



A RAPID RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME CRISIS

THREATS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FROM
ILLEGAL EXPLOITATION AND TRADE IN WILDLIFE
AND FOREST RESOURCES



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Preface

Given the alarming pace, level of sophistication, and globalized nature that illegal trade in wildlife has now notoriously achieved, UNEP initiated a Rapid Response Assessment to provide some of the latest data, analysis, and broadest insights into the phenomenon. Tackling illegal wildlife trade demands this examination of the relationship between the environmental resources at stake, their legal and illegal exploitation, the loopholes that exacerbate the situation, the scale and types of crimes committed, and the dynamics of the demand driving the trade.

In the international community, there is now growing recognition that the issue of the illegal wildlife trade has reached significant global proportions. Illegal wildlife trade and environmental crime involve a wide range of flora and fauna across all continents, estimated to be worth USD 70–213 billion annually. This compares to a global official development assistance envelope of about 135 billion USD per annum. The illegal trade in natural resources is depriving developing economies of billions of dollars in lost revenues and lost development opportunities, while benefiting a relatively small criminal fraternity.

This report focuses on the far-reaching consequences of the environmental crime phenomenon we face today. The situation has worsened to the extent that illegal trade in wildlife's impacts are now acknowledged to go well beyond strictly environmental impacts – by seriously undermining economies and livelihoods, good governance, and the rule of law. Even the security and safety of countries and communities is affected: the report highlights how wildlife and forest crime, including charcoal, provides potentially significant threat finance to militias and terrorist groups. Already recognized as a grave issue in DRC and Somalia by the UN Security Council, the assessment reveals that the scale and role of wildlife and forest crime in threat finance calls for much wider policy attention, well beyond those regions.

The consequences are increasingly evident: illegal wildlife trafficking constitutes a barrier to the achievement of both sustainable development and environmental sustainability. As reflected in a range of decisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the UN Office for Drugs and Crime, the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, INTERPOL, the UN Security Council, and others, the illegal trade in wildlife and environmental crime are now widely recognized as significant threats on a global scale, to be tackled with urgency. However the responses to date, in terms of impact on the ground, have been too modest, and inadequate to the scale and growth of the threat to wildlife and the environment.

A fuller understanding of the phenomenon of illegal wildlife trade is necessary to design and further strengthen – and accelerate – an effective strategy to successfully tackle the issue at all levels and with all means possible. A global and holistic response needs to be implemented to support national, regional and international efforts by strengthening and synchronizing actions targeting coherent environmental legislation, poverty alleviation and demand reduction.

Achim Steiner

UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director



**The illegal trade in
natural resources is
depriving developing
economies of billions
of dollars**

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Executive summary

Ecosystems play a crucial role and especially for developing economies by supporting revenues, future development opportunities, livelihoods and sustainable harvest sectors relying heavily on natural resources, such as in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Healthy ecosystems provide the platform upon which future food production and economies are ultimately based.

The opportunities ecosystems provide for future development, however, are threatened by serious and increasingly sophisticated transnational organized environmental crime, undermining development goals and good governance. Transnational organized environmental crime may include illegal logging, poaching and trafficking of a wide range of animals, illegal fisheries, illegal mining and dumping of toxic waste. It is a rapidly rising threat to the environment, to revenues from natural resources, to state security, and to sustainable development. Combined estimates from the OECD, UNODC, UNEP and INTERPOL place the monetary value of all transnational organized environmental crime between 70–213 billion USD annually. This compares to a global ODA of ca. 135 billion USD. Whilst therefore benefiting a relatively small criminal fraternity, the illegal trade in natural resources is otherwise depriving developing economies of billions of dollars in lost revenues and development opportunities.

The illegal trade in wildlife is no longer an emerging issue. The scale and nature of the challenge has been recognized in decisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, INTERPOL, the World Customs Organisation (WCO) and others, including at national levels. High-level political conferences have also addressed the issue, most notably recently convened in Botswana and Paris (December 2013), London (February 2014), and Dar es Salaam (May 2014). However, the responses in terms of impact on the ground are still behind the scale and development of the threat to wildlife, including forests, as well as increasingly also development goals.

The illegal trade in fauna and flora excluding timber, charcoal and fisheries, has been estimated by different sources to be worth 7–23 billion dollars annually. The trade involves a wide range of species including insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish and mammals. It concerns both live and dead specimens or products thereof, used for pharmaceutical, food, pets, ornamental or traditional medicinal purposes. Illegal harvest and trade includes a range of taxa such as gorillas, chimpanzees,



elephants, tigers, rhinos, Tibetan antelopes, bears, corals, birds, pangolins, reptiles, sturgeon for black caviar, and a wide range of other commercial fisheries species from the high seas and territorial waters. All of these have a significant value not only on the black market, but even more to national economies if managed sustainably. The illegal trade in wildlife operates per definition outside government official regulation and management, and thus represents a significant economic, environmental and security threat that has received relatively little attention in the past.

The possible number of elephants killed in Africa is in the range of 20–25,000 elephants per year out of a population of 420,000–650,000. For the forest elephant, population size has been estimated to decline by ca. 62% between 2002 and 2011. Poached African ivory may represent an end-user

street value in Asia of an estimated USD 165–188 million of raw ivory, in addition to ivory from Asian sources. For rhinos, some 94% of the poaching takes place in Zimbabwe and South Africa, which have the largest remaining populations. Here poaching has increased dramatically from possibly less than 50 in 2007 to over 1,000 in 2013 involving organized syndicates. Rhinos have disappeared entirely from several Asian and African countries in recent years. Rhino horn poached last year is valued around USD 63.8 – 192 million USD, much less at the frontline.

The scale of revenue from the illegal trade in fauna is dwarfed by the income from illegal logging and forest crime. Forest crime, such as illegal logging, has previously been estimated to represent a value of 30–100 billion USD annually or 10–30% of the total global timber trade. An estimated 50–90% of the wood in some individual tropical countries is suspected to come from illegal sources or has been logged illegally. Forest crime appears to take place in four forms: 1) The illegal exploitation of high-value endangered (CITES listed) wood species, including rosewood and mahogany; 2) Illegal logging of timber for sawn wood, building material and furniture; 3) Illegal logging and laundering of wood through plantation and agricultural front companies to supply pulp for the paper industry; and 4) Utilization of the vastly unregulated woodfuel and charcoal trade to conceal illegal logging in and outside protected areas, conduct extensive tax evasion and fraud, and supply fuel through the informal sector.

For pulp and paper production, networks of shell companies and plantations are actively used to by-pass logging moratoriums under the pretext of agricultural or palm- oil investments, used to funnel illegal timber through plantations, or to ship wood and pulp via legal plantations in order to re-classify pulp or wood as legal production, undermining also legal business and production.

These methods effectively bypass many current customs

coal trade alone involves an annual revenue loss of at least USD 1.9 billion to African countries. With current trends in urbanization and the projected population increase of another 1.1 billion people in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2050, the demand for charcoal is expected to at least triple in the coming three decades. This will generate severe impacts like large-scale deforestation, pollution and subsequent health problems in slum areas, especially for women. The increased charcoal demand will also strongly accelerate emissions from both forest loss and emissions of short-lived climate pollutants – black carbon. Internet listings reveal over 1,900 charcoal dealers in Africa alone. At least 300 of these are exporting minimum orders of 10–20 tons of charcoal per shipment. Their minimum daily orders exceed the official total annual exports for some countries. For East, Central and West Africa, the net profits from dealing and taxing unregulated, illicit or illegal charcoal combined is estimated at USD 2.4–9 billion, compared to the USD 2.65 billion worth of street value heroin and cocaine in the region.

Wildlife and forest crime has a serious role in threat finance to organized crime, and non-state armed groups including terrorist groups. Ivory also provides a portion of income raised by militia groups in the DRC and CAR, and is likely a primary source of income to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) currently operating in the border triangle of South Sudan, CAR and DRC. Ivory similarly provides a source of income to Sudanese Janjaweed and other horse gangs operating between Sudan, Chad and Niger. However, given the estimated elephant populations and the number of projected killed elephants within the striking range of these militia groups, the likely annual income from ivory to militias in the entire Sub-Saharan range is likely in the order of USD 4.0–12.2 million.

Illicit taxing of charcoal, commonly up to 30% of the value, is conducted on a regular basis by organized criminals, militias and terrorist groups across Africa. Militias in DRC are estimated to make USD 14–50 million annually on road taxes.

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