



Fighting illicit wildlife trafficking: A consultation with governments

Key findings & recommendations

Dalberg report *Fighting illicit wildlife trafficking: A consultation with governments*, commissioned by WWF, is strictly embargoed until 00:01 GMT December 12, 2012. Excerpts from the report below are indicated with quotation marks.

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Key findings

For this study, Dalberg Global Development Advisors consulted government representatives and relevant international organizations to explore the scale and implications of illicit wildlife trafficking, why it matters to society and how the different actors should respond going forward. Dalberg contacted more than 110 government and international organization representatives, exchanged over 450 items of correspondence with potential interviewees and conducted 22 in-depth interviews.

Based on the interviews, it is Dalberg's conclusion that: "The current global approach to fighting illicit wildlife trafficking is failing, contributing to the instability of society and threatening the existence of some illegally traded species."

According to the report, illegal trade in wildlife, including timber and fish:

- Comprises the fourth largest global illegal trade after narcotics, counterfeiting of products and currency, and human trafficking, and is estimated to be worth at least US\$19 billion¹ per year;
- Has become a lucrative business for criminal syndicates because the risk involved is low compared to other crimes and high profits can be generated;
- Hinders social and economic development, including potential economic loss for governments, and has direct consequences on rule of law, national and international security and the environment.

Destabilizing effects

The representatives of governments and international organizations that participated in the study see illicit wildlife trafficking as having far-reaching implications for society. They agree that:

- "Illicit wildlife trafficking compromises the security of countries. Much of the trade in illegal wildlife products is run by criminal groups with broad international reach, and the profits can be used to finance civil conflicts and terrorist-related activities. INTERPOL and the UNODC's² Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice agree that the involvement of organized crime syndicates and rebel groups in wildlife crime to fund their activities and purchase weapons has increased. Illicit wildlife trafficking is also linked to other forms of illegal trafficking and money-laundering."

¹ "Unreported and unregulated fisheries trade alone has been estimated at between US\$ 4.2 billion and US\$ 9.5 billion per year, the value of the illegal timber trade as much as US\$ 7 billion per year, and the illicit wildlife trafficking (excluding fisheries and timber) as between US\$ 7.8 billion and US\$ 10 billion per year," report page 9.

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

- “Illicit wildlife trafficking hinders sustainable social and economic development. The corruption that is associated with illicit wildlife trafficking and the security threat posed by the often violent nature of illegal wildlife product sourcing deter investment and hinder growth in source, transit and demand countries. [The crimes] reduce the effectiveness of governments, deter civil engagement, erode the rule of law, harm the reputation of and trust in the state, and affect the growth of local communities.”
- “Illicit wildlife trafficking destroys natural wealth. Wildlife is considered an important asset by many communities—often the poorest—in the developing world. The illegal exploitation of wildlife is capable of heavily depleting species and, in some cases, of bringing a species close to extinction.”
- “Illicit wildlife trafficking poses risks to global health. Illicit wildlife trafficking can represent a disease-transmission mechanism that threatens the health of humans, livestock and ecosystems.” Nearly 75 per cent of emerging infectious diseases in humans are of animal origin, the majority of which originate in wildlife, including global epidemics such as avian influenza, Ebola and SARS.

Drivers

The following underlying conditions are identified by the representatives of governments and international organizations that participated in the study as factors that enable pervasive illicit wildlife trafficking and impunity:

- Poaching tends to thrive in places where there is widespread corruption, weak enforcement by government and limited economic opportunities.
- Illicit wildlife trafficking involves organized criminal groups that are attracted to the availability of huge profits and the low-risk nature of the crime, including the absence of credible law enforcement, prosecution, penalties and other deterrents.
- In many source, transit and consumer countries rangers, police officers and customs officials are not sufficiently trained or equipped. Most developing countries do not have access to modern investigative tools such as DNA technology and other advanced forensic methodologies to trace illegal products.
- Demand for illegal wildlife products has risen in step with economic growth in consumer countries, which is exacerbated by the increased accessibility of illegal wildlife products through the internet.
- Illicit wildlife trafficking is almost always seen by governments as exclusively an environmental issue and is not viewed as a transnational crime and justice issue.
- Internationally, blame for the issue is passed back and forth between source and consumer countries, and there is a lack of collaboration, coordination and accountability between them.

Solutions

Those interviewed by Dalberg universally agree that a systematic approach is needed to fight illicit wildlife trafficking. They highlight the following critical needs:

- Improvements to the rule of law and the creation of deterrents by strengthening criminal investigation, prosecution and sentencing;
- Cross-ministerial collaboration within government;
- Deployment of adequate resources for law enforcement, including resources for specialized investigative and forensic methodologies;
- Effective awareness-raising campaigns to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products that take into account the fundamental factors influencing the behaviour of consumers;
- The ability to hold governments accountable for meeting their commitments and, crucially, for their lack of action.

WWF and TRAFFIC recommendations

WWF and TRAFFIC urge governments to give the issue of illicit wildlife trafficking higher priority and to implement an effective response at national and international levels. Recommended approaches are outlined below.

- Because illicit wildlife trafficking threatens sovereignty, security and stability, governments need to treat wildlife crime seriously and in coordination with efforts to halt other forms of illegal trafficking, corruption and money laundering.
- To enhance the rule of law, governments must expand and elevate the issue through multiple ministries beyond the environment community in a coordinated manner, including strengthening custom controls and other international enforcement mechanisms.
- Countries are urged to employ the best available investigative techniques to identify and prosecute the criminals at the heart of the trade, and to apply penalties severe enough to create the deterrent required to discourage criminal involvement.
- Governments must address corruption as a priority by adopting and rigorously implementing policies of zero tolerance.
- It is also necessary that long-term demand reduction campaigns are sustained at scale by governments by drawing on social science and marketing expertise.
- Finally, governments and non-governmental organizations have an important role in holding countries publicly accountable for delivering on their international commitments, including applying sanctions where necessary. The [Elephant Trade Information System](#), executed by TRAFFIC, and the recent WWF [Wildlife Crime Scorecard](#) provide examples of reporting initiatives that highlight countries failing to uphold their commitments.

Selected expert views

Donald Kaberuka, African Development Bank President, quoted on report page 18

“Tackling organized crimes such as illicit wildlife trafficking is essential to secure sustainable economic growth in [Africa]. It is then of paramount importance that national governments—and regional institutions such as my own—do everything they can to tackle illicit wildlife trafficking. Our approach to tackling illicit wildlife trafficking must be of a magnitude that matches its severity. That means attention from the highest levels of government.”

David Higgins, INTERPOL Environmental Crime Programme Manager, quoted on report page 17

“[W]ildlife crime is known to involve significant organized criminal networks that are engaged in a range of criminal activities. They are responsible for the corruption of officials, fraud, money laundering and violence, causing social unrest and undermining the rule of law and confidence in government institutions.”

Christian Glass, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany), quoted on report page 19

“The new wave of organized wildlife trade crime with heavily armed groups of poachers acting cross-borders is jeopardizing conservation successes we had in the past and puts in danger whole ecosystems in many countries. It is thus threatening people’s livelihoods and has severe socioeconomic effects for the countries affected.”

Robert Hormats, Under-Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment (USA), quoted on report page 9

“Drug and human traffic are getting a lot more attention than illicit wildlife trafficking. And just as we need to intensify our efforts to combat drug trade and human trafficking, we also need to intensify our efforts to combat illicit wildlife trafficking. A recent visit to Southern Africa has strengthened my already deep convictions about this. All of these are moral outrages and serious legal violations. Many are connected to organized criminal conspiracies. They also bring instability to several parts of the world. They all need to be addressed through bold and consistent actions by the international community.”

Jorge Eduardo Rios, Anti-Wildlife and Forest Crime Programme, UN Office of Drugs and Crime, quoted on report page 23

“Combating wildlife and forest crime is not currently a priority and often remains overlooked and poorly understood, despite the actual and potential scale and consequences. Wildlife and forest policies and laws and their enforcement have not, or not always, kept up with the changing levels and patterns of trafficking in fauna and flora.”