proper access control, and ethical sharing of sensitive information (e.g. forensic data, intelligence). The governance framework's structure includes these measures to enhance transparency, accountability, and operational integrity (Julakanti et al., 2025). In multi-agency enforcement contexts, robust data protection underpins trust and facilitates inter-institutional coordination.

2.2.2. Institutional norms

Institutional norms encompass formal rules (regulative pillar), shared codes of conduct (normative), and shared cultural beliefs (cultural-cognitive pillar) that shape organisational behaviour (Tribe, 2022). These norms guide how agencies structure data-access protocols, enforce confidentiality, and govern inter-agency collaboration (Kurniawati et al., 2025). In the context of the BRTT, norms arising from standard

operating procedures, hierarchical controls, and professional culture influence data governance practices.

2.2.3. Inter-agency collaboration

Inter-agency collaboration is defined as structured, or sometimes emergent, cooperative interactions among distinct government or partner agencies aimed at achieving a shared goal through joint decision-making, resource sharing, and mutual accountability (Khan & Moazzam, 2022). Inter-agency collaboration denotes the structured interaction between multiple institutions that jointly pursue a common enforcement goal (Bianchi et al., 2021). In wildlife crime enforcement, effective collaboration relies on trust, coordination mechanisms, and shared infrastructure to enable operational consistency and responsiveness.

2.2.4. Intelligence-led enforcement

Intelligence-led enforcement (also described as intelligence-led policing or law enforcement) was defined as an approach where empirical and analytical information guided strategic and operational decision-making (Leone, 2024). In the wildlife crime context, agencies collected and analysed data, often through community informants and IT tools, to anticipate, prevent, and disrupt poaching or trafficking networks. It relied on actionable intelligence to allocate resources efficiently and target serious offenders (Pizarro Choy, 2025).

2.2.5. Wildlife crime

Wildlife crime is described as the illegal collection, trade, transportation, or possession of wildlife or their derivatives in breach of national or international legislation. Wildlife crimes including illegal poaching, trafficking and trade in wildlife products, pose threats to biodiversity, economic stability, public health, and environmental governance. Illegal wildlife trafficking has exceeded \$20 billion annually and includes associated offences such as corruption, money laundering, and organised crime (Wyatt & Nurse, 2020; Canton, 2021; Kurland & Pieres, 2017). As reported by TRACIT (Trade, 2024), illicit trade was estimated to cause annual losses of up to USD 3 trillion to the global economy.

Enablers (*within this study*)

Enablers refer to factors that positively influence the efficiency of BRTT operations, such as leadership support, shared mission alignment, digital tool integration (e.g., Cellebrite, shared databases), and joint training that strengthen collaboration and trust.

Barriers or constraints (*within this study*)

Barriers or constraints include legal gaps (e.g., absence of national data protection law), inconsistencies in communication, capacity imbalances, delayed access to telecommunication data, and over-reliance on informal norms. These impede coordinated data sharing and constrain operational effectiveness.

2.3. Empirical literature**2.3.1. Wildlife crime and conservation challenges in Africa**

The African continent has witnessed a dramatic decline in its black rhinoceros' population due to poaching, with Kenya's black rhino population falling from 20,000 in the 1970s to just 300 in the early 1990s (Karanja & Matsui, 2018). Although numbers slightly recovered, illegal activities persisted. While Kenya provided a poignant example, Namibia also faced parallel challenges, including organised poaching rings and the need for multi-agency interventions such as the BRTT. Wildlife crimes evolved from opportunistic acts into militarised operations, often facilitated by organised criminal syndicates (Karanja, 2019). These networks exploited porous borders, limited enforcement capacity, and outdated data-sharing systems, making enforcement responses highly challenging.

Wildlife crime continues to pose a critical threat to biodiversity and conservation efforts across the African continent. Historically, countries such as Kenya experienced a dramatic decline in iconic species such as the black rhinoceros, whose population plummeted from approximately 20,000 in the 1970s to just 300 by the early 1990s due to rampant poaching (Karanja & Matsui, 2018). While modest recovery efforts have improved population numbers, poaching remains persistent, driven by high demand for rhino horn and ivory in illegal markets.

Namibia, though celebrated for its community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) and relatively successful conservation models, has also seen a rise in sophisticated poaching networks, particularly targeting rhinos and elephants. Organised criminal groups operate with transnational reach, using militarised tactics and exploiting gaps in enforcement and intelligence (Steiner, 2020; TRAFFIC, 2023). These syndicates leverage weak border controls, inadequate inter-agency coordination, and outdated surveillance systems, making detection and prosecution difficult (Dubey, 2022). Recent studies have highlighted that wildlife crime in Africa has evolved from opportunistic, localised poaching into a form of serious organised crime that intersects with other illicit activities such as drug trafficking and arms smuggling (Nellemann et al., 2021; EIA, 2024). This escalation has necessitated a shift towards intelligence-led enforcement and multi-agency collaboration. Task teams like Namibia's Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT) were established to address these challenges through coordinated enforcement, data-driven intelligence sharing, and enhanced operational synergy between wildlife authorities, law enforcement, customs, and intelligence agencies (WWF, 2023).

However, empirical findings from multiple African contexts reveal that despite the establishment of such task forces, effectiveness remains hampered by fragmented institutional mandates, capacity disparities among agencies, and a lack of integrated data protection mechanisms (Rademeyer, 2023; UNEP, 2024). These systemic weaknesses hinder the timely flow of intelligence and reduce the impact of enforcement efforts on the ground. There is growing consensus in the literature that strengthening data governance, institutional alignment, and trust-based inter-agency relationships is essential to dismantling criminal networks and ensuring long-term conservation outcomes (Ogada et al., 2023; USAID, 2022).

2.3.2. Institutional norms and data protection in law enforcement

Empirical studies have underscored the significant role of institutional norms in shaping the operational integrity of law enforcement, particularly in the realm of data protection. Institutional norms, which include formal rules, informal practices, and organisational culture, often influence how data is generated, stored, shared, and protected within and across security institutions (Chan & Logan, 2022; Cole, 2017). In jurisdictions with weak or ambiguous institutional arrangements, data governance

(Kuzio et al., 2022) tends to be inconsistent, thereby increasing the risk of breaches, inefficiencies, and manipulation of sensitive intelligence (Kilovaty, 2019).

For example, in a study conducted by Agina (2021) and Komna and Mpungose (2023) on southern African law enforcement agencies, it was found that inconsistent data protection protocols stemmed from fragmented institutional mandates, outdated ICT infrastructures, and resistance to digital transformation. These structural issues have often led to poor inter-agency data flows and duplication of efforts in investigations. Similarly, a regional investigation by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2022) revealed that the effectiveness of collaborative intelligence sharing in anti-trafficking task forces was largely dependent on the alignment of institutional norms between the participating entities.

In the context of wildlife crime enforcement, Kornelius (2024) and Meteti (2022) observed that formal protocols within elite enforcement units such as Namibia's BRTT were frequently undermined by informal practices, such as undocumented intelligence briefings and ad hoc communication. This led to challenges in ensuring data traceability and operational accountability, even when outcomes were successful. These insights were echoed in this study, where respondents described informal workarounds, including discretionary decisions and verbal exchanges, as necessary for agility but also risky due to their undocumented nature.

Institutional theory provides a useful lens through which these findings can be interpreted, suggesting that deeply embedded norms and routines often persist despite formal reforms or technological advancements (Scott, 2017). Marqueni and Quezada-Tavárez (2022) argue that when data protection policies are introduced without accompanying cultural and structural changes, implementation remains superficial. This was confirmed in the BRTT context, where encryption tools existed but were underutilised due to limited training, lack of institutional buy-in, or competing priorities.

Additionally, the study corroborates Eiseb's (2024) findings in Namibia, where weak institutional alignment on data governance exposed law enforcement agencies to legal and operational risks. Despite commitment to intelligence-sharing within the BRTT,

fragmentation of roles and policies hindered cohesive data protection. Ultimately, for data protection measures to be effective in such collaborative enforcement settings, they must be supported by aligned institutional norms, leadership commitment, shared protocols, and continuous capacity development.

2.3.3. Collaborative governance and inter-agency cooperation

Recent empirical studies reaffirm the growing necessity of collaborative governance and inter-agency cooperation in addressing multifaceted problems such as wildlife crime, cyber threats, and transnational illicit trade, issues that no single agency can effectively confront alone. While Ansell and Gash's (2008) foundational collaborative governance model continues to be cited, more recent research underscores the operational complexity of such collaboration in African contexts. Onyango (2023) stresses the importance of trust, shared objectives, and institutional alignment, particularly in law enforcement scenarios where jurisdictional boundaries and organisational mandates overlap.

In Namibia, inter-agency task forces such as the BRTT have become important case examples of how diverse agencies can coordinate to share intelligence, pool resources, and mount effective responses to environmental crime. However, as Mistry (2020) and Duggal et al. (2024) observe, such collaborations often contend with systemic barriers, chief among them inconsistent communication tools, capacity asymmetries, and conflicting institutional priorities. Empirical research by Mogomotsi et al. (2021) on transboundary anti-poaching units and Baruti (2018) on public security in the SADC region highlights that while formal mechanisms (e.g., Memoranda of Understanding) are foundational, the strength of informal interpersonal networks, such as trust among officers and shared training, plays a far greater role in achieving tactical success.

Nambisan and George (2024) further contend that enabling structures such as integrated databases, real-time communication platforms, and cross-institutional leadership forums are critical to sustaining such cooperation. Without them, organisations are prone to fragmentation, inefficiency, and duplication of effort. The literature thus converges on the notion that collaborative governance must be

underpinned not just by formal institutional arrangements, but also by relational and cultural alignment.

Findings from this study of the BRTT align closely with these scholarly observations. While the team exhibited high commitment to collaborative enforcement, the effectiveness of inter-agency cooperation was constrained by structural and cultural misalignments. Participants reported that the absence of a national data protection framework led to inconsistent practices across agencies. Formal institutional norms provided operational oversight but introduced rigidity and delays, while informal practices such as verbal briefings and undocumented data exchanges, though enabling agility, posed significant risks to data traceability and security. This duality echoes the work of Kaiser et al. (2021) and Dubey (2022), who observed similar tensions between formal accountability and informal discretion in data-sharing partnerships.

Moreover, despite the presence of structured collaboration protocols, institutional tensions occasionally surfaced within BRTT operations. These mirrored challenges were documented by Kornelius (2024) and Meteti (2022), who found that in Namibian wildlife protection efforts, unclear reporting lines and overlapping mandates between agencies such as law enforcement and conservation bodies resulted in operational friction. The prevalence of informal coordination strategies, while effective in the short term, often led to accountability gaps, especially during joint operations, where roles and responsibilities were not clearly delineated.

Drawing on institutional theory, these findings further support the argument that collaborative governance is not merely about structural co-location or policy harmonisation, but also about continuous negotiation, mutual accountability, and the cultivation of shared meaning among actors (Sandhu & Kulik, 2019; Scott, 2017). Without a unified institutional culture and shared digital infrastructure, collaboration risks becoming ad hoc and unsustainable. Ultimately, the effectiveness of inter-agency cooperation within the BRTT, and similar enforcement settings, depends not only on operational mandates and resources but also on the strength of institutional synergy, leadership commitment, and shared ethical practices.

2.3.4. Factors influencing efficiency in multi-agency enforcement

2.3.4.1. Structural enablers and operational constraints

Efficiency in inter-agency collaboration is shaped by a complex interplay of legal, technological, and institutional structures. Within the context of wildlife crime enforcement, especially in African settings, empirical studies highlight the need for harmonised legislation, secure digital infrastructure, and well-defined operational protocols as foundational elements for success (Leone, 2024; Jin & Li, 2023). Yet, these structural enablers are often absent or inconsistently applied, resulting in fragmented responses and duplicated efforts (Bhanye, 2025; De Schrevel et al., 2025). For example, incompatible data formats and the absence of real-time sharing platforms hinder joint action and delay intelligence dissemination. In the Namibian context, Kornelius (2024) notes that limited interoperability between agencies and undefined reporting lines caused operational bottlenecks, despite a shared commitment to wildlife conservation.

2.3.4.2. Behavioural dynamics and institutional culture

Beyond formal systems, behavioural factors play a critical role in shaping collaborative efficiency. Leadership engagement, shared values, and a sense of common mission enhance trust and reduce friction across institutional boundaries (Dubey, 2022; Nambisan & George, 2024). Studies in Uganda and Botswana demonstrate that inter-agency units with strong top-down leadership, routine joint capacity building, and trust-based cultures outperformed loosely connected networks (Mogomotsi et al., 2021). However, where informal communication dominates in the absence of defined procedures, the risk of ambiguity, selective enforcement, and accountability gaps increases (Bhanye, 2025).

2.3.4.3. The role of digital tools and data protocols

Technological innovation is central to improving the efficiency of collaborative enforcement, particularly through tools such as mobile data apps, secure communication dashboards, and cloud-based analytics (Komna & Mpungose, 2023; Florek-Paszkowska & Ujwary-Gil, 2025). Nevertheless, such tools must be embedded within robust policy frameworks and supported by organisational readiness. Without proper governance, even advanced platforms remain underutilised. In Namibia,

Kornelius (2024) observed that the uneven rollout of digital tools across agencies led to fragmented data handling and diminished response times, problems compounded by inconsistent digital policies and inadequate safeguards.

2.3.4.4. Recommendations for enhancing efficiency

To address the dual challenges of structure and behaviour, scholars recommend formalising collaboration through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), establishing centralised coordination units, and institutionalising regular joint training and review meetings (Leone, 2024; Ruijter, 2021). Furthermore, the uptake of federated databases, allowing decentralised access while preserving data sovereignty, has been proposed to reconcile the need for secure collaboration with operational autonomy. However, these systems require not only technical infrastructure but also leadership buy-in and a reformed legal environment to function effectively.

2.3.4.5. Implications for the BRTT context

The findings from this body of literature directly inform the analysis of BRTT's operational efficiency in Namibia. Similar to other African enforcement networks, BRTT's collaborative structure was challenged by misaligned data practices, informal communication norms, and inconsistent leadership engagement. Although a shared mission, curbing wildlife trafficking, provided motivational unity, systemic barriers such as unclear mandates, inadequate training, and capacity disparities hindered sustained progress. These realities affirm the broader scholarly consensus that sustainable efficiency in multi-agency collaboration requires a multidimensional strategy encompassing legal harmonisation, digital integration, capacity development, and behavioural alignment.

2.3.5. Data protection and technology in multi-agency enforcement

Technological advances transformed how enforcement agencies collect, process, and share data. Tools such as real-time surveillance, geospatial mapping, and cloud-based analytics enabled more proactive, intelligence-led enforcement (Carter & Fox, 2019; Leone, 2024). However, the increased digitisation of sensitive information also introduced new vulnerabilities, including cybersecurity threats and data breaches. These risks necessitated robust data protection frameworks involving encryption,

access controls, and data anonymisation techniques (Weippl & Schrittwieser, 2024). Federated database systems emerged as a promising solution to the tension between data sovereignty and collaboration. Such systems enabled agencies to retain control of their data while allowing secure access for partner institutions through query-based sharing (Ruijter, 2021). When combined with social network analysis (SNA), these systems offered an effective means of mapping trafficking networks while protecting data integrity. In the case of BRTT, the adoption of such systems was constrained by disparities in technical infrastructure and inconsistent digital policies across agencies. The BRTT context in Namibia presented a valuable test case for such innovations. In the case of BRTT, the adoption of such systems was constrained by disparities in technical infrastructure and inconsistent digital policies across agencies. Inadequate safeguards could lead to operational risks, compromised safety, and diminished public trust.

2.3.6. Challenges to collaboration in conservation law enforcement

Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of collaboration, real-world implementation often encountered numerous obstacles. Institutional mistrust was a consistent barrier, particularly in systems where agencies traditionally operated in silos. Such recurring barriers validated the need for a study that dissected the BRTT's collaborative and data management mechanisms. Unclear roles, lack of joint training, and non-integrated systems further weakened collective responses (Voets et al., 2021). Conservation enforcement introduced additional challenges, including political interference, limited funding, and remote deployment settings. In many African countries, wildlife crimes were increasingly linked to organised criminal networks, requiring coordinated and intelligence-led approaches (Esmail et al., 2020).

However, the absence of formal data-sharing agreements or harmonised operating procedures frequently resulted in fragmented enforcement. Ruijter (2021) found that agencies were often reluctant to share intelligence due to fears of data misuse, loss of jurisdictional control, or reputational risk. Such dynamics led to the inefficient use of resources and duplicated efforts. These problems were specifically relevant to the BRTT, which, despite operational success, remained vulnerable to structural and coordination-related weaknesses. These challenges are not only persistent but directly relevant to the operational reality of the BRTT. The recurring issues of

institutional mistrust, fragmented data systems, and the absence of harmonised protocols have tangible implications for the task team's efficiency in combating wildlife crime.

2.3.7. The Blue Rhino Task Team: A contextual review

Operation Blue Rhino was launched in 2018 to respond to escalating rhino poaching in Namibia. It represented a formal collaboration between NAMPOL's Protected Resources Division and MEFT's Intelligence and Investigation Unit. The Rooikat Trust provided crucial logistical and financial support. The initiative aimed to investigate wildlife crimes, ensure prosecution, and promote data-driven enforcement (Rooikat Trust, 2022). What made Blue Rhino distinctive was its adaptive, intelligence-led model. Unlike traditional models, BRTT's intelligence-led framework aligned closely with ILP principles (Carter & Fox, 2019), yet still encountered operational bottlenecks tied to data interoperability. It operated with shared vehicles, joint personnel, and integrated data platforms. Emphasis was placed on critical thinking, evidence-based decision-making, and clear accountability. Nonetheless, challenges remained in areas such as system interoperability, data security, and equitable resource sharing. The sensitivity of wildlife intelligence and the use of diverse technologies highlighted the importance of well-defined data protection frameworks and structured collaboration.

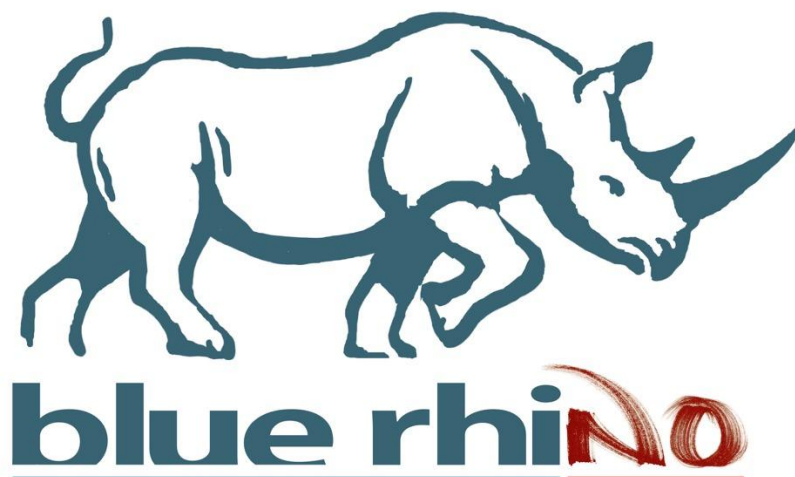


Figure 1: Blue Rhino Task Team Logo

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework formed the fundamental structure of this study, serving as the cornerstone upon which the research was built and the lens through which the complexities of the research objectives were addressed. In the specific context of this study, two complementary theoretical perspectives, Institutional Theory and the Collaborative Governance Model, were employed to guide the analysis. These frameworks enabled a deeper understanding of how institutional arrangements and inter-agency dynamics influenced data protection and collaborative enforcement mechanisms within the BRTT in Namibia. Their integration allowed the study to interrogate both the structural and relational dimensions that shaped the functioning and efficiency of BRTT in combating wildlife crime.

2.4.1. Institutional theory

Building on this foundation, institutional theory, as advanced by Scott (2005), offered a powerful lens for analysing how institutions, through formal rules, informal norms, and shared cultural-cognitive beliefs, shape organisational practices and decision-making processes. In complex multi-agency collaborations such as the BRTT, institutional theory was particularly valuable in explaining the behavioural patterns and organisational dynamics that arose when agencies with different mandates and operational cultures converged.

Institutional theory has long been regarded as a key framework for explaining organisational behaviour in complex institutional environments. It postulated that institutions, defined as enduring rules, practices, and structures, constrain and guide action by shaping expectations and legitimising certain forms of conduct (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008). This theory was particularly suited for analysing multi-agency collaborations such as the BRTT, where diverse organisations such as the NAMPOL and MEFT operate under distinct mandates but are required to converge for a common enforcement purpose. Furthermore, David et al. (2019) argue that institutional practices become “taken for granted” over time, even when more efficient or secure alternatives exist. This phenomenon may be particularly salient in BRTT, where legacy systems, resistance to change, or a lack of cross-training inhibit innovation and integration. Therefore, using institutional theory enabled this study to critically assess

how entrenched practices, bureaucratic inertia, and inter-agency politics affect the operationalisation of data protection and collaboration within BRTT.

Scott's (2005) framework, which distinguishes between regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars, has been frequently used to examine how institutional pressures shaped organisational responses. The regulative pillar focused on rules, laws, and enforcement mechanisms; the normative pillar addressed values and standards of appropriateness; and the cultural-cognitive pillar referred to the shared understandings and taken-for-granted beliefs that guided action. These pillars were especially relevant to BRTT, as the task team operated at the intersection of formal law enforcement and conservation priorities, each shaped by distinct institutional logics.

According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), organisations operating in the same field often become more similar over time due to institutional isomorphism, which takes three forms: coercive (driven by legal or regulatory pressure), mimetic (emulating successful peers under uncertainty), and normative (stemming from shared professional standards). In the context of BRTT, such isomorphism explained the gradual alignment of data protection practices across agencies, even when initial approaches diverged. However, Aksom et al. (2020) cautioned that recent adaptations of institutional theory, which increasingly emphasised agency, change, and heterogeneity, might dilute its predictive power. They argued that the original theory's strength lay in its ability to explain tendencies toward stability and homogeneity, a perspective particularly useful for analysing how BRTT institutions conformed to external expectations and pressures, even amidst reform.

Kauppi (2022) similarly highlighted that isomorphism enhanced legitimacy, which was vital for public agencies like NAMPOL and MEFT operating under public scrutiny and donor oversight. Organisations pursued legitimacy by adopting practices perceived as socially acceptable, including secure data handling and collaborative governance structures, thereby reinforcing institutional convergence. Yet, Galleli and Amaral (2025) reminded scholars that institutional processes were not unidirectional: actors not only responded to institutional constraints but also reshaped them. In BRTT, this dynamic might manifest in how mid-level operatives or external funders influenced the

evolution of protocols through day-to-day adaptations or the introduction of new technologies. Aslina (2022) also pointed out that institutional theory encompasses a variety of sub-theories, such as institutional logics and institutional work, which at times overlap or conflict. These tensions were particularly visible in practical contexts like the BRTT, where actors had to balance competing logics of law enforcement, conservation, and donor accountability. The study of BRTT, therefore, required recognising such tensions while focusing on the dominant institutional pressures that drove policy and practice convergence.

Furthermore, Mahmud (2017) demonstrated the utility of institutional theory in analysing public policy processes, especially in agenda setting and policy implementation. Within BRTT, institutional theory helped to explain how data governance and collaboration protocols were not merely technical choices but were shaped by the institutional priorities and policy agendas of key stakeholders. For example, MEFT's conservation agenda might prioritise transparency and community involvement, while NAMPOL's mandate could necessitate secrecy and rapid enforcement. These institutional orientations affected not only how data were protected but also how collaboration was negotiated. Finally, Rudko et al. (2025) underscored the potential for applying institutional theory to contemporary technologies, including artificial intelligence. While AI was not a primary concern of BRTT, their insight that technology itself could become an institutional force was relevant. In the BRTT context, emerging technologies such as federated databases or surveillance tools were shaped by institutional arrangements but could also reshape collaboration and data protection practices in unforeseen ways. In sum, Institutional Theory provided a comprehensive framework for examining how entrenched practices, structural mandates, and inter-organisational norms shaped the way BRTT managed data and collaborated across boundaries. The theory's emphasis on stability, legitimacy, and isomorphism offered predictive and explanatory power that was critical to understanding why certain practices persisted, even in the face of reform or innovation. At the same time, its more recent adaptations acknowledge the potential for agency and change, thus enabling a subtle exploration of how BRTT institutions both upheld and challenged established norms in the enforcement of wildlife crime.

2.4.2. Criticism of Institutional Theory

While Institutional Theory provides valuable insights into how organisations conform to social norms, rules, and expectations, it is not without its criticisms. One of the major critiques is its overemphasis on isomorphism and organisational homogeneity, often at the expense of agency, innovation, and strategic behaviour (Aksom & Tymchenko, 2020).

Early formulations of the theory, particularly by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), focused predominantly on how coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures led organisations to become increasingly similar over time in pursuit of legitimacy. However, this focus was later challenged for lacking explanatory power in dynamic environments where organisations exhibited heterogeneity and change. Scholars such as Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) argue that Institutional Theory underplays the role of institutional entrepreneurs, actors who intentionally disrupt established norms and structures to introduce new practices. Similarly, the theory's tendency to describe institutional processes as self-reinforcing and path-dependent often fails to account for how radical transformation occurs, particularly in complex, rapidly changing sectors such as conservation enforcement or digital governance (Galleli & Amaral, 2025; Rudko et al., 2025).

Additionally, Aslina (2022) pointed out the theoretical fragmentation within Institutional Theory, noting the proliferation of sub-theories, such as institutional logics, institutional work, and institutional entrepreneurship, that sometimes contradict each other, thereby undermining coherence and empirical testability. Critics also argue that Institutional Theory provides limited guidance for practical application, especially in contexts like the Global South, where formal institutions were often weak or evolving (Rifat, 2017). In response to these limitations, scholars called for a more integrative approach that combined institutional pressures with agency, context, and innovation. This includes recognising the interplay between institutional structures and individual actors, as well as examining how power dynamics, resistance, and unintended consequences shaped institutional evolution (Kauppi, 2022; Galleli & Amaral, 2025).

Scholars such as Aksom et al. (2020) argue that modern extensions of the theory overemphasise agency and change, thereby weakening its predictive power. Earlier

formulations of the theory have been valued for their ability to explain the tendency towards organisational conformity and equilibrium, whereas more recent versions lacked empirical clarity and theoretical boundaries. Other critics, such as Rudko et al. (2025) and Aslina (2022), noted that institutionalism struggled to capture innovation, resistance, or transformation, factors that were increasingly relevant in dynamic, technology-driven environments such as law enforcement. Despite these limitations, institutional theory remains valuable for this study because it offers insights into entrenched institutional practices, bureaucratic inertia, and fragmented policy environments that continues to shape inter-agency collaboration and data handling within the BRTT. It provides a structural lens through which to analyse the deeper constraints on institutional behaviour and information-sharing norms across Namibia's wildlife crime enforcement ecosystem.

2.4.3. Collaborative Governance Model

The Collaborative Governance Model, introduced by Ansell and Gash (2008) and later refined by Emerson et al. (2012), served as a complementary lens through which the study analysed inter-agency cooperation, shared accountability, and joint decision-making within BRTT. It was especially pertinent in addressing complex, cross-sectoral challenges such as wildlife crime, where no single institution possessed the authority, resources, or expertise to act independently. Recent scholarship continued to validate and refine the model's application in governance and conservation contexts. Collaborative governance refers to the arrangements where public agencies, and sometimes private and civil society actors, engage in consensus-oriented, participatory processes to address common problems (Bianchi et al., 2021). This model was particularly relevant to the BRTT, which brought together the Namibian Police Force, the MEFT, and private funders such as the Rooikat Trust. The model emphasises starting conditions (trust, power imbalances, institutional capacity), institutional design (rules and protocols), and collaborative process dynamics (shared goals, communication, leadership). In the BRTT context, these dimensions helped explain how agencies navigated structural differences, overlapping mandates, and divergent accountability mechanisms to pursue a unified enforcement strategy.

Gash (2022) emphasised the importance of clarity in roles, leadership, and accountability. These findings resonated with theoretical mechanisms identified by

Ansell and Gash (2008): starting conditions (e.g., trust and power distribution), institutional design (i.e., rules of engagement), facilitative leadership, and collaborative process dynamics. Anthony Jnr (2022) introduced another dimension by analysing governance mechanisms in distributed ledger technologies (DLT). Anthony noted that DLT governance models distributed decision-making authority across stakeholders through algorithmic consensus. Although not directly applied to BRTT, this indicated the potential for innovative, technology-supported collaborative governance structures. It suggested ways in which shared data protocols and transparent audit mechanisms could enhance trust and accountability within organisations, a concept that aligned with BRTT's need for secure, interoperable data sharing. Nevertheless, collaborative governance was not without its challenges.

Studies highlighted systemic barriers, including power asymmetries, information hoarding, role ambiguity, and technology gaps. For example, Cusack et al. (2022) found that unclear rules and insufficient facilitation led to decision-making gridlock. Similarly, Bianchi and Nasi (2018) noted that collaborations faltered when participatory tools failed to mediate stakeholder differences. Gash (2022) echoed these concerns, warning that decision-making can become stifled if the collaborative process lacks clear structure and strategic impetus. Studies of wildlife enforcement reinforced these dynamics. For instance, analysis of cross-agency task forces in Kenya demonstrated that multi-stakeholder coordination significantly improved arrests and prosecutions, but only when supported by trust, shared objectives, and clear leadership (UNODC, 2020; Karanja, 2019). However, conditions such as hierarchical cultures, siloed data systems, and operational secrecy continued to hinder meaningful collaboration (Voets et al., 2021; Ruijter, 2021). The model posits four key dimensions underpinning effective collaboration: starting conditions (trust levels, power dynamics), institutional design (formal rules of engagement), facilitative leadership, and collaborative process (deliberation, joint decision-making) (Ullah & Kim, 2020).

Critically, recent literature has also cautioned against treating collaboration as inherently beneficial. Jalal (2023) emphasises that inequitable power relations or hidden agendas could compromise legitimacy and performance. This concern was echoed in Swedish large carnivore governance, where viability hinged on balancing social conflict resolution and institutional adaptability (Bennett et al., 2022).

Furthermore, collaborative governance in conservation often encountered barriers, particularly power asymmetries, role ambiguity, and a lack of data-sharing infrastructure. Cusack et al. (2022) found that without clear rules of engagement and trust, decision-making stalled. Similarly, community-based programmes struggled when leadership failed to mediate conflicting interests, undermining community trust (Bennett et al., 2022). Recent contributions (Gash, 2022; Bianchi et al., 2020; Anthony Jnr, 2022) reinforced the relevance of this model, particularly in highlighting its role in building inclusive, innovative, and digitally supported governance arrangements. Anthony Jnr (2022), for example, emphasised that effective collaboration increasingly depended on adaptive governance systems that could accommodate emerging technologies such as distributed ledger technologies (DLTs), echoing the BRTT's own evolving use of digital intelligence platforms. Nonetheless, the collaborative governance model had its limitations.

2.4.4. Criticism of the Collaborative Governance Model

Despite its wide application in public administration and policy implementation, the collaborative governance model had its share of criticisms. One key limitation is its idealised assumptions about inclusiveness, trust, and shared power among stakeholders. Critics argue that in practice, collaborative settings are often shaped by asymmetric power relations, hidden agendas, and institutional inertia, which undermine the model's effectiveness (Gash, 2022; O'Flynn, 2009). Critics such as O'Flynn (2009) further warn that it often assumes ideal conditions of trust, shared values, and competent institutions, conditions rarely met in practice. While collaborative governance promotes deliberation and consensus-building, it sometimes fails to account for the realpolitik of bureaucratic dominance or elite capture, especially in high-stakes, resource-sensitive domains like wildlife crime enforcement.

Moreover, the model often oversimplifies institutional complexity, assuming a level of coordination and capacity that might not exist in fragmented governance systems. In developing countries or cross-sectoral initiatives, operational challenges such as lack of interoperability, role ambiguity, and inconsistent legal frameworks further weaken collaborative efforts (Anthony Jnr, 2022; Bianchi & Nasi, 2018). Critics note the model's limited attention to conflict dynamics, especially when goals between collaborating entities diverge, such as between law enforcement agencies and

conservation actors (Gash, 2022). These criticisms highlight the need for context-sensitive application of the collaborative model, one that acknowledges both its normative appeal and the practical barriers to its success. It also underscores the value of pairing CG with other theoretical frameworks, such as Institutional Theory, to capture both structural and relational dimensions of governance.

Power asymmetries, resource inequalities, and mistrust could undermine even the most well-intentioned partnerships. In addition, the model occasionally failed to address the tension between deliberative processes and urgent operational demands, a dilemma frequently encountered in real-time law enforcement. Despite these critiques, the model offered significant analytical power for this study by unpacking the behavioural, procedural, and contextual variables that either promoted or hindered effective collaboration and intelligence-sharing among BRTT stakeholders. It illuminated how relationships, not just rules, govern joint enforcement strategies.

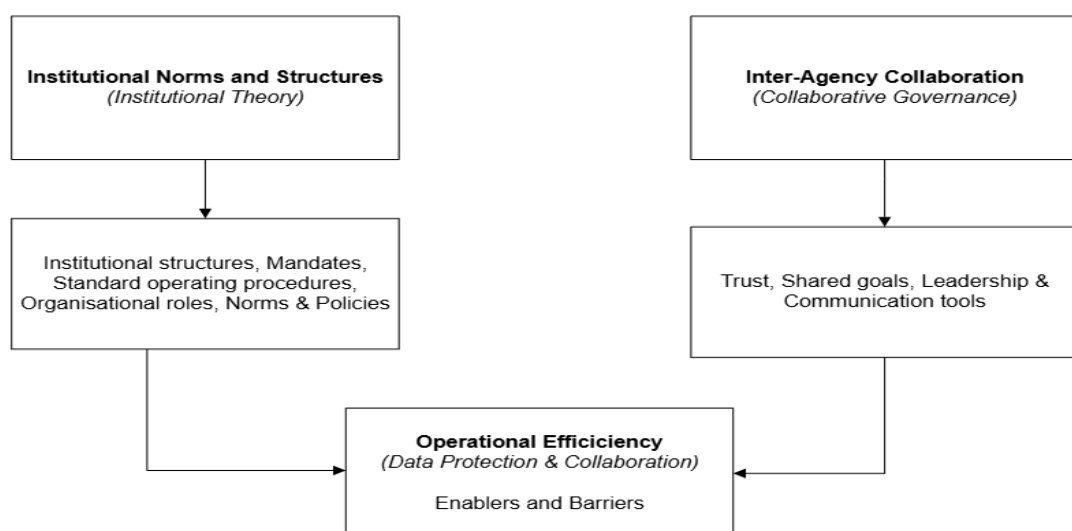
2.4.5. Integration of theoretical frameworks

In integrating both institutional theory and the collaborative governance model, this study adopted a dual-lens approach to understanding the structural and relational complexities that shape the operations of the BRTT. The integration of these theories was both deliberate and necessary for this study. Institutional theory provided insight into how formal rules, informal norms, and organisational legacies condition agency behaviours, particularly about data protection and operational practices. It highlighted how institutional isomorphism and inertia may either support or hinder innovation and compliance in sensitive enforcement settings. Meanwhile, the collaborative governance model complemented this by examining how inter-agency coordination, power dynamics, shared decision-making, and trust influence the efficiency of collective action in intelligence-led enforcement. Together, these frameworks offered a comprehensive foundation for analysing not only the internal institutional arrangements that govern data practices within the BRTT but also the inter-organisational processes that determine the success of multi-agency collaboration in combating wildlife crime. While institutional theory revealed the systemic barriers to change, collaborative governance explained the conditions under which change could occur. This dual-lens approach was crucial for understanding how agencies operated

both within their institutional confines and across collaborative spaces to combat wildlife crime in Namibia.

2.5. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study was developed by synthesising insights from the literature, grounded in Institutional Theory (Suddaby, 2010; Scott, 2004) and the Collaborative Governance Model, and further informed by thematic areas emerging from the empirical investigation. As shown in Figure 2, the framework posits that institutional norms, comprising formal structures, protocols, and informal practices, influence the efficiency of data protection within the BRTT. These data protection practices interact with the dynamics of inter-agency collaboration, which are shaped by factors such as trust, communication tools, and coordination capacity. The framework also incorporates a range of enablers (e.g., leadership support, shared vision, and digital tools) and constraints (e.g., legal ambiguities, fragmented communication, and institutional misalignment) that either enhance or hinder operational efficiency. Ultimately, these institutional and collaborative elements collectively determine the effectiveness of the BRTT's operations, reflected in tangible outcomes such as increased arrests, intelligence-sharing, and seizures. This conceptual lens enabled a comprehensive understanding of how policy, behaviour, and organisational arrangements intersect to shape collaborative governance in Namibia's wildlife crime response.



Source: Own compilation

Figure 2: The conceptual framework

2.6. Linkage between the Theoretical Framework and the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in two key theoretical perspectives: Institutional Theory and the Collaborative Governance Model. Institutional Theory offered a lens through which the influence of formal structures, informal norms, and the absence of harmonised data protection legislation on information governance within the BRTT could be examined. It helped explain how institutional misalignment, bureaucratic processes, and ad-hoc decision-making practices created fragmentation and vulnerability in data management. The Collaborative Governance Model, on the other hand, informed the analysis of inter-agency coordination and the dynamics of stakeholder engagement within the BRTT. It emphasised the importance of trust-based relationships, shared objectives, and participatory decision-making in driving effective collaboration. The model highlighted how informal communication tools (e.g., WhatsApp) and uneven resource distribution shaped collaborative practices in real-time operations. The conceptual framework thus reflected an integration of these theoretical foundations with empirical insights drawn from the study. It captured the relationship between institutional arrangements, collaborative mechanisms, and operational efficiency in the context of combating wildlife trafficking. The framework served as a guide for data analysis and interpretation, ensuring consistency between the research objectives, guiding theories, and the real-world dynamics encountered within the BRTT's operations.

2.7. Gaps in the Literature

Despite increasing scholarly interest in wildlife law enforcement and inter-agency collaboration, significant gaps remained in understanding how institutional norms, governance frameworks, and data protection mechanisms operated within real-world multi-agency enforcement contexts, especially in the Global South. Much of the existing research focused on technical and operational aspects, such as surveillance systems, anti-poaching strategies, and legal frameworks, while often overlooking deeper institutional and relational dynamics. These included organisational cultures, norms, and levels of inter-agency trust, which critically influenced the effectiveness of collaborative enforcement efforts.

Moreover, although institutional theory and the collaborative governance model had been applied extensively in developed countries, their practical relevance in conservation enforcement within low- and middle-income countries, such as Namibia, was insufficiently explored. Limited attention had been given to how institutional isomorphism, path dependency, and normative pressures shaped data-sharing behaviours and the implementation of secure intelligence systems across agency boundaries. Likewise, the interplay between formal governance structures and informal coordination mechanisms, central to collaborative governance, had not been adequately studied in African conservation contexts. More broadly, African scholarship on wildlife crime enforcement remains sparse compared to global literature, with limited comparative analyses across countries in Southern and Eastern Africa where inter-agency collaboration is equally critical. In addition, little research has examined how external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted (Driscoll et al., 2020; Doni & Johannsdottir, 2021) or reshaped inter-agency collaboration (de Paula, 2020), particularly in terms of resource allocation, operational continuity and information-sharing practices (Prakash, 2022).

Building on this general understanding, the literature review identified several specific gaps that this study addressed, particularly relating to Namibia's BRTT:

- While regional and global studies evaluated collaborative enforcement mechanisms, few focused on Namibia's wildlife crime enforcement landscape. This resulted in a lack of empirical insight into how national institutional arrangements, resource allocations, and legal frameworks influenced inter-agency collaboration within Namibia's conservation security environment (*limited context-specific research in Namibia*).
- Prior research largely concentrated on formal agreements (e.g., MoUs, joint task force mandates), but informal platforms such as WhatsApp groups and interpersonal trust networks often played a dominant role in real-time communication and information exchange. These informal mechanisms remained underexplored, especially concerning their implications for data protection and operational sustainability (*insufficient attention to informal collaboration tools and practices*).

- Studies often treated institutional frameworks (legal and technological) separately from behavioural factors (trust, leadership, commitment). There was a paucity of research examining how these formal and informal elements interacted to affect enforcement effectiveness (*lack of integration between structural and behavioural enablers*).
- Although intelligence-sharing and technology use received considerable attention, data protection, particularly within transboundary, multi-agency wildlife crime enforcement, was rarely examined empirically. The absence of a clear national data protection framework presented both legal and operational challenges for secure information exchange (*underrepresentation of data protection concerns*).
- a) Most research was top-down, focusing on policy or management views rather than frontline personnel who handled data, arrests, and coordination. Capturing these ground-level perspectives was critical for a fuller understanding of enforcement realities (*limited operational-level perspectives*).

This study filled these gaps by providing a context-specific, empirically grounded analysis of the BRTT, integrating institutional theory and the collaborative governance model to offer a holistic view of how structural, normative, and relational factors influenced secure intelligence sharing and coordination in a complex multi-agency conservation enforcement setting.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter critically reviewed the existing literature on institutional norms, inter-agency collaboration, and data protection within the context of wildlife law enforcement, drawing on relevant theoretical frameworks to underpin the study. The application of Institutional Theory provided a lens through which the formal and informal structures shaping organisational behaviour were analysed, particularly as they relate to data handling within the BRTT. Similarly, the collaborative governance model offered insight into the mechanisms and challenges of cooperation across institutional boundaries, highlighting the importance of mutual trust, shared objectives, and structured decision-making. Emerging technologies and the increasing complexity of intelligence-sharing frameworks underscore the need for both effective governance

and secure data environments. The review identified several gaps in the literature, particularly the limited focus on the interplay between institutional arrangements and data protection within conservation enforcement efforts in Africa, as well as the lack of localised, empirical analysis of multi-agency models such as the BRTT. Furthermore, existing studies provided little attention to informal collaboration mechanisms, operational level perspectives, or the impact of external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The gaps justify the present study's focus on evaluating how institutional and collaborative structures influence the efficiency of data protection and inter-agency cooperation. Ultimately, this review laid the groundwork for the development of a robust conceptual framework and guided the methodological choices for the study. The following chapter therefore outlines the research methodology adopted, detailing the design, data collection and analytical strategies employed to address the identified gaps.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology adopted to explore how institutional norms, inter-agency collaboration, and data protection practices influence the operational efficiency of the BRTT in Namibia. The methodology encompasses the philosophical assumptions, research approach, research design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, data analysis techniques, trustworthiness measures, and ethical considerations. It drew on widely accepted methodological frameworks to ensure that the study is systematic, rigorous, and credible. By clearly outlining each methodological component, the study ensured transparency, coherence, and alignment between the research questions, data collection methods, and analytical processes.

3.2. Research philosophy

This study adopted an interpretivist research philosophy, grounded in the belief that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the subjective experiences of individuals (Bell et al., 2022; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022; Hair et al., 2019). Interpretivism is especially suited for investigating phenomena in complex, socially embedded environments such as the BRTT, where multiple institutions interact under varying mandates, cultures, and operational frameworks. Rather than seeking generalisable laws, interpretivism facilitated a deep understanding of meanings, institutional processes, and context-specific dynamics. This philosophical orientation supports the goal of generating rich, in-depth insights rather than seeking objective truths, which is consistent with the exploratory nature of the study.

3.2.1. Ontology

Ontology, which concerns the nature of reality, was framed within an interpretivist paradigm that views reality as multiple, context-dependent, and socially constructed (Coy, 2019; Youngs, 2017). This ontological stance recognised that experiences of institutional collaboration and data governance within the BRTT were not fixed, but rather fluid and shaped by interactions, positions, and perceptions of stakeholders. This enabled the researcher to explore the multiple “realities” that co-existed within the

team's structure. These varied realities were later interpreted during data analysis to reflect the influence of institutional norms on collaboration and trust.

3.2.2. Epistemology

The study adopted a subjectivist epistemological stance, consistent with interpretivism. Knowledge was understood to be co-created through engagement between the researcher and participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Insights into institutional and collaborative dynamics were drawn from the lived experiences and contextual understandings of task team members. The researcher's role was not that of a detached observer, but an active interpreter of meaning, embedded in the co-construction of knowledge. This epistemological stance supports the study's aim to explore deep insights into data governance and collaborative functioning from those embedded within the institutional ecosystem of the BRTT. This approach also aligns with Omodan's (2022) assertion that the selection of a theoretical framework should be based on the epistemological assumptions and paradigmatic orientation of the study, rather than personal interest or convenience. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to document thoughts, assumptions, and potential biases during the research process, further aligning with the co-constructive stance.

3.2.3. Axiology

This research recognised the value-laden nature of qualitative inquiry. The researcher's values and positionality were not bracketed out but acknowledged as shaping data interpretation (Bell et al., 2022). Strong ethical commitments, including respect for confidentiality, informed consent, and protection of participants' identities, were embedded throughout the research. The researcher engaged reflexively, being mindful of how personal biases and institutional affiliations may affect participant responses or analysis. This aligns with Pretorius (2024), who emphasised the ethical responsibility of researchers to account for how their own values and assumptions shape research processes and interpretations. Ethical awareness extended to the interpretation stage, where attention was paid to ensuring participants' voices were represented authentically and without distortion. In sum, the interpretivist philosophy offered an appropriate foundation for this study by supporting an in-depth exploration of the social processes, institutional dynamics, and governance norms that influenced collaboration and data protection within the BRTT. This paradigm is particularly

suitable for research situated in dynamic, multi-agency environments where multiple stakeholders operate under diverse institutional frameworks. It aligns with the study's qualitative nature and its aim to uncover deep, context-sensitive insights into how inter-agency practices are shaped by institutional norms and perceptions of data protection.

3.2.4. Research approach

The study adopted an inductive research approach, which allowed for the development of theoretical insights based on empirical data rather than pre-established hypotheses (Kumar, 2024). As Kumar (2024) highlights, inductive reasoning is particularly well-suited for qualitative and exploratory research, especially in contexts where literature on the specific issue is limited or fragmented. This approach was particularly suitable for exploring the relatively under-researched intersection of institutional norms, inter-agency collaboration, and data protection in the Namibian conservation enforcement landscape. Inductive reasoning supported the discovery of emerging patterns, institutional tensions, and collaborative practices by allowing themes to arise from participants' narratives.

This approach also ensured that the resulting insights were grounded in local context rather than imported theoretical assumptions. The use of open-ended questions and iterative coding during data analysis further reinforced the emergent and exploratory nature of the research. Ultimately, this approach allowed the study to develop context-specific conceptual contributions to the understanding of data governance in multi-agency task teams. Given the absence of detailed literature on the BRTT and its operational arrangements, inductive inquiry provided the flexibility to generate new, subtle understandings. This methodological stance aligned seamlessly with both the interpretivist philosophy and the qualitative design, ensuring that findings would reflect the complexities of human experience and organisational interaction.

3.2.5. Research design

A qualitative research design was adopted to enable the in-depth exploration of complex, context-specific social phenomena. Qualitative research is especially valuable when the goal is to understand the meanings individuals or groups assign to a social issue (Siedlecki, 2020). Aligned with the interpretivist paradigm and inductive reasoning, this design facilitated the examination of the lived experiences, institutional

norms, and collaborative dynamics among stakeholders engaged in wildlife law enforcement.

This study utilised a single-case study strategy, focusing on the BRTT as a bounded, information-rich case. As Yin (2017) explains, case study research enables a holistic investigation of real-world issues within their natural settings, making it ideal for studying processes, relationships, and actor perceptions across multi-agency environments. Similarly, Moufdi and Mansouri (2021) emphasise that case studies are especially valuable when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are blurred, as is the case in collaborative institutional arrangements.

By focusing on the BRTT, the study benefited from the opportunity to generate empirical, context-driven insights into the intersection of institutional governance, collaborative practices, data protection, and inter-agency collaboration. This single-case design also allowed the researcher to engage deeply with a unique operational structure and explore the depth and variation of practices across participating agencies. This design choice enhanced the study's ability to provide context-rich recommendations and highlight practical lessons for similar task teams operating in comparable settings. The design thus supported a deeper understanding of policy-practice gaps and offered grounded recommendations for strengthening coordination and information security in conservation enforcement.

3.3. Population and sampling

The target population for this study consisted of 31 purposively selected respondents directly or indirectly affiliated with the BRTT. These individuals were chosen based on their active roles in intelligence gathering, data protection, training, enforcement coordination, and strategic communication within Namibia's wildlife crime response framework. The sample included a diverse mix of stakeholders: 1 head of the BRTT, 1 head of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism – Intelligence and Investigation Unit (MEFT-IIU), 10 investigators, 4 data analysts, 2 trainers, 2 Rhino Custodians, 2 representatives from park management, 1 communication strategist (consultant), 1 donor representative, 1 policymaker, 2 representative from Namibian Revenue Agency (NamRA), 2 representatives from the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC), and several operational personnel directly engaged in the BRTT.

This multidisciplinary composition ensured coverage across enforcement, conservation, data analysis, and institutional coordination functions. Drawing insights from this diverse group, the study captured a comprehensive understanding of the practical realities, institutional dynamics, and collaborative processes that shape the BRTT's performance. The participants' varied roles and affiliations offered valuable perspectives on the barriers and enablers of secure data handling and inter-agency collaboration within Namibia's anti-poaching architecture.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants with specialised knowledge and direct experience relevant to the study's focus. According to Bell et al. (2022), purposive (or judgmental) sampling is appropriate when researchers aim to gather deep insights from individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation. This approach aligned with the interpretivist paradigm by prioritising depth and contextual richness over breadth or generalisability. Participants were selected based on their strategic or operational roles in data handling, collaborative enforcement, and decision-making within the BRTT. Data saturation was monitored during the review of responses to the Google Form questionnaire, and data collection was concluded once recurring patterns and no new insights were evident from additional responses.

3.4. Data collection methods and research instruments

Data for this study were collected through a qualitative, questionnaire-based approach, designed to capture the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders involved in the operations of the Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT). A semi-structured questionnaire was developed using Google Forms, which allowed for a mix of open-ended and guided questions aligned with the study's thematic focus on institutional norms, data protection practices, and inter-agency collaboration. The Google Form link was distributed electronically to a purposive sample of participants, selected based on their direct involvement in wildlife crime investigations, intelligence analysis, enforcement coordination, or policy oversight within the BRTT framework. These participants included personnel from law enforcement agencies, conservation authorities, financial intelligence units, and supporting NGOs. The electronic format enabled respondents to complete the questionnaire at their convenience, promoting

candid and thoughtful responses, particularly on sensitive topics related to institutional dynamics and information governance.

The choice of this method was informed by both logistical and ethical considerations. Given the inter-agency nature of the task force and the geographical dispersion of its members, an online tool facilitated wider reach and timely data collection while ensuring participant anonymity. This method is increasingly accepted in qualitative research for its flexibility, especially in contexts where face-to-face access is limited due to geographical, logistical, or operational constraints (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Bell et al., 2022). Although lacking real-time probing typically of interviews, the design of the open-ended questions encouraged deep and reflective responses, enabling the researcher to gather rich narrative data.

Documentary analysis

In addition to the online questionnaire, the researcher conducted documentary analysis of relevant secondary data sources, including policy documents, institutional memoranda, operational reports, the Integrated National Wildlife Crime Database of Namibia, and standard operating procedures (SOPs). These documents offered insights into formal frameworks and procedural guidelines governing data sharing, confidentiality, and inter-agency coordination. The inclusion of these documents served to validate and triangulate questionnaire responses, providing institutional context and helping the researcher examine the alignment (or lack thereof) between policy and practice. The triangulation of the questionnaire and documentary data enhanced the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the findings (Ahmed, 2024; Donkoh, 2023) in line with qualitative research quality criteria. Integrating both participant narratives and institutional documentation allowed for a multi-dimensional understanding of the factors shaping data handling and collaborative practices within a multi-agency conservation enforcement setting.

3.5. Data collection procedure and administration

The Harold Pupkewitz Graduate School of Business at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) issued an official letter requesting permission for the researcher to conduct the study with members of the Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT). Upon receiving approval, the researcher identified relevant participants across partner

agencies and shared a formal invitation to take part in the study. A link to the semi-structured questionnaire, designed using Google Forms, was then electronically distributed to the selected participants. To improve response rates and engagement, participants were first contacted to confirm their availability and willingness to participate, after which the questionnaire link was sent along with instructions and consent information. This strategy supported the development of trust and maximised the likelihood of obtaining rich, thoughtful responses from knowledgeable participants.

Data analysis and presentation tools

According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), thematic analysis is a flexible and rigorous method for making sense of textual data in qualitative research. Data collected through questionnaires and documentary sources were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely accepted qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Majumdar, 2019). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and suitability for inductive, interpretivist research that seeks to explore participants' perceptions, meanings, and experiences within specific contexts. Given the absence of interview transcripts, raw narrative responses from the online form were extracted, cleaned, and compiled into a central document for analysis.

The analysis followed a six-step process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021) and Naeem et al. (2023):

a) Familiarisation with the data

- Responses from the open-ended questions were reviewed multiple times to gain a deep understanding of recurring themes and context-specific details.

b) Generating initial codes

- Key phrases and patterns related to institutional norms, data protection, and inter-agency collaboration were manually coded using an open coding process.

c) Searching for themes

- Codes were organised into preliminary themes that addressed the core research questions (e.g., “data sharing constraints, trust institutional capacity, policy-practice disconnect”).

d) Reviewing themes

- Emerging themes were reviewed about the entire dataset to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation.

e) Defining and naming themes

- Final themes were refined and labelled to capture their essence in line with the research focus.

f) Producing the report

- Narrative findings were linked to theoretical concepts and supported with illustrative quotations from participants to strengthen analytical claims. Data from documentary analysis were also examined thematically. Relevant institutional documents were reviewed to extract policies, guidelines, and procedures concerning data handling and inter-agency coordination. Themes from documents were compared with participants' responses to uncover any mismatches between policy and practice. This triangulated approach increased the depth, reliability, and contextual sensitivity of the findings. Due to the manageable size of the dataset, Microsoft Excel was used to organise codes and themes. This provided a structured yet adaptable platform to track analytical progression and ensure transparency in the coding process.

Data from documentary analysis were also examined thematically. Relevant institutional documents were reviewed to extract policies, guidelines, and procedures concerning data handling and inter-agency coordination. These documents were analysed to compare formal institutional frameworks with the lived realities shared by participants. This allowed for triangulation, enhancing the validity of the results by corroborating evidence from multiple sources (Donkoh, 2023). Given the inductive approach of the study, themes were not predetermined but emerged from the data itself. This ensured that the findings were grounded in participants' experiences and responsive to the contextual realities of the BRTT. NVivo and/or Microsoft Excel were used to organise and manage the data coding process, providing a structured way to track and refine themes as analysis progressed.

3.6. Trustworthiness of the study

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher applied the four key qualitative criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Kakar et al., 2023). Several strategies were employed to ensure rigour:

1. **Peer debriefing** was conducted with the academic supervisor to validate the coding process and theme construction.
2. **Reflexive journaling** was used throughout the research process to document potential biases and the researcher's positionality.
3. **Data triangulation** was achieved by using both open-ended Google Form responses and relevant documentary sources.

Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where selected participants were provided with summaries of their responses and the emerging interpretations for validation. Transferability was addressed by providing rich, contextual descriptions of the BRTT environment, its organisational structure, and the roles of key stakeholders, allowing readers to judge the applicability of findings to similar settings. Dependability was established by documenting the data collection instruments, coding decisions, and analytical procedures in detail. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of the coding and analysis process, supported by evidence drawn from participant responses and institutional documents. Together, these strategies ensured that the study's findings were rigorous, transparent, and aligned with recognised qualitative research standards.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Ethical integrity was a central component of the research process, particularly due to the sensitive nature of the study involving wildlife crime, law enforcement, and inter-agency collaboration. The researcher adhered to internationally recognised ethical guidelines and the policies of the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST).

3.7.1. Ethical Approval

Ethical clearance was obtained from the NUST Research Ethics Committee before data collection. A formal approval letter is available in the appendix (see Appendix B).

Ethical integrity was a central component of the research process, particularly due to the sensitive nature of the study involving wildlife crime, law enforcement, and inter-agency collaboration. The researcher adhered to internationally recognised ethical guidelines as well as the policies and ethical clearance of the host academic institution. Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of this study, which involves law enforcement personnel and intelligence-sharing practices, strict ethical protocols were followed.

3.7.2. Informed consent

Participants were fully informed about the study's aims, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. A digital consent form was embedded in a Google Form, requiring participants to acknowledge consent before proceeding.

3.7.3. Confidentiality and anonymity

To protect participants' identities and professional affiliations, pseudonyms or role-based identities (e.g., "investigator 1", "Policy Officer A") were used in the presentation of findings. Data were stored securely in password-protected folders and accessible only to the researcher and supervisor.

3.7.4. Sensitive topics and researcher reflexivity

Given the political and operational sensitivities surrounding wildlife crime enforcement and data management, care was taken to avoid leading questions or probing for confidential operational intelligence. The researcher remained reflexive throughout, acknowledging power dynamics, institutional sensitivities, and personal biases. No questions probed for classified or operational intelligence. The reflexive stance ensured that ethical awareness was not limited to procedural consent but extended throughout data analysis and reporting.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodological approach adopted to explore how institutional norms and collaborative governance influence data protection and inter-agency coordination within the BRTT in Namibia. Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, the study employed a qualitative, exploratory case study design to uncover

the lived experiences and contextual realities of stakeholders operating within a complex, multi-agency enforcement environment. The adoption of an inductive approach allowed for the theory to emerge from empirical evidence, while purposive sampling ensured that data were gathered from information-rich participants deeply involved in BRTT operations. Data were collected using an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, complemented by documentary analysis of relevant institutional records. This combination allowed for the triangulation of data sources, enhancing the credibility and depth of findings. The use of open-ended responses preserved the richness of participants' narratives, while documentary evidence helped contextualise institutional practices and frameworks. Rigour and trustworthiness were upheld by applying established qualitative criteria, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, through techniques such as member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexivity. Overall, the methodological design was closely aligned with the research questions, theoretical foundations, and practical goals of the study. The next chapter presents the empirical findings generated through this process, highlighting the key themes that emerged from participants' accounts and institutional documents.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the qualitative research methodology adopted to examine how institutional norms and inter-agency collaboration influence data protection practices within the BRTT in Namibia. This chapter presents and interprets the findings derived from open-ended questionnaire responses and documentary evidence. The study involved 31 participants selected through purposive sampling, including investigators, analysts, policy officers, legal advisors, wardens, trainers, advocates, security personnel, consultants, and officers from multiple agencies involved in the BRTT. These stakeholders were directly or indirectly engaged in the operations and governance of the BRTT. The analysis is structured around the study's research questions and draws on emergent themes generated through inductive thematic analysis. In line with qualitative best practices, the presentation of findings is interwoven with discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2021), drawing on relevant literature to contextualise the insights. This approach supports the interpretivist aim of capturing the lived experiences, perceptions, and institutional realities of BRTT members (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The chapter begins with a description of the research process and participant profiles before moving into the core thematic findings.

4.2. Description of the research process and participation characteristics

Data were collected through an online, semi-structured Google Form questionnaire. The form included open-ended questions designed to probe participants' insights on institutional norms, inter-agency dynamics, and data security practices within the BRTT. A consent form preceded the questionnaire, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, as per ethical protocols (ESRC, 2015). This digital approach was found to be both logistically efficient and ethically sensitive, allowing participants to engage at their convenience, particularly given the sensitive nature of wildlife crime enforcement (Tracy, 2020).

A total of 31 respondents completed the questionnaire. Their institutional affiliations spanned law enforcement, conservation authorities, financial intelligence bodies, and

non-governmental organisations, reflecting the multidisciplinary and inter-agency architecture of the BRTT. Table 1 below presents the summary profile of the participants, capturing their demographic characteristics, professional roles, and motivations for participating in the task team.

Respondents	Gender	Age	Data security training	Affiliation with BRTT	Motivation in BRTT participation	Roles
1	Male	55 and above	Yes	Head of BRTT (NamPol)	Formal mandate	Management of the BRTT and operations
2	Male	25-34	Yes	Investigator (Nampol)	Formal mandate	Investigate wildlife crimes
3	Male	25-34	Yes	Data Analyst (RT)	Professional norms	Capture and analyse data, offer technical support
4	Female	25-34	Yes	Data Analyst (RT)	Professional norms	Maintain the rhino carcass database
5	Male	25-34	No	Data Analyst (RT)	Professional norms	Capture and analyse data, offer technical support
6	Male	25-34	No	Data Analyst (RT)	Professional norms	Capture and analyse data, offer technical support
7	Female	25-34	Yes	Trainer (C4ADS)	Voluntary cooperation	Provide training, data and case support
8	Male	45-54	Yes	NamRA officer	Professional norms	Customs investigations
9	Male	35-44	Yes	Investigator (NamPol)	Formal mandates	Investigate wildlife crime

10	Male	45-54	Yes	Dada Analyst (RT)	Professional norms	Research and development
11	Male	35-44	Yes	Advocate (OPG)	Formal mandate	Prosecute wildlife crime
12	Male	35-44	Yes	Security officer (Ex NamPol)	Professional norms	Used to investigate wildlife crimes
13	Male	35-44	Yes	Legal coordinator (RT)	Professional norms	Provide legal support to BRTT
14	Female	25-34	Yes	NamRA officer	Formal mandate	Customs investigations, commercial frauds
15	Male	45-54	No	Investigator (NamPol)	Formal mandate	Investigate wildlife crime
16	Male	25-34	Yes	AWCT	Professional norms	Rhino monitoring, data recording
17	Male	35-44	Yes	Investigator (NamPol)	Formal mandate	Investigate wildlife crime
18	Male	35-44	Yes	Trainer/mentor (D-One Consulting)	Voluntary cooperation	Training on problem analysis and solving
19	Male	55 and above	No	Rhino custodian (AWCT)	Voluntary cooperation	Occasional donor
20	Male	25-34	No	Investigator (NamPol)	Professional norms	Investigate wildlife crime
21	Male	35-44	Yes	NDF- SF	Professional norms	Data management and intelligence handling
22	Male	45-54	Yes	FIC	Formal mandate	Provide financial intelligence and investigation

23	Female	25-34	Yes	Investigator (NamPol)	Professional norms	Investigate wildlife crime
24	Male	45-54	No	MEFT-Chief warden	Formal mandate	Management of BRTT operations
25	Male	25-34	Yes	MEFT-Warden	Formal mandate	Provide investigation support
26	Female	25-34	No	MEFT-Warden	Professional norms	Data entry and wildlife crime database management
27	Female	35-44	Yes	MEFT-Warden	Professional norms	Data analysis, sharing and case coordination
28	Male	25-34	Yes	AWCT	Voluntary cooperation	Data collection and management
29	Male	25-34	No	MEFT-Warden	Formal mandate	Operational support on wildlife related matters
30	Male	35-44	Yes	Consultant to BRTT	Professional norms	Develop wildlife crime database
31	Male	55 and above	No	Communications consultant	Professional mandate	Strategic inputs and data interpretation

Source: Own compilation

Table 1: Participants profiles

The gender composition of the sample reveals a significant gender imbalance, with 26 male participants and only 5 females, indicative of the male-dominated nature of law enforcement and conservation sectors in Namibia (UNODC, 2022). Nonetheless, female participants occupied important technical roles such as data analyst, wardens, and customs officers, highlighting their contribution to the operational and analytical arms of the BRTT. In terms of age, the majority (22 out of 31) were between the ages of 25-44, suggesting that frontline operational tasks, including data handling and investigations, are predominantly undertaken by early to mid-career professionals. The inclusion of older participants (5 aged 45-54, and 3 aged 55+) brought valuable

senior-level expertise and institutional memory to the collaborative structure, often influencing strategic decision-making. Regarding data security training, 21 participants (68%) reported having received formal instruction, primarily those in roles involving information governance, legal affairs, or analytical work. In contrast, the remaining 10, mostly involved in field-based or custodial roles, lacked formal training in data protection, a finding that may indicate gaps in operational data governance capacity and the need for broader sensitisation and skills transfer (Ahmed, 2024; Donkoh, 2023).

Participants' affiliations confirm the multi-agency composition of the BRTT. The NamPol was the most represented, followed by Rooikat Trust (RT), the MEFT, NamRA, and affiliated NGOs and consultants. This institutional diversity aligns with collaborative governance theory, which underscores the role of cross-sector engagement in addressing complex policy problems (Ansell & Gash, 2008). In terms of motivations, responses were categorised into three major themes:

- a) Formal mandate (n=14): Participants who were officially deployed by their institutions.
- b) Professional norms (n=13): Professionals who aligned with the task team's mission due to job relevance or sectoral alignment.
- c) Voluntary cooperation (n=4): Stakeholders who participated through voluntary interest, often bringing specialised knowledge or donor support.

The range of roles further reflects the complexity and interdisciplinarity of BRTT's mandate. Approximately 10 respondents worked as wildlife crime investigators, while another 9 were involved in data collection, research, and analysis. Others contributed to training, legal interpretation, field enforcement, and strategic support. This range reinforces the assertion by Bryson et al. (2015) that effective collaborative governance in security-related environments requires both horizontal (cross-agency) and vertical (inter-level) coordination. The use of an online open-ended questionnaire proved advantageous in this context. It respected the operational sensitivity of BRTT's work while allowing for detailed narrative responses. This flexibility, coupled with ethical

safeguards, enhanced both data richness and research credibility (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Data was collected from 31 individuals who are either directly involved in or affiliated with the Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT). At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were presented with a consent option, which they signed to confirm their voluntary participation. This process also served to ensure their anonymity and safeguard the confidentiality of the information they provided. Some participants noted that the questions were not particularly easy but acknowledged the importance and relevance of the study. They also expressed appreciation for the use of a Google Form, describing it as the most convenient method compared to traditional approaches such as paper-based questionnaires, telephonic interviews, or face-to-face sessions. The digital format allowed them to participate at their own pace and convenience, with just the click of a button. This approach also saved the researcher a lot of time and, most importantly, money, as there was no longer printing of questionnaires required or travelling to deliver and collect the answers from participants.

Each respondent brought unique perspectives shaped by their professional roles, experience, and institutional mandates within the data handling, collaboration efforts, and wildlife crime enforcement environment. The gender distribution among participants reveals a clear imbalance, with 26 male respondents and only 5 female participants. This reflects the male-dominated nature of the sectors involved, namely: law enforcement, conservation operations, and intelligence work. While female representation was limited, it is noteworthy that those who did participate were mostly engaged in technical or analytical roles, including data analysis and customs enforcement. In terms of age, the majority of respondents fell within the 25-34 and 35-44 age brackets, with 14 and 8 participants in these ranges, respectively. These figures suggest that much of the BRTT's operational and technical work is being carried out by early to mid-career professionals. Additionally, five respondents were between 45–54 years, and three were 55 and above, indicating that some participants bring senior-level experience and institutional memory into the collaboration.

When asked about data security or information protection training, 21 participants reported having received some form of formal instruction, while 10 had not. The

majority of trained individuals were in roles that involve direct handling of sensitive information, such as investigators, data analysts, and legal professionals. Those without training were often from field-based positions, including wardens and rhino custodians, highlighting a potential gap in data security and handling practices among operational support staff.

Participants' affiliations reflect the diverse, multi-agency structure of the BRTT. The largest number of respondents were from NamPol, primarily in investigative roles. This was followed by significant representation from Rooikat Trust, where participants worked as data analysts, legal coordinators, and consultants. Other agencies included the MEFT, NamRA, AWCT, and private consultancies, which contributed to roles ranging from customs investigations and rhino monitoring, to training and database development.

The motivation for participation in the BRTT was categorised into three themes: formal mandate, professional norms, and voluntary cooperation. A total of 14 participants indicated that their involvement was mandated by their institution, reflecting their official duties within government or statutory bodies. Another 13 participants were involved based on professional alignment with BRTT's objectives, despite not being institutionally obligated. A smaller group of four respondents participated voluntarily, driven by personal commitment, donor interest, or subject-matter expertise. The roles performed by participants were wide-ranging. Approximately 10 individuals served as wildlife crime investigators under NamPol or MEFT. Another nine were involved in data collection, analysis, or management through RT or partner organisations. A few respondents acted as trainers, mentors, legal coordinators, or consultants, while others supported field operations, strategic planning, or intelligence work. This spread of responsibilities reflects the collaborative, interdisciplinary nature of the BRTT, bringing together actors from various fields to address the complex challenge of rhino poaching.

4.3. Presentation of the results

This section presents the findings that address the central research question:

How efficient are the existing data protection practices and inter-agency collaboration mechanisms in supporting the operations of the BRTT in Namibia?

Using an inductive thematic analysis approach, as articulated by Lochmiller (2021) and Braun and Clarke (2021), qualitative data from an online, open-ended questionnaire were analysed to identify emergent patterns related to institutional norms, data protection, and collaborative governance. While the codes and themes were inductively derived from participant responses, the presentation of findings is deductively structured in alignment with the three sub-research questions and underpinned by the theoretical lenses of Institutional (Scott, 2014) and Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Voets et al., 2021).

Each sub-section below addresses one of the three sub-questions, highlighting the emergent thematic domains. Relevant participant excerpts are included to give voice to the data and strengthen interpretive depth.

4.3.1. Institutional norms and data protection practices

This section addresses the first sub-research question:

“How do institutional norms, policies, and structures influence data protection practices in the BRTT?”

Using Institutional Theory (Meyer et al., 2017), the analysis identifies formal rules, informal norms, and structural arrangements that govern data handling among agencies collaborating within the BRTT.

a) Formal rules and protocols

The data indicate a strong awareness of confidentiality protocols within institutions affiliated with the BRTT. A majority of respondents confirmed the existence of formal rules for handling sensitive information, often tied to internal SOPs or chain-of-command procedures. One respondent noted:

“No privileged information is shared outside of the task team, without the approval of BRTT management... unless it is with partners in the criminal justice system”. This reflects the regulative pillar of Institutional Theory (Scott, 2014), where formal

structures guide organisational behaviour. Such protocols are especially prominent within agencies such as NAMPOL and MEFT, where hierarchical command structures regulate information flows.

b) Informal norms and discretion

Beyond formal policies, informal behavioural expectations also shape data protection practices. Several respondents emphasised discretion, caution, and personal accountability in how data is managed. As one participant stated:

“Treat every information confidential... we don’t expose activities we are planning to host or carry out (covert operation)”. This aligns with the normative pillar of Institutional Theory, which highlights how unwritten expectations and shared values shape organisational conduct (Greenwood et al., 2017). These norms, though effective in some cases, are inconsistently applied across agencies.

c) Inconsistent enforcement and workarounds

Despite the prevalence of confidentiality norms, some agencies lack structured enforcement mechanisms. Data also shows a reliance on informal practices such as verbal agreements and selective sharing. For instance:

“I always follow the chain of command. Non-disclosure agreements are sometimes used”.

While these ad hoc practices provide flexibility, they also introduce risks of inconsistency and security breaches, particularly in institutions without clear accountability systems.

d) Absence of unified national frameworks

A critical theme that emerged was the lack of overarching national legislation or unified protocols for data protection across agencies. This results in fragmented practices and varying standards. One respondent warned:

“Without strict access controls and authentication protocols, we are at risk of data breaches or insider misuse”. This structural deficiency limits institutional alignment and increases the system’s vulnerability, confirming the need for codified, cross-agency standards (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

e) Influence of institutional norms and structures

Many respondents referenced institutional frameworks that shape their approach to data protection. These include hierarchical clearance systems, ethical expectations, and task-specific confidentiality protocols. However, the variation in enforcement across agencies highlights fragmented institutionalisation.

“There are internal rules, but they are not always followed the same way in each institution”.

This uneven application of norms reflects institutional isomorphism, where structures may appear similar on paper but differ in practice depending on local cultures or capacities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

f) Chain of command and centralised authority

A strong theme was the use of centralised authorisation procedures for data sharing, particularly within NamPol and the FIC. Participants described access to data as highly regulated, reinforcing the regulative pillar of Institutional Theory (Scott, 2014). chain-of-command procedures as the foundational mechanism for controlling access to sensitive information. Respondents from both law enforcement and conservation agencies described a system in which data movement is tightly regulated, with authorisation required at multiple levels before information can be shared externally.

“No privileged information is shared outside of the task team, without the approval of BRTT management... unless it is with partners in the criminal justice system”.

This top-down data governance model offers a protective mechanism but may also limit operational agility, particularly during joint investigations that require rapid data flow.

g) Behavioural norms and informal practices

Beyond formal structures, respondents emphasised informal cultural expectations, such as operational discretion, silence, and personal accountability, as critical to information handling.

“Treat every information confidential... we don't expose activities we are planning to host or carry out (covert operation) ...”

These unwritten rules illustrate the normative pillar of institutional behaviour, where shared values fill the gaps left by absent formal policy (Jakab, 2020).

h) Informal safeguards and workarounds

Some agencies resort to non-policy-based safeguards, such as verbal instructions, locked filing systems, or unshared passwords. While these reflect operational pragmatism, they can also undermine data governance consistency across agencies. *“I was told never to leave my laptop unattended at home...that’s our unwritten rule”*. Such practices, while rooted in caution, risk compromising accountability due to a lack of documentation or audit trails.

i) Absence of codified legislation and unified protocols

Many respondents expressed concern over the absence of national legislation or harmonised data protection policies. This regulatory gap creates ambiguity in data handling expectations, especially during joint operations.

“Without strict access controls and authentication protocols, we are at risk of data breaches or insider misuse”.

This supports literature arguing that policy vacuum in multi-agency operations weakens institutional coherence and can lead to security vulnerabilities (Donkoh, 2023; Ahmed, 2024).

j) Fragmented compliance and institutional gaps

This finding indicates that BRTT’s data security practices, while taken seriously at the operational level, are not uniformly institutionalised across participating entities. Instead, compliance depends heavily on agency culture, leadership discretion, and individual ethics.

“Even though we all value confidentiality, not all institutions have proper structures in place. So, it comes down to who’s in charge”.

This reflects what Scott (2014) describes as institutional fragmentation, where multiple logics coexist without a unified governance framework.

4.3.2. The nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration

This section answers the second sub-research question: *“What is the nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration among stakeholders in the BRTT?”*.

The results are interpreted through the lens of the Collaborative Governance Model, which emphasises structured interaction, shared authority, trust, and mutual accountability among autonomous organisations working toward a common goal.

(Voets et al., 2021). The responses reveal a complex but functional collaborative landscape, one that is characterised by a blend of informal coordination, shared operational objectives, and persistent structural challenges.

a) Operational collaboration and joint activities

Respondents consistently described a high level of operational collaboration, often driven by field investigations, joint planning, and case management. A respondent shared:

“So far, so good. We can coordinate activities, share intelligence, and carry out joint operations effectively”.

This suggests strong task-based cooperation, even in the absence of formal governance structures.

b) SOPs and shared guidelines

Some agencies use Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to manage coordination. However, their implementation is uneven. One participant noted:

“SOPs are applied, but inconsistently. In some cases, we rely on informal briefings and updates”.

This highlights a partial institutionalization of collaboration, reflecting both progress and gaps in formal coordination frameworks.

c) Conflict resolution and decision-making practices

Most conflict resolution occurs through informal dialogue or ad hoc meetings. One participant described:

“No specific mechanisms exist apart from convening an immediate inter-agency meeting in the spirit of professionalism, maturity, and respect.”

This approach fosters flexibility, but the absence of codified mechanisms could undermine long-term consistency, particularly during inter-personal or inter-institutional disputes.

d) Trust and relational dynamics

Trust emerged as a cornerstone of effective collaboration. However, it is highly individualised and context-specific. For example:

“Trust in other agencies depends largely on the individuals involved—some are reliable, but others are too loose with sensitive information.”

It further supports the relational dimension of collaborative governance, wherein trust is both a prerequisite and outcome of successful cooperation (Voets et al., 2021). (Voets et al., 2021). But such trust is fragile and dependent on stable relationships, vulnerable to turnover or institutional politics.

e) Communication tools and coordination platforms

Digital tools such as WhatsApp, email, and shared Google Docs have played a key role in bridging communication gaps. Respondents who rated collaboration as “very effective” typically cited clear agendas, structured briefings, or cross-agency working groups. Yet others flagged concerns:

“Communication can be reactive, inconsistent, and dependent on who is available or engaged at the time”.

This inconsistency points to the absence of a central coordinating body or a formalised inter-agency engagement framework, as advocated in the literature (Ruijter, 2021).

f) Barriers to effective collaboration

Nevertheless, not all experiences were positive. Several respondents cited uneven participation and conflicting institutional priorities as key barriers to effective collaboration. One respondent explained:

“Uneven commitment or priorities, not all partners share the same urgency or level of engagement, which can delay decision-making and follow-through.”

g) Need for formal governance structures

This finding suggests a governance asymmetry within the task team, where some actors are more invested or better resourced than others. Such disparities can hinder the BRTT’s ability to act cohesively, especially when rapid, coordinated responses are required. It also reflects what the collaborative governance literature refers to as “capacity imbalance”, which can result in dominance by stronger actors or

disengagement by weaker ones (Ruijter, 2021). In terms of formal structures, participants provided mixed responses. While some reported the presence of structured opportunities for data-related discussion, others indicated that such engagements were ad hoc or inconsistent. Several respondents called for the institutionalisation of regular inter-agency meetings, joint planning sessions, and after-action reviews to strengthen the feedback loop and promote accountability. Overall, the findings reveal a collaborative environment that is pragmatic but structurally underdeveloped. The BRTT benefits from a shared mission and the goodwill of its members, but it lacks the governance architecture to institutionalise collaboration fully.

4.3.3. Factors enhancing or hindering the efficiency of data handling and inter-agency collaboration

This section addresses the third sub-objective of the study, namely: *To identify factors that enhance or hinder the efficiency of data handling and inter-agency collaboration within the task team*. Thematic analysis revealed two overarching categories, hindering factors and enhancing (enabling) factors, that influence the effectiveness of data practices and cooperation in the BRTT. The interpretation of these findings is grounded in Institutional Theory and the Collaborative Governance Model, providing a robust lens through which to examine the organisational dynamics at play.

a) Absence of a national legal framework

One of the most consistent hindrances identified by participants was the lack of a clearly articulated national legal framework governing data protection. Several participants lamented the absence of formalised national guidelines or legislative instruments that could harmonise how institutions collect, store, share, and secure sensitive data. One respondent emphasised:

“Lack of formal national guidelines and/or legislation on data protection. Uncertainty of the security of data network systems”.

This institutional void not only fragments compliance but also introduces legal and operational ambiguities when data is exchanged across agencies. As Scott (2014) asserts, institutional efficiency is undermined when the regulative pillar, rules and laws, is either absent or inconsistently applied.

b) Informal norms and risk of data breaches

In addition to legislative gaps, several respondents identified informal practices and human behaviour as critical vulnerabilities. While there is a shared expectation of confidentiality, there is no consistent enforcement mechanism across the BRTT. This reliance on individual discretion raises significant risks. As one respondent stated:

“Some members are loose talkers, and these will cause problems”.

This sentiment underscores the dangers of over-relying on the normative pillar of Institutional Theory (Scott, 2014), where values and expected behaviour guide conduct, but without formal reinforcement. The lack of uniform behavioural standards means that personal integrity remains the primary safeguard, a risky proposition in collaborative, high-stakes environments.

c) Inconsistent communication and coordination

Another prominent theme was the inconsistent nature of inter-agency communication and coordination mechanisms. While platforms such as WhatsApp and email are widely used, many participants pointed out that communication tends to be reactive, informal, and dependent on interpersonal dynamics rather than structured protocols. One participant shared:

“Poor communication and coordination. A lack of regular engagement or clearly defined roles can result in missed opportunities for collaboration.”

This gap undermines operational effectiveness and slows decision-making processes. According to Ansell and Gash (2008), effective collaborative governance requires regular, inclusive, and structured dialogue to sustain engagement and accountability.

d) Unequal capacity and commitment among agencies

Participants also highlighted asymmetries in resource availability and institutional engagement. While some agencies demonstrate high commitment, others appear less invested, resulting in inconsistent follow-through. As one respondent noted:

“Uneven commitment or priorities, not all partners share the same urgency or level of engagement”.

This imbalance reflects the phenomenon of capacity asymmetry, wherein dominant institutions may shape the direction of collaborative work, while less-resourced partners lag (Ruijter, 2021). This disparity can hinder joint decision-making, dilute collective ownership, and strain inter-agency trust. Despite these challenges, the data also revealed several enablers that positively influence collaboration and data management within the BRTT.

e) Shared mission focus

A unifying factor noted by numerous participants was the shared mission to combat wildlife crime, which acts as a strong cohesive force among diverse institutional actors. Respondents consistently emphasised that their collaboration was anchored in a mutual understanding of the urgency and importance of protecting rhinos and prosecuting wildlife crime. This sense of purpose strengthens inter-agency coordination even in the absence of formalised agreements, echoing the Collaborative Governance Model's assertion that a common problem frame is essential for sustained cooperation (Voets et al., 2021).

f) Leadership and strategic support

The role of strategic leadership and high-level endorsement emerged as a key enabler of inter-agency coordination. Several participants acknowledged that guidance from BRTT leadership plays a stabilising role, setting the tone for professionalism and ensuring operational alignment. This aligns with institutional literature, which emphasises the role of leadership in reinforcing norms, managing conflict, and facilitating trust-building across organisational boundaries (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Scott, 2014).

g) Joint operations and shared infrastructure

The BRTT's collaborative investigations and shared infrastructure, such as the use of Cellebrite for digital forensics, were cited as instrumental in fostering operational synergy. These shared tools not only streamline workflows but also create opportunities for joint learning and data consistency. Participants noted that working together on real-time operations helped build credibility and reduce duplication, thereby increasing efficiency.

h) Training and capacity building

Lastly, inter-agency workshops and capacity-building sessions were highlighted as valuable enablers of institutional trust and professional alignment. Respondents expressed that periodic briefings and trainings improved mutual understanding of each agency's capabilities, protocols, and constraints. This kind of structured engagement enhances both the relational and procedural dimensions of collaborative governance, fostering a sense of collective competence (Voets et al., 2021).

4.3.4. Operational outcomes: Contextual evidence supporting qualitative insights

While the study primarily relied on qualitative data collected via open-ended questionnaires, operational outcome statistics drawn from the Integrated National Wildlife Crime Database were used to triangulate and enrich the interpretation of findings. This form of data source triangulation enhances the credibility and contextual relevance of the themes identified, particularly in demonstrating how collaborative efforts and institutional norms translate into tangible law enforcement results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The operational performance of the BRTT between 2015 and 2025 reflects the evolution of inter-agency collaboration and data governance within Namibia's wildlife crime response framework. Data from the Integrated National Wildlife Crime Database reveal the following patterns:

- Arrests and wildlife crime cases rose significantly post-2015, peaking around 2019, which corresponds with intensified collaborative efforts, increased training, and improved intelligence coordination.

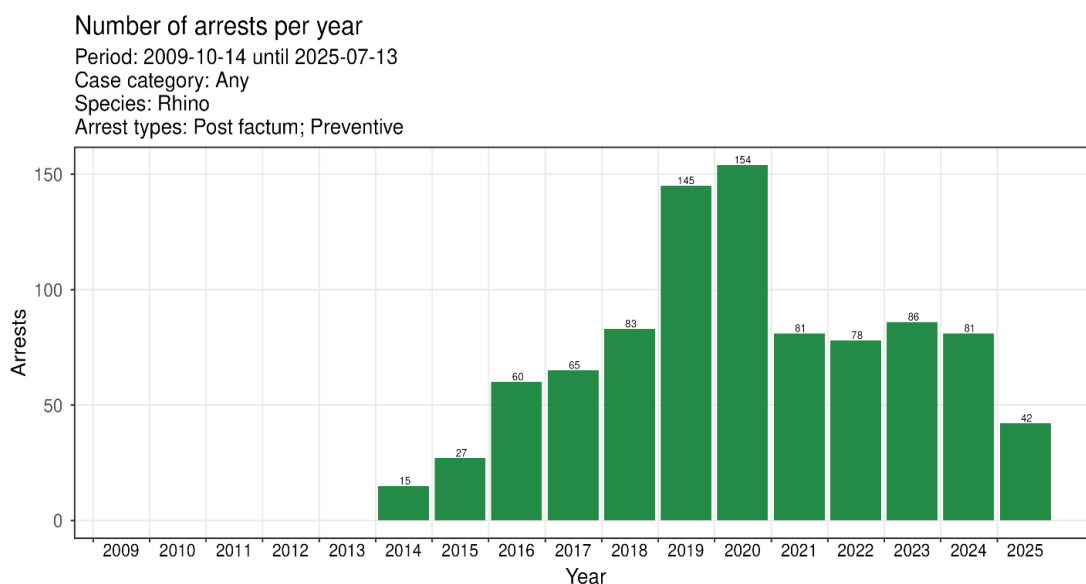


Figure 2: Number of arrests per year (200-2025)

Source: *Integrated National Wildlife Crime Database of Namibia*

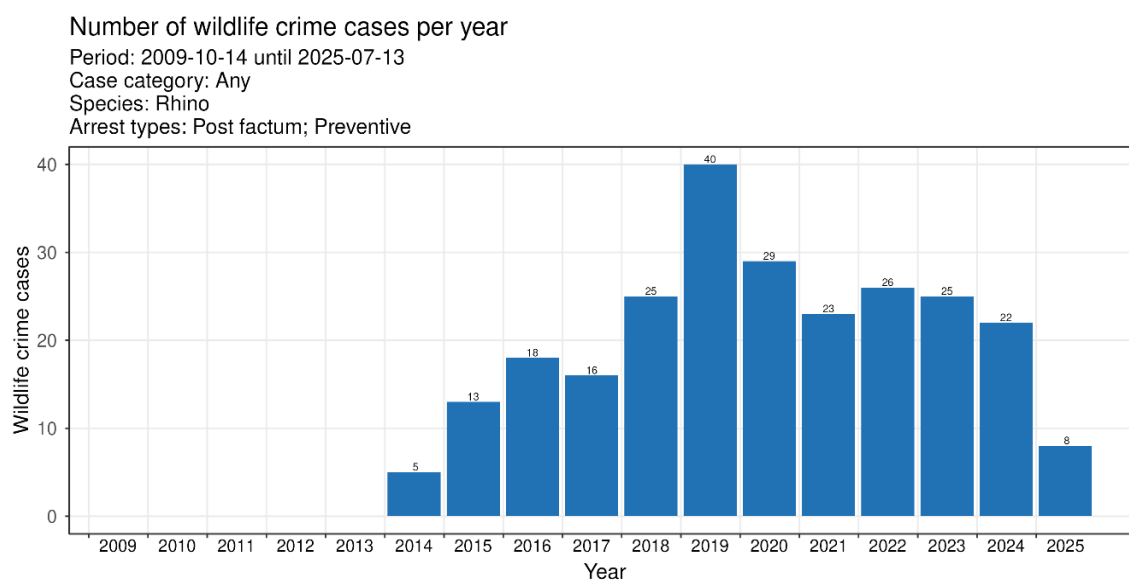


Figure 3: Number of wildlife crime cases per year (2009–2025)

Source: *Integrated National Wildlife Crime Database of Namibia*

- Vehicle and firearm seizures surged during the same period, suggesting enhanced operational capacity, improved field coordination, and the institutionalisation of tactical responses.

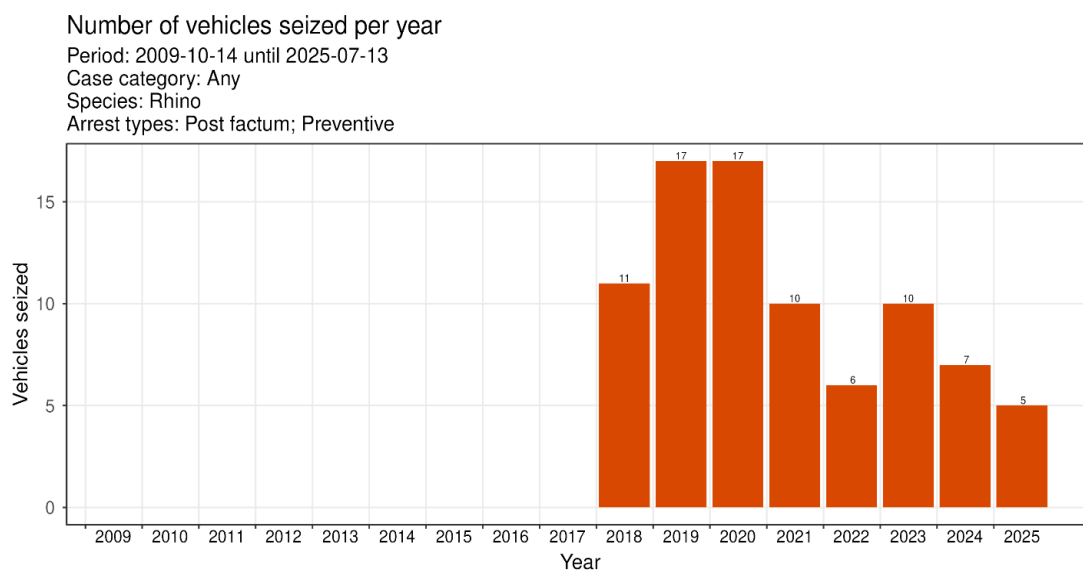


Figure 4: Number of vehicles seized per year (2009–2025)

Source: *Integrated National Wildlife Crime Database of Namibia*

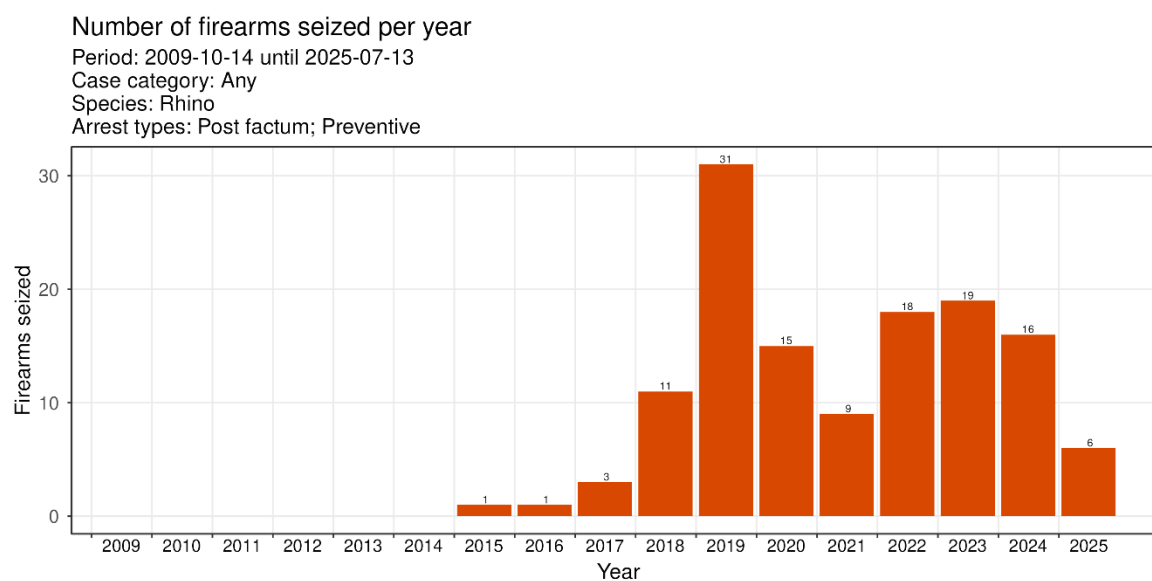


Figure 5: Number of firearms seized per year (2009–2025)

Source: *Integrated National Wildlife Crime Database of Namibia*

- The seizure of wildlife products, particularly rhino horns, indicates a growing deterrent effect and improved surveillance capabilities.

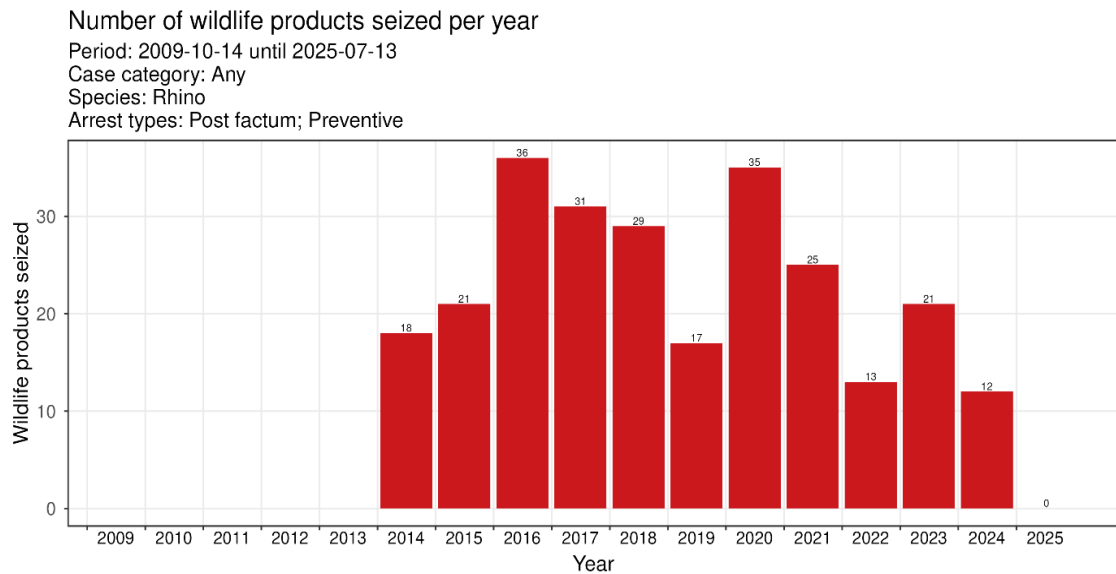


Figure 6: Number of wildlife products seized per year (2009–2025)

These trends mirror and validate the perceptions shared by questionnaire respondents, particularly in relation to:

- The effectiveness of trust-based collaboration and shared operational goals.
- The value of strategic leadership and aligned institutional mandates in coordinating inter-agency responses.
- The expressed need for formalised protocols and national legislation to maintain momentum and institutionalise gains.

These findings underscore the interconnectedness of institutional structures, collaboration dynamics, and operational effectiveness, as theorised under both Institutional Theory and the Collaborative Governance Model (Scott, 2014; Voets et al., 2021).

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented and analysed the empirical findings of the study, structured around the three sub-objectives that underpin the research: (1) examining how institutional norms influence data protection practices, (2) assessing the nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration, and (3) identifying factors that enhance or hinder operational efficiency within the BRTT. The findings revealed that while there

is a strong operational culture of confidentiality and collaboration among BRTT stakeholders, these practices are often guided by informal norms and discretionary behaviour rather than codified national policies or standardised protocols. The application of chain-of-command procedures and internal expectations around data sensitivity reflects both the regulative and normative pillars of Institutional Theory (Scott, 2014), although the absence of a national data protection framework poses legal and operational risks. From a collaborative perspective, the BRTT demonstrates a largely functional model of task-driven coordination, enabled by shared goals, interpersonal trust, and joint operations. However, the reliance on informal mechanisms, variable levels of institutional commitment, and inconsistent communication channels signal a need for more formalised governance structures, as emphasised in the Collaborative Governance Model (Voets et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the operational outcomes, such as increased arrests, seizures, and intelligence-led activities, corroborate participants' views and demonstrate the effectiveness of multi-agency collaboration. Yet, the sustainability of these gains remains contingent on addressing structural gaps, building capacity, and enacting enforceable legal instruments. In sum, the BRTT's achievements illustrate the potential of collaborative enforcement models, even in the face of institutional fragmentation. However, formalising these efforts through legal, structural, and procedural reforms will be essential for ensuring long-term efficiency and accountability in both data governance and inter-agency coordination. The next chapter discusses these findings in greater depth, relating them to existing literature and offering recommendations for practice and policy development.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a critical discussion of the key findings derived from the data presented in Chapter Four, to evaluate their significance in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks. The discussion is structured around the three sub-objectives of the study, which address: (1) the influence of institutional norms, policies, and structures on data protection practices; (2) the nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration; and (3) the factors that enhance or hinder the efficiency of data handling and inter-agency collaboration within the BRTT. The analysis is framed within the beliefs of Institutional Theory (Scott, 2014) and the Collaborative Governance Model (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Voets et al., 2021), offering a subtle understanding of organisational behaviour and coordination in a multi-agency enforcement setting.

5.2. Addressing the main research question

To address the central research question, *“How efficient are the existing data protection practices and inter-agency collaboration mechanisms in supporting the operations of the BRTT in Namibia?”*, this chapter synthesised insights from participants’ experiences, institutional dynamics, and operational practices within the BRTT. The analysis revealed that while collaborative efforts are underpinned by strong interpersonal trust and informal communication tools, these mechanisms are not fully institutionalised and remain vulnerable to systemic inefficiencies. Data protection practices are similarly influenced by a mix of formal protocols and informal norms yet are constrained by the absence of a national legal framework, resulting in fragmented and at times inconsistent implementation. Overall, the efficiency of the BRTT's operations is partially supported by these existing mechanisms; however, structural gaps, legal ambiguities, and coordination imbalances continue to hinder their optimal functioning. The discussion that follows unpacks these dynamics in greater detail, guided by the study's three sub-questions.

5.3. Discussion of findings

5.3.1. Institutional norms and data protection

Research question 1: *How do institutional norms and policies shape data protection practices within the BRTT?*

The study revealed that institutional norms and structures significantly influenced how data was managed and protected within the BRTT. The absence of a national data protection framework resulted in inconsistent and fragmented practices among agencies. Comparable challenges have been documented in other countries. For instance, in Kenya, fragmented data protection policies within anti-poaching units created overlaps and legal ambiguities that weakened enforcement coordination (Mwangi, 2019; Tubey, 2025). In South Africa, despite the establishment of a national data protection framework, inter-agency wildlife crime enforcement units struggled with institutional silos and limited interoperability of intelligence systems (Longinus, 2024). Similarly, in Botswana and Tanzania, informal exchanges often substituted formal intelligence-sharing protocols, exposing sensitive information to risks of misuse (Lutz, 2021; Kadio, 2022). These parallels suggest that Namibia's experience with the BRTT reflects broader regional patterns where weak institutional harmonisation and reliance on informal practices continue to constrain the effectiveness of data protection in multi-agency wildlife enforcement. Formal structures provided accountability yet introduced bureaucratic delays and operational rigidity. On the other hand, informal mechanisms, such as discretion and trust, allowed more agility but exposed data to risks of misuse or compromise. This finding aligns with literature suggesting that in the absence of robust national legal instruments, agencies often resort to informal workarounds that lack security and consistency (Kaiser et al., 2021; Dubey, 2022).

The interaction between hierarchical structures and operational discretion also reflected insights from institutional theory, which posits that organisations are shaped not only by formal mandates but also by embedded norms and cultural logics (Sandhu & Kulik, 2019). In Namibia, Eiseb (2024) similarly found that weak institutional alignment on information governance exposed law enforcement agencies to legal and operational risks. Thus, while BRTT members demonstrated commitment to information sharing, the structural misalignment weakened data governance.

Moreover, echoing findings by Kornelius (2024) and Meteti (2022), the study highlighted how informal practices, such as verbal briefings and undocumented

exchanges, remained prevalent despite the presence of formal protocols. These practices undermined accountability and made traceability of intelligence difficult, especially during joint operations. As also observed in other regional enforcement contexts (Agina, 2021; Komna & Mpungose, 2023), the lack of harmonised institutional norms across BRTT member agencies led to inefficiencies, duplication, and vulnerabilities in data handling. The findings reinforce the argument that effective data protection in collaborative enforcement settings requires not only technological tools and policies but also a shared institutional culture, capacity-building efforts, and coordinated leadership.

5.3.2. Nature and effectiveness of Inter-agency collaboration

Research question 2: *What is the nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration within the BRTT?*

The study revealed that institutional norms and structures significantly influenced how data was managed and protected within the BRTT. The absence of a national data protection framework resulted in inconsistent and fragmented practices among agencies. Formal structures provided accountability yet introduced bureaucratic delays and operational rigidity. On the other hand, informal mechanisms such as discretion and trust allowed more agility but exposed data to risks of misuse or compromise. This finding aligned with literature suggesting that in the absence of robust national legal instruments, agencies often resort to informal workarounds that lack security and consistency (Kaiser et al., 2021; Dubey, 2022).

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5.3.3. Factors influencing efficiency

Research question 3: *What factors enhance or hinder the efficiency of data handling and inter-agency collaboration within the task team?*

Efficiency in data handling and collaboration was found to be influenced by both structural enablers and constraints. Positive factors included strong leadership, the use of digital tools, joint training, and a collective mission. On the contrary, legal gaps, inconsistent data formats, delayed communication, and a lack of real-time data sharing acted as barriers. These findings aligned with the dual-level model of collaboration, which highlights that both structural systems (e.g., laws, protocols, and ICT infrastructure) and behavioural factors (e.g., leadership and motivation) are essential for effective coordination (Siahaan et al., 2025; Jin & Li, 2023). The study echoed (Florek-Paszkowska & Ujwary-Gil, 2025) in showing that digital innovation can facilitate data sharing, but only when embedded within a secure and policy-driven framework. Moreover, the tension between agility and accountability echoed themes in public administration literature that caution against over-reliance on informal systems (De Schrevel et al., 2025; Bhanye, 2025). Respondents' call for harmonised frameworks and legal reform underscored the need for systemic institutional change to strengthen operational performance.

Hindrances to efficiency

- Lack of a national data policy results in inconsistent practices and legal uncertainty (legal gaps).
- Reliance on discretion introduces errors and security risks (informal practices).
- Irregular coordination leads to delays and misalignment (poor communications).
- Some agencies dominate due to resources; others lag (capacity imbalances).
- Bureaucratic delays in accessing real-time data hinder field operations.

Enablers of efficiency

- Shared Mission - protecting wildlife unites agencies.
- Leadership Support - high-level backing drives participation and resourcing.
- Digital Tools - tools such as Cellebrite and the Printout Analysis App boost speed and accuracy.
- Joint Training - builds trust and shared skills across teams.

Participants Recommendations

- Formal MoUs to define roles and data protocols.
- Regular multi-agency meetings for alignment.
- A central coordination unit to mediate and manage.
- Wider adoption of digital tools like the Printout Analysis App.

5.3.4. Summary of key findings aligned with the literature

Table 2: Key Findings

Theme	Key finding	Support from literature	Implication
1. Institutional Norms and Data Protection	Data protection is shaped by formal rules and informal discretion. Lack of national legislation leads to fragmented practices and legal ambiguity.	Scott (2014): Institutional theory, organisations follow both formal and informal norms. Kaiser et al. (2021); Dubey (2022): Absence of legal frameworks	Highlights the need for a national data protection framework to standardise practices and enhance legal clarity.

		weakens data governance. Eiseb (2024): Namibian enforcement bodies operate under fragmented structures.	
2. Nature and Effectiveness of Inter-Agency Collaboration	Collaboration relies heavily on relational trust, informal tools (e.g., WhatsApp), and goodwill. However, coordination is uneven and lacks structure.	Kirimi (2022): Trust-based collaboration is effective in anti-poaching but vulnerable. Stöckl and Struck (2022): Informal digital tools support coordination but are not sustainable. Meteti's (2022): Namibia's agencies face unequal involvement due to resource disparities.	Formalising collaboration structures (e.g., MoUs) and ensuring equitable resource access is critical.
3. Factors Influencing Efficiency	Efficiency is enabled by leadership, shared goals, and technology. Barriers include legal gaps, poor communication, and delayed data access.	Siahaan et al. (2025): Efficiency depends on both structural and behavioural enablers.	Efficiency gains require structural reform (e.g., clear legal mandates) and continued behavioural commitment (e.g., training and leadership).

5.4. Study's originality and contribution

This study offered a unique contribution by critically examining the intersection of data protection and inter-agency collaboration within the specific context of Namibia's

BRTT, a multi-agency initiative focused on combating wildlife crime. Unlike prior studies that have largely explored these domains in isolation or within more developed legal frameworks, this research provided empirical insights into how informal norms, trust-based practices, and capacity disparities influence operational effectiveness in a low-legislation environment. Its originality lies in contextualising data governance challenges and collaborative mechanisms in a setting where formal structures are still evolving, thus filling a critical gap in the literature on law enforcement collaboration in the Global South.

Additionally, by utilising a qualitative approach through open-ended questionnaires, the study captured rich practitioner perspectives that are often underrepresented in scholarly discourse, offering both theoretical advancement and practical recommendations that are grounded in real-world operational experiences.

5.5. Synthesis: Implications for BRTT data protection efficiency

The interplay of formal structures, informal norms, and the absence of a national legal framework significantly shapes the efficiency of data protection practices within the BRTT, directly addressing the main research question.

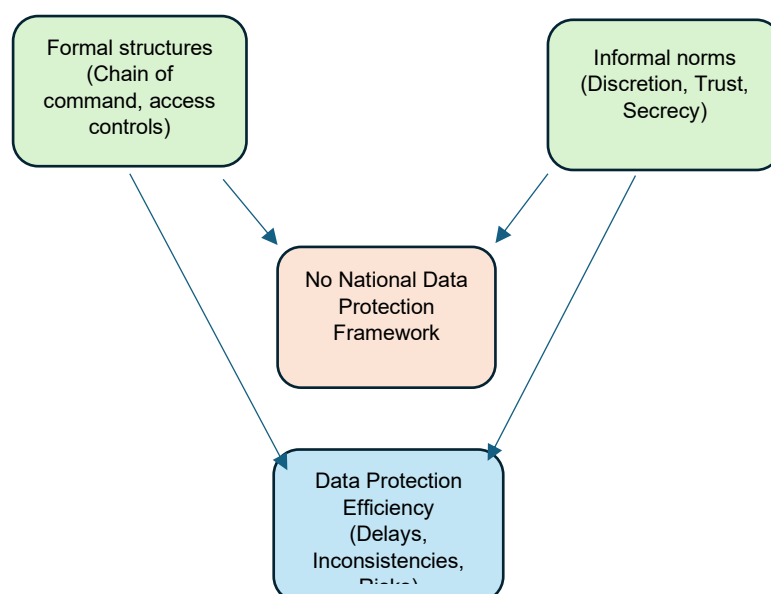


Figure 7: Thematic map of institutional influences on BRTT data protection efficiency

Source: Own compilation

Figure 8 (thematic map) illustrates how formal structures, informal practices, and legal gaps intersect to shape the efficiency of BRTT’s data protection systems. While hierarchical access controls create accountability, they delay responsiveness. Informal norms offer speed but pose risks. Legal uncertainty undermines consistency. To improve, BRTT should: (a) standardise protocols across agencies, (b) formalise informal norms through codified guidelines, and (c) advocate for national legislation to guide data protection. These reforms are essential to ensure secure, consistent, and efficient information management in support of BRTT’s mission.

5.5.1. Synthesis: Implications for BRTT operational efficiency

The study found that BRTT’s collaboration was functional but fragile. Trust and shared goals drive short-term success, but structural weaknesses, such as informal systems and unequal commitment, limit long-term efficiency. Figure 8 (Collaboration Effectiveness Matrix) places BRTT in the “Ad Hoc Coordination” quadrant, high trust but low structure.

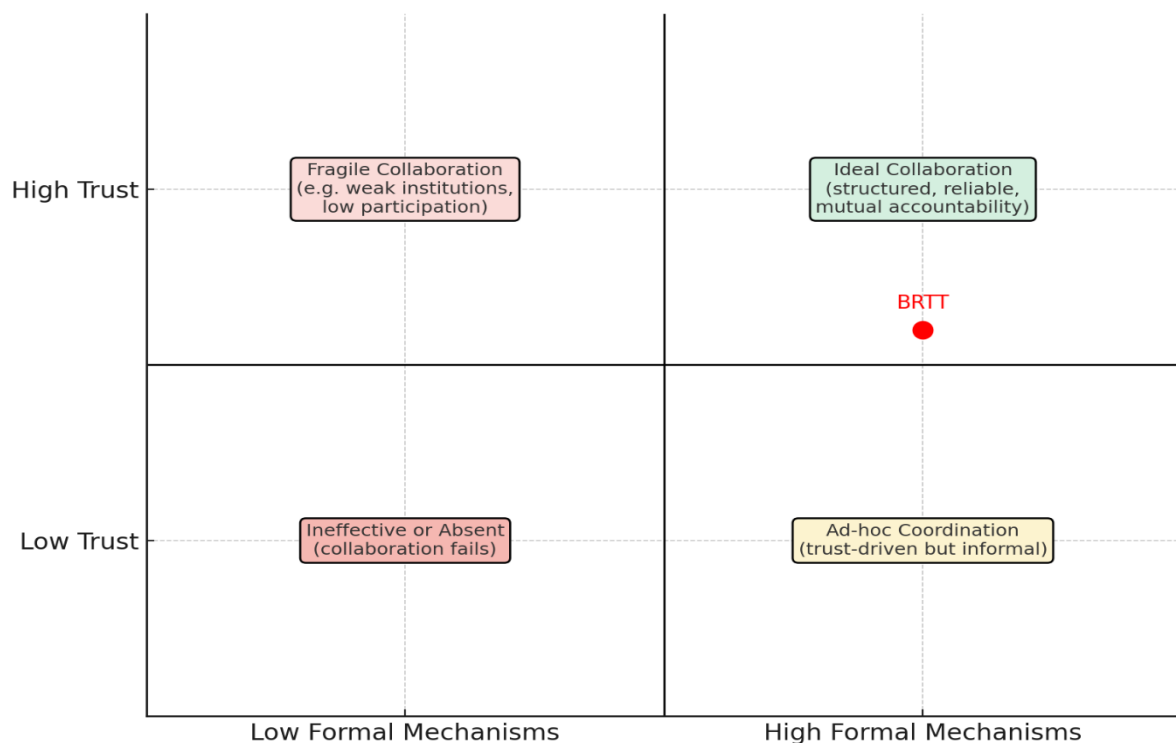


Figure 8: Collaboration Effectiveness Matrix: BRTT’s position within collaborative governance maturity.

Source: Own compilation

Table 3: Comparative summary: Barriers vs. Enablers to BRTT efficiency

Theme	Barrier Identified	Proposed Enabler / Recommendation
Institutional Framework	Lack of formal agreements leading to inconsistency in roles, data-sharing, and accountability	Establish structured legal agreements to define roles, responsibilities, and data-sharing protocols
Communication & Coordination	Fragmented decision-making and lack of alignment across agencies	Institutionalise periodic multi-agency coordination meetings to align priorities and resolve issues
Central Oversight	Absence of a neutral, central body to manage operations and conflicts	Set up an independent unit to oversee operations, mediate disputes, and ensure balanced participation
Digital Capacity & Tools	Manual data analysis delays, inefficiencies in processing, and identifying trends in CDRs	Broaden the adoption of digital tools, e.g. the Printout Analysis App to streamline and automate data analysis
Accountability & Transparency	Perceived imbalance in tasking and information flow among partners	Central unit promotes transparency and equal representation across all partner agencies

5.6. Chapter summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive discussion of the key findings from the study, aligned with the research objectives and supported by relevant literature. The analysis revealed that institutional norms, both formal and informal, significantly shape the efficiency of data protection practices within the BRTT. While inter-agency collaboration was found to be driven by trust, informal coordination, and shared purpose, its sustainability is undermined by the absence of structured mechanisms and legal clarity. Moreover, both enabling factors (such as leadership commitment and shared digital infrastructure) and constraints (such as fragmented communication and resource disparities) influence the task team's operational efficiency. The discussion highlighted not only how institutional theory, and the collaborative governance model framed the findings but also revealed the practical interplay between behavioural, structural, and procedural elements. A synthesis of the findings was presented using

a Collaboration Matrix that underscored how effective coordination is contingent upon balancing legal frameworks with social capital. This chapter also demonstrated the study's originality and its contribution to scholarly understanding of multi-agency governance within data-sensitive security contexts.

5.7. Conclusion of the chapter

In conclusion, the chapter established that while informal practices and relational dynamics provide short-term operational advantages for the BRTT, long-term sustainability and efficiency require institutional alignment, formal coordination mechanisms, and legal standardisation. The findings contributed new insights to existing literature on collaborative governance and data protection in multi-agency environments, particularly within the wildlife crime response context in Namibia. These insights lay the foundation for the concluding chapter, which outlines practical recommendations, the study's theoretical and practical implications, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the final synthesis of the study, which aimed to evaluate the efficiency of data protection and inter-agency collaboration mechanisms within the BRTT in Namibia. Drawing on the institutional theory and the collaborative governance model, the chapter summarises the key findings about the main research objective and sub-questions and offers strategic recommendations for enhancing collaborative enforcement efforts in wildlife crime prevention. The chapter also reflects on the theoretical and practical contributions of the study and identifies areas for future research.

The study was guided by the central research question:

“How efficient are the existing data protection practices and inter-agency collaboration mechanisms in supporting the operations of the BRTT in Namibia?”

To address this question, the research adopted a qualitative case study approach, focusing on how institutional norms, formal policies, and collaborative dynamics influence the operational effectiveness of the BRTT, particularly in combating rhino poaching. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaire responses from 31 purposively selected participants affiliated with the BRTT, complemented by documentary analysis. The findings were presented thematically in Chapter 4 and discussed in depth in Chapter Five about the existing literature. These findings were organised around the following three sub-research questions:

1. How do institutional norms, policies, and structures influence data protection practices within the BRTT?
2. What is the nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration among BRTT stakeholders?
3. What factors enhance or hinder the efficiency of data handling and inter-agency collaboration in the BRTT?

This chapter consolidates the study findings by summarising the key insights into actionable recommendations for improving institutional alignment, technological safeguards, and collaborative practices. It concludes with reflections on the study's overall contribution to the fields of wildlife crime enforcement, institutional theory, and collaborative governance, while suggesting avenues for further inquiry.

Evolution of study objectives

The initial objectives of this study focused broadly on assessing data protection collaboration within the BRTT, including evaluating current practices, identifying key challenges, and exploring strategies to improve inter-agency information exchange. However, as the research progressed, these objectives were refined to provide a more detailed and theoretically grounded focus. The revised objectives emphasise evaluating the efficiency of data protection and inter-agency collaboration mechanisms, guided by institutional theory and the collaborative governance model. This shift brought greater specificity by exploring how institutional norms, policies, and structures influence data protection practices, examining the nature and effectiveness of collaboration among BRTT stakeholders, and identifying factors that enhance or hinder operational efficiency. Thus, while the core focus on improving data protection and collaboration remains consistent, the revised objectives deepened the inquiry, thus allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the institutional and relational dynamics underpinning the BRTT's operations.

6.2. Summary of key findings

This study set out to investigate the efficiency of data protection practices and inter-agency collaboration mechanisms in supporting the operations of the BRTT. The analysis yielded the following key findings:

6.2.1. Institutional norms and data protection

Research question: *How do institutional norms, policies, and structures influence data protection practices in the BRTT?*

The study found that data protection within the BRTT was shaped by a mix of formal hierarchical structures, informal norms, and the absence of national legislation. Agencies such as NamPol and MEFT relied on internal SOPs and formal protocols that provided legal backing and accountability, reflecting the regulative pillar of

institutional theory (Scott, 2008). However, the lack of harmonised procedures across agencies led to inconsistencies and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Informal practices such as verbal briefings and trust-based sharing introduced flexibility in time-sensitive situations, but they also heightened the risk of data breaches and reduced institutional reliability. This tension between formal structures and informal norms echoed Barbalat's (2023) observation that discretion often compensates for institutional rigidity at the cost of standardisation. The absence of a national data protection framework further created legal ambiguity and constrained both domestic and cross-border data flows, supporting Anthony Jr. (2022), who argues that intelligence-led enforcement is weakened without a robust legal foundation.

6.2.2. Nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration

Research question: *What is the nature and effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration among stakeholders in the BRTT?*

The collaboration within the BRTT was largely informal and built on interpersonal trust, a shared conservation mission, and professional camaraderie. This reflected the Collaborative Governance Model by Ansell and Gash (2008), which highlights the role of trust, dialogue, and shared goals in fostering joint action. Respondents indicated that platforms such as WhatsApp allowed for real-time coordination but were insecure and unsuitable for institutionalised operations. While informal collaboration was effective in the short term, the absence of formal coordination tools, such as binding MoUs, structured leadership, and shared accountability mechanisms, limited institutional resilience. These findings echo Voets et al. (2021), who note that sustainable collaboration requires embedded governance frameworks. Additionally, unequal resource distribution (e.g., digital tools, transport, skilled personnel) contributed to power imbalances, with better-equipped agencies dominating operations, a pattern noted in the literature on collaborative enforcement (Aivalli et al., 2025).

6.2.3. Factors influencing efficiency

Research question: *What factors enhance or hinder the efficiency of data handling and inter-agency collaboration within the task team?*

Efficiency within the BRTT was influenced by both structural and behavioural factors. Key constraints included the lack of a national data protection law, fragmented

communication protocols, delayed access to telecommunications data, and disparities in human and technological resources. These barriers aligned with literature that identified unclear institutional arrangements and poor interoperability as common obstacles to collaboration (Griffiths, 2022; Jenkins, 2019). Enablers of efficiency included a shared mission (Adams et al., 2021), strong leadership backing, the use of digital tools like Cellebrite and CDR analysis apps, and joint capacity-building initiatives. These findings validate collaborative governance principles, wherein success depends on facilitative leadership, technology use, and shared learning (Luntungan, 2024). Practical recommendations from respondents included establishing formal agreements, setting up a central coordinating unit, conducting periodic review meetings, and deploying secure digital platforms, echoing best practices in the public sector (Mian et al., 2025; Jenkins, 2019).

6.3. Conclusions drawn from the study

This study examined how institutional norms and inter-agency collaboration influenced the operational efficiency of the BRTT, especially regarding data protection practices. Drawing on the institutional theory (Scott, 2008) and the collaborative governance model (Ansell & Gash, 2008), the following conclusions were reached:

6.3.1. Institutional misalignment undermined data protection efficiency

The absence of a unified legislative and procedural framework for data protection significantly weakens the BRTT's ability to manage sensitive information securely and consistently. Agencies operate under distinct internal policies that are not harmonised, leading to fragmented practices, legal uncertainties, and operational delays. This reflects a deficiency in the regulative pillar of institutional theory, where legal voids impede coherent institutional behaviour.

6.3.2. Inter-agency collaboration was functional but structurally weak

While collaboration was effective in practice due to interpersonal trust and shared objectives, its informal nature and lack of formal structures (e.g., MoUs, planning tools, performance metrics) posed sustainability risks. The collaborative mechanisms lacked institutional depth and were vulnerable to disruptions.

6.3.3. Efficiency depended on both structural and behavioural factors

Operational efficiency was contingent on structural enablers (e.g., legal clarity, secure technologies, formal roles) as well as behavioural dynamics (e.g., leadership, professional commitment, trust). As the collaborative governance model suggests, long-term efficiency depends on both institutional scaffolding and strong relational capital among actors.

6.4. Recommendations

Drawing on the key findings of this study, this section presents a set of actionable recommendations to enhance data protection, strengthen inter-agency collaboration, and improve operational efficiency within the BRTT. These recommendations are informed by institutional theory and the collaborative governance model, recognising that both formal structures and informal norms shape collaborative success. The recommendations are structured across five key thematic areas: institutional and legal reforms, coordination and governance, communication and information systems, capacity development and resource allocation, and trust-building and performance alignment.

Institutional and Legal Reforms

Institutional and legal reforms are necessary to provide a strong regulatory foundation for data protection and cooperation. It is recommended that the Government of Namibia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and relevant stakeholders, draft and implement a comprehensive National Data Protection Framework within the next 18-24 months. Adequate budgetary resources should be allocated for policy drafting, stakeholder consultations and public awareness campaigns, estimated at a minimum of Five Million Namibian dollars. This would address the current legislative gap regarding the handling of sensitive data, particularly in high-risk law enforcement environments such as conservation crime. Furthermore, agencies operating within BRTT should develop legally binding Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) within 6-12 months to define roles, responsibilities, and standardised data-sharing protocols. These formal agreements will reduce reliance on informal norms and enhance accountability, aligning with the regulative pillar of institutional theory.

Coordination and Governance

There is a need to enhance coordination and oversight mechanisms. A Central Coordination and Oversight Unit should be established, ideally hosted within the MEFT but operating independently to ensure neutrality. This unit should be set up within 12 months, supported by a dedicated annual budget and a minimum of 10 specialised staff members. It would facilitate operational planning, manage inter-agency disputes, and oversee performance monitoring. Additionally, institutionalising quarterly joint strategy and review meetings would promote alignment of priorities, shared ownership of challenges, and proactive problem-solving, key components of sustained collaboration as posited by the collaborative governance model.

Communication and Information Systems

The study recommends investing in a centralised, secure digital platform for real-time intelligence sharing, case tracking, and document storage. Development of this systems should be prioritised within 12-18 months with an initial capital investment estimated Fifteen to Twenty Million Namibian dollars, supplemented by donor or development partner contributions. To complement this, agencies should develop standardised communication protocols and templates for reporting and escalation within 6 months, alongside shared dashboards for data-driven decision-making. These improvements would enhance institutional trust and transparency, as highlighted in the study's findings.

Capacity Development and Resource Allocation

Capacity development and resource allocation emerged as critical enablers of effective collaboration. A bi-annual, standardised inter-agency training programme should be introduced starting within the next 12 months, with training costs integrated into the annual annual budgets of participating agencies and supported by international conservation partners where possible. Training should cover digital evidence handling, collaborative investigations, and cybersecurity. In addition, a dedicated resource mobilisation strategy should be developed within 6-12 months to address disparities in vehicles, surveillance tools, and protective gear among agencies, with an estimated Twenty-five Million Namibian Dollars needed over a three-year cycle. This would improve operational parity and morale.

Trust-Building and Performance Alignment

Fostering institutional trust and aligning performance expectations is vital. The introduction of joint performance metrics, reviewed quarterly starting within the next 6 months, would enhance mutual accountability and performance transparency. Furthermore, inter-agency exchange programmes conducted annually, annual retreats, and recognition awards requiring an estimated Two to Three Million Namibian Dollars annually across agencies can play an important role in building interpersonal trust and reinforcing a culture of collaboration. These relational strategies are essential for bridging organisational silos and sustaining long-term cooperation in complex law enforcement environments.

6.5. Theoretical, practical, and policy implications

6.5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study contributed to the theoretical understanding of collaborative governance and institutional theory within high-risk, multi-agency environments such as conservation crime enforcement. By examining the operations of the BRTT, the research provided empirical validation for the relevance of Scott's (2008) institutional pillars, regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive, in shaping collaborative behaviours and inter-agency norms. It also extended the collaborative governance framework by illustrating how informal norms and relational trust often filled the gaps left by absent formal structures in resource-constrained contexts. The findings further suggested that while formal rules and structures (regulative institutions) were necessary, they were insufficient without strong normative alignment and interpersonal trust among actors. This affirmed the interplay between institutional structures and individual agency within collaborative frameworks. Thus, the study added depth to the understanding of how institutional logics and governance models operated in practice, particularly in conservation task forces operating under ambiguous legal frameworks.

6.5.2. Practical contributions

From a practical standpoint, the study identified operational challenges and provided actionable recommendations to improve collaboration, data protection, and performance management in the BRTT. Key practical implications included the importance of institutionalising standard operating procedures and performance metrics to address inconsistencies across partner institutions. The findings also

highlighted the critical role of secure information systems and regular inter-agency communication in sustaining operational efficiency and trust. Moreover, the study demonstrated that capacity gaps, both human and technological, undermined the collective ability of agencies to respond effectively to conservation crimes. Addressing these gaps through targeted training programmes, equitable resource allocation, and improved digital infrastructure was essential for enhancing operational parity. Practitioners managing similar multi-stakeholder teams could apply these insights to strengthen collaborative efforts in other enforcement domains.

6.5.3. Policy implications

The study's findings have significant implications for national policymaking, particularly about data governance and collaborative enforcement. The absence of a comprehensive national data protection framework emerged as a critical gap that exposed both personnel and sensitive intelligence to legal and operational risks. This underscores the need for the Namibian government to prioritise the formulation and enactment of data protection legislation that governs multi-agency collaboration and information sharing. In addition, the research supports the development of legally binding Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between agencies to formalise data-sharing protocols, clarify roles, and enhance accountability. Policymakers are also encouraged to support the creation of an independent coordination unit for task forces like the BRTT, with a mandate to facilitate strategic alignment, monitor performance, and resolve inter-agency disputes. These policy-level interventions are necessary to transition from ad hoc coordination to institutionalised collaboration, thereby ensuring more sustainable and legally compliant conservation enforcement strategies.

6.5.4. Limitations of the study

While this study provided valuable insights into inter-agency collaboration, institutional dynamics, and data protection practices within the BRTT, several limitations were acknowledged. First, the study relied solely on data collected through a Google Form-based open-ended questionnaire, which, although effective in capturing broad perspectives, may have limited the depth and nuance of the responses. The absence of follow-up interviews or focus group discussions restricted the ability to probe deeper into specific experiences or clarify ambiguous responses. Second, the study was confined to a single conservation law enforcement initiative in Namibia. While the

BRTT represented a unique and complex collaborative arrangement, the findings may not be fully generalisable to other regions or multi-agency environments with differing legal, cultural, or institutional contexts. Third, the research focused primarily on the perceptions and experiences of individuals embedded within the BRTT. As such, the findings were shaped by subjective interpretations, which may have introduced bias or overlooked broader organisational or political influences affecting collaboration and data governance. Lastly, although the study was framed within institutional theory and the collaborative governance model, it did not empirically measure institutional effectiveness or governance performance using quantitative indicators. Future studies could benefit from incorporating mixed methods approaches to triangulate findings and offer a more robust assessment of collaborative outcomes. Despite these limitations, the study offered meaningful, context-specific contributions to both theory and practice, particularly within under-researched multi-agency enforcement structures in the Global South.

6.6. Recommendations for future research

While this study offered important insights into collaborative governance and data protection practices within Namibia's BRTT, several areas remain underexplored, and these were identified as potential directions for future research. These suggestions aim to expand the evidence base and support the development of more robust and context-specific conservation enforcement policies.

Firstly, it is recommended that future studies examine the role of donor-driven priorities in shaping inter-agency dynamics and influencing the sustainability of task forces such as BRTT. Donor agendas often affect funding structures, strategic focus, and performance indicators, which may not always align with national priorities or institutional capacities.

Secondly, comparative research involving similar conservation-focused task forces across the Southern African region could yield valuable insights. Such studies would have allowed for cross-national learning and the identification of replicable best practices.

A third area of interest concerned the legal admissibility of digital evidence collected through multi-agency operations. Future research could have explored the extent to which such evidence met prosecutorial standards and contributed to successful wildlife crime convictions. In addition, further investigation into the impact of gender and organisational diversity on collaboration dynamics and leadership effectiveness was encouraged. Understanding how these variables influenced teamwork, trust, and decision-making could inform the development of more inclusive and resilient collaborative structures.

Lastly, with the increasing integration of digital technologies into enforcement operations, future research should have assessed how innovations such as AI-driven surveillance, remote sensors, and digital case management platforms affected inter-agency cooperation and data protection. These studies would have been valuable in evaluating the balance between technological advancement, ethical data use, and institutional trust. By addressing these research gaps, future studies could build on the findings of this work and contribute to more effective, transparent, and inclusive models of conservation enforcement.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form and Questionnaire

Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Evaluating the Efficiency of Data Protection and Inter-Agency Collaboration in the Blue Rhino Task Team

Researcher: Gabriel Kapiya (+264 814648248)

Research Supervisor: Dr Merlyn Tjimuku (+264 811294068)

Institution: Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST)

Purpose of the study

The study seeks to explore how institutional policies and inter-agency collaboration practices affect the effectiveness and efficiency of data protection within the Blue Rhino Task Team. The insights will contribute to better understanding collaborative security frameworks and data management practices in task teams.

Why you have been invited to participate

You have been identified as someone who has relevant experience or involvement with the Blue Rhino Task Team or related inter-agency efforts.

What participation involves

- You will be interviewed at a mutually agreed time and place.
- The interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes
- With your permission, the interview may be audio-recorded for accuracy.
- You may decline to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

- Your identity will be kept strictly confidential.
- All data will be anonymised during analysis and reporting.
- Audio recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and only accessible to the researcher.
- Data will not be shared with third parties and will be destroyed a year after the study ends.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any point without giving a reason and without any repercussions

Risk and Benefits

- There are minimal or no foreseeable risks in participating.
- There are no direct benefits, but your participation will contribute to academic research and policy development.

Ethics Approval

This study has been approved by NUST Ethics Review Committee.

Consent Declaration

I have read and understood the information provided above. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time. I consent to participate in this research study.

Participant Name: _____

Signature : _____

Date: _____

☐ I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.

Questionnaire: Evaluating the Efficiency of Data Protection and Inter-Agency Collaboration in the Blue Rhino Task Team

This qualitative interview guide is designed to gather in-depth information from key participants involved in the Blue Rhino Task Team. The questionnaire is structured according to major thematic areas aligned with Institutional Theory and the Collaborative Governance Model.

Section A: Demographics

1. Age range

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55 and above

2. Sex

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other: _____

3. Agency/Department Affiliation

- _____ (e.g. Namibian Police Force, Min of Safety & Security, Immigration Dept etc)

4. Current Job Title/Position

- _____

5. Number of Years in Current Role

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- More than 10 years

Section B: Specific to study context

6. Have you been directly involved in the Blue Rhino Task Team?

- Yes
- No

7. If yes, how long have you been involved?

- Less than 6 months
- 6-12 months
- 1-2 years
- More than 2 years

8. What role do you primarily play in the task team?

- Data collection and analysis
- Operational planning
- Policy and legal advisory

- Field enforcement/intervention
 - Inter-agency coordination
 - Other (please specify): _____
- 9. Have you received training on data protection or information security?**
- Yes
 - No
- 10. Is your agency's participation in the task team driven more by:**
- ☐ Formal mandates ☐ Professional norms ☐ External pressure
- ☐ Voluntary cooperation

Section C: Background and Role

1. Can you briefly describe your role in the Blue Rhino Task Team?
2. How long have you been involved in operations related to the task team?
3. What specific responsibilities do you have regarding data protection or collaboration with other agencies?

Section D: Institutional Influences on Data Protection (Institutional Theory)

1. What formal data protection policies guide your operations in the task team?
2. Are there any informal or unwritten practices that influence how information is handled?
3. How are these data protection policies enforced within your agency?
4. Do you feel that the current institutional structures support or hinder effective data protection? Please explain.

Section E: Inter-Agency Collaboration (Collaborative Governance Model)

1. How would you describe the level of collaboration among agencies in the task team?
2. What mechanisms are in place for joint decision-making?
3. To what extent do you trust other agencies when it comes to sharing sensitive information?
4. How is accountability maintained when decisions are made collectively?
5. What challenges have you encountered in inter-agency collaboration?

Section F: Operational Efficiency and Overall Assessment

1. How would you evaluate the task team's efficiency in protecting data and sharing information?
2. What internal or external factors have affected the efficiency of the task team's operations?
3. What suggestions do you have for improving inter-agency collaboration and data protection within the task team?

Section G: Final Comments

1. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience with the Blue Rhino Task Team?

Appendix B: Permission Letter



Blue Rhino Task Team
Windhoek, Namibia
Cell: 264811290054
Email: Bart@blue-rhino.org

10 June 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

RE: AUTHORISATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN THE BLUE RHINO TASK TEAM

This letter serves to confirm that **Mr. Gabriel Kapiya**, a student enrolled in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), has been granted permission to conduct academic research involving members of the Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT).

Mr. Kapiya's research is titled:

"Evaluating Data Protection and Inter-Agency Collaboration in the Blue Rhino Task Team in Namibia."

The study is aligned with the operational realities and collaborative environment within the BRTT and seeks to contribute meaningfully to both academic literature and practical improvements in inter-agency coordination and data governance in the context of wildlife crime enforcement.

Permission is hereby granted for Mr. Kapiya to engage relevant BRTT personnel and affiliated stakeholders for the purpose of data collection, which may include questionnaires, interviews, or the review of relevant documentation. Participation in the study is voluntary, and confidentiality of all participants must be strictly maintained in line with ethical standards approved by NUST and the BRTT.

Should you require further clarification regarding this authorisation, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours sincerely,

Barry De Klerk
Deputy Commissioner
Head of the Blue Rhino Task Team (BRTT)



Appendix C: Permission Letter



c/o Brahms and Haydn Streets
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NAMIBIA

T: +264 61 207 2809
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25 June 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTERS QUALIFICATION

The Master's qualification at Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) requires that all students undertake a practical research project. In this way, students are allowed to creatively link and discuss the theoretical aspects of the programme to the practical issues facing organisations in real-life settings. Typically, this project necessitates data gathering by questionnaires or interviews.

Gabriel Kapiya (211083011) has chosen to do a research project entitled: **Evaluating the Efficiency of Data Protection and Inter-Agency Collaboration in the Blue Rhino Task Team.**

We appreciate your assistance in permitting access to your organisation for purposes of this research. Please be assured that all information gained from the research will be treated with the utmost circumspection. The student will adhere to principles of confidentiality and anonymity when reporting information about research participants.

I am available at any stage to answer any queries and/or discuss any aspect of this research project.

Thank you for your assistance in this request.

Sincerely

Sulaiman Olusegun Atiku, Ph.D.
Professor of Research
Harold Pupkewitz Graduate School of Business
Namibia University of Science and Technology
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Appendix D: Language Editing

ACET Consultancy
Anenyasha Communication, Editing, and Training
Box 50453 Bachbrecht, Windhoek, Namibia
Cell: +264814218613
Email: mlambons@yahoo.co.uk

31 July 2025

To Whom It May Concern

LANGUAGE EDITING – GABRIEL MWAHAFA KAPIYA

This letter serves to confirm that a research project titled *EVALUATING THE EFFICIENCY OF DATA PROTECTION AND INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION IN THE BLUE RHINO TASK TEAM* was submitted to me for language editing.

The research was professionally edited, and track changes and suggestions were made in the document. The research content or the author's intentions were not altered during the editing process, and the author has the authority to accept or reject my suggestions.

Yours faithfully



PROF. (DR) NELSON MLAMBO
PhD in English
M.A. in Intercultural Communication
M.A. in English
B. A. Special Honours in English – First class
B. A. English & Linguistics

Appendix E: Turnitin Report

Final Draft Thesis

ORIGINALITY REPORT

10 %	9 %	3 %	1 %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to Polytechnic of Namibia Student Paper	<1 %
2	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %
3	moam.info Internet Source	<1 %
4	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %
5	www.theseus.fi Internet Source	<1 %
6	ir-library.ku.ac.ke Internet Source	<1 %
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