

Policy pointers

Responses to wildlife crime must recognise that sustainable use of wildlife — including well-managed legal trade — can underpin rural development and help motivate and fund conservation.

Law enforcement efforts must not inadvertently or disproportionately penalise the poor nor inhibit legal and sustainable wildlife use.

Better information, analysis and more informed dialogue is needed to build and to clarify the evidence base on wildlife assets' value for local and national development, the costs of poaching, and when trade in wildlife — particularly threatened and/or iconic species — is and is not likely to be sustainable.

Improving governance in wildlife range states is a prerequisite for ensuring effective strategies for tackling wildlife trafficking and for conserving endangered species.

The elephant in the room: sustainable use in the illegal wildlife trade debate

Illegal transnational wildlife trade is currently attracting considerable international attention. This is partly due to conservation concerns but also to suggestions of links with organised crime and militant groups. The attention afforded to this issue is much needed and the various international initiatives that have emerged rightly take a multi-faceted approach. But they tend to emphasise law enforcement and demand reduction, with considerably less focus on effective incentives for community-based and private sector management. In particular, the role of sustainable use as a tool for both conservation and local development has generally been overlooked. Wildlife is one of the strongest assets for many rural communities, and depleting it through illegal trade removes potential income. But tackling illegal trade in ways that further restrict sustainable use can limit communities' options even more. Addressing wildlife crime effectively means developing approaches that protect wildlife for poor people not from poor people.

Legal and illegal wildlife trade

International trade in wild plants and animals — and their products — takes place across the globe. It ranges from live animals or plants to specific parts or products. It includes major commodities such as fish and timber, and niche products such as medicinal herbs and aromatic oils. Its overall value is difficult to estimate, since reliable data are available only for specific sectors, commodities or countries. TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, estimated that legal international trade was worth US\$324 billion in 2009.¹

But illegal (and hence unrecorded) international trade is big business too, worth from US\$6 billion² to US\$20 billion per year,³ making wildlife trafficking the fourth most lucrative transnational crime after trafficking drugs, people and arms.

More than just a conservation issue

Illegal wildlife trade is currently gaining unprecedented high level international attention. It has been raised as a serious issue at the UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, the G8 and the European Parliament, and by national and regional government-led initiatives in Africa and Asia.⁴ Its rapid rise up the political agenda is driven partly by huge increases in poaching of African elephants⁵ and rhinos, and by concerns for these and other already threatened species. Concern is also driven by the trade's suggested links to large-scale organised crime and militant groups, and the repercussions for national and international security.

But these immediate threats mask a wider issue. Wildlife is a key asset for rural communities, providing a foundation for investment, livelihoods

and economic development. Poaching depletes this asset, limiting options for sustainable local and national development.

In South Africa, for example, protected area authorities have reaped substantial financial benefits by selling live rhinos to private ranches for tourism and trophy hunting. The revenue generated has funded rhino and elephant protection in South Africa's national parks, and has subsidised other

conservation initiatives. The strategy has also engaged the private sector, which now holds more land for wildlife ranching than is held in national or provincial protected areas.⁶ But escalating poaching of rhinos and hence the costs of effective protection and law enforcement mean the private sector is disinvesting.⁷⁻⁹

Tackling illegal wildlife trade: a three-legged stool

There is no simple solution to tackling illegal wildlife trade. Emerging initiatives usually adopt multiple approaches that can be broadly categorised into three different but mutually supportive types — like three legs of a stool:

- 1) Increase law enforcement and strengthen criminal justice systems
- 2) Reduce demand and consumption
- 3) Support sustainable livelihoods and local economic development

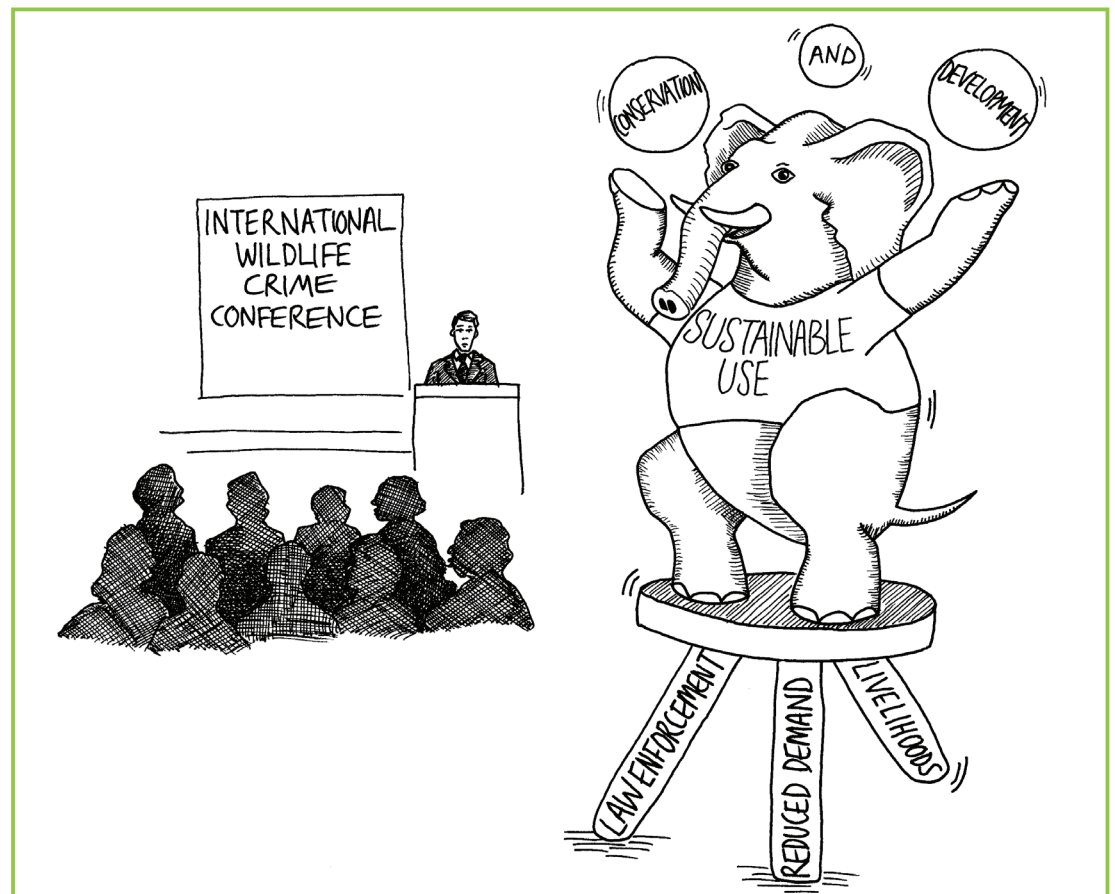
To date, the third leg has received relatively limited attention. For example, a January 2014 European Parliament resolution¹⁰ on wildlife crime includes over twenty actions supporting law enforcement but only one on local livelihoods.

This is unbalanced. Even where initiatives have paid attention to livelihoods, there has been relatively little focus on incentives or on sustainable use and trade as a conservation tool. Furthermore, the suggested law enforcement strategies tend to ignore how punitive law enforcement can hurt local people (Box 2), and also overlook the wealth of experience (from Southern Africa and elsewhere) on how involving local people in conservation, for example as community game guards, can boost more formal law enforcement approaches.

People, poaching and poverty

An international conference at Clarence House in May 2013 suggested that poverty was a major driver of the transnational illegal wildlife trade. But recent research shows that poaching

Strategies to address illegal wildlife trade need to support sustainable use and trade



Acknowledging the elephant in the room: the role of sustainable use and well-regulated legal trade. (Illustration by Mike Shanahan)

and trafficking of elephant ivory and rhino horn are ultimately driven by profits and not by poverty.¹¹ Poor people are involved in the illegal wildlife trade but are often hired by more powerful players. Poor people are also involved in other unauthorised resource use — subsistence collection of firewood, harvesting honey and medicinal plants, and snaring rodents. Calling all illegal trade 'wildlife crime' lumps all 'criminals' together without distinguishing between meeting basic needs and poaching for profit.

These different types of crimes require different policy responses, as do different countries with different social, ecological and governance contexts. While greater enforcement may produce 'quick wins', indiscriminate heavy handed tactics will be counterproductive and alienate local communities in the longer term (see Box 1 for example).

Potential for sustainable wildlife trade and use

International policy discussions on illegal wildlife trade are focusing on a few iconic species and on transnational trade involving organised crime. But much of the international wildlife trade is both legal and sustainable, and contributes significantly to both conservation and/or development. International attention to illegal wildlife trade must not cast all wildlife use in a bad light. There are cases where local people have ably demonstrated sustainable use of wildlife, including threatened species, bringing considerable conservation success.

In the Andes, money from traded vicuña fibre has led many local and indigenous communities to share their grazing land with this threatened camelid. Vicuña have recovered from 10,000 in 1965 to 421,500 in 2010.¹³ Similar incentives for conserving threatened species have significantly boosted rhino, lion, elephant, and many other wildlife populations in Namibia's communal wildlife conservancies (see Box 2, overleaf). And legal international trade in skins has been central to reducing illegal, unmanaged and unsustainable crocodilian harvests.

Despite the experience and lessons learnt from these success stories — including their notable challenges — the current international initiatives to address illegal wildlife trade are opaque on legal and sustainable wildlife use and trade. This is not to suggest that these initiatives should necessarily promote or support legal trade in controversial products such as rhino horn, elephant tusks and tiger bones, but rather that they should better acknowledge the wider opportunities from sustainable use, both

Box 1. 'War on poachers' has unintended consequences

Escalating elephant and rhino poaching in Africa has led some to call for a 'war on poaching'. But Kizito Makoye, writing for the Inter Press Service news agency in January 2014,¹² reported how in Tanzania this war — like all wars — has harmed innocent local people. In October 2013, Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete ordered a military approach to enforcing a ban on elephant and rhinoceros poaching. Only a month later the campaign was stopped following heavy criticism that security forces raped, murdered and tortured locals and used extortion. A parliamentary inquiry found 13 people were murdered and thousands of livestock — the livelihoods of many people — were maimed or killed.

consumptive and non-consumptive, in endangered and non-endangered species.

Local involvement in wildlife trade is not always a win-win for conservation and development. A vast literature highlights the challenges associated with community-based natural resource management if governance, market and economic conditions are not right.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there are existing lessons that can help ensure wildlife is used sustainably for both conservation and livelihoods.^{15,16}

Moving forwards

International action on the illegal wildlife trade is gathering momentum. The current focus on iconic species has helped to bring this serious problem to public attention, and the multi-faceted approach to dealing with the issue is appropriate. The following strategies will help ensure that this positive momentum achieves its potential by recognising the full range of policy options available:

Recognise sustainable use as a crucial livelihood imperative and conservation incentive.

Incentives are integral to any conservation or development endeavour, and are needed even where there is no illegal wildlife trade. Under the right conditions, sustainable wildlife use and trade can provide enough incentive (and finance) to deliver both conservation and development goals.

Strategies to address illegal wildlife trade need to acknowledge and support sustainable use (consumptive and non-consumptive) and trade better. Creating incentives through community-based resource management and locally controlled wildlife-based enterprises should be part of future interventions. At the very least, strategies to address illegal wildlife trade in iconic, endangered species should not harm other opportunities for sustainable wildlife use and trade or inadvertently penalise the poor.

Enable evidence-driven dialogue and debate. The debate on illegal wildlife trade and

Box 2. Local management and sustainable use has increased black rhino numbers in Namibia

In Namibia, a policy change in the mid-1990s, which let local people use and benefit from wildlife on their land, transformed attitudes to conservation. The country's communal conservancy programme is now widely viewed as a conservation and rural development success story, with tourism and trophy hunting playing central roles.¹⁷

In 2004, in recognition of black rhinos' improved conservation status in Namibia and how trophy hunting can support additional conservation and habitat protection, CITES approved an annual export quota of five hunting trophies of adult male black rhinoceros from Namibia. Since then, black rhino populations in Namibia have continued to increase, from 1,435 in 2007 to 1,750 in 2012.⁶

on sustainable use as a conservation tool is highly polarised, particularly because it centres on endangered and iconic species. Some commentators oppose any consumptive use of wildlife. Others firmly believe in the 'use it or lose it' philosophy of conservation. Equally, some believe that allowing legal trade in endangered species and their products makes illegal trade worse, while others see legal trade as an integral means of offsetting and combating illegal trade. The evidence base for each position is mixed. Informed dialogue and targeted research and analysis, rather than polarised and ideologically driven positions, are needed to clarify it.

Improve governance as a foundation for any strategy. Law enforcement strategies will only be effective if underlying governance structures, rule of law and accountability are present. Good governance is necessary to ensure organised crime does not subvert law enforcement, and to help ensure justice and respect for human rights (in particular to prevent broad-based law enforcement harming poor and vulnerable people). Good governance includes supporting

diverse and equitable forms of governance, including community governance, private sector governance and collaborative governance.

Ultimately, the illegal wildlife trade will be best controlled not by guns and rangers but by solutions that respect and make partners of local communities and landowners, through providing sound incentives and opportunities to value and conserve wildlife.

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Notes

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