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LONG TERM IMPACT OF ILLEGAL HUNTING AND TRADE OF WILDLIFE PRODUCTS ON CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN AFRICA

Invited paper¹

I. Introduction

1. Kenya's unique landscape supports abundant and varied wildlife of scientific, intrinsic and economic value and has considerable land area of wildlife habitat. The country has committed a total of 8 percent of its land mass (approximately 48 000 km² for wildlife conservation in a total). This comprises 23 national parks, 28 national reserves, 6 marine national reserves, 4 marine parks and 4 national sanctuaries. In addition to the national parks and reserves, there are many private and community sanctuaries hosting big populations of wildlife. The privately-owned conservation areas are located mainly in the wildlife dispersal and migratory corridors and thus directly support the country's wildlife conservation efforts.

2. With a significant population of wildlife living outside the protected areas on a seasonal or permanent basis, the country's wildlife resource has suffered from the effects of human economic activities, poaching, human-wildlife conflict and demand for wildlife products in the illegal market amongst other factors. As a developing country, Kenya is characterized by a high level of dependency on natural resources for survival. This invaluable wildlife resource is the target of illegal activities

¹ Official country paper prepared by the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development, Republic of Kenya. Contact for additional information : Ms Irene Thuku, Email: thuku.irene@gmail.com

such as poaching and illegal exploitation and other wildlife crimes which have been on the increase all over the world in the recent past. These environmental and wildlife crimes have both direct and indirect negative impact on local communities, including depletion of the resource base on which they depend for their livelihoods besides altering of the local environmental conditions. The crimes also poses a great threat to national, regional and international conservation efforts. It also works against the spirit of the country's Vision 2030 by jeopardizing our wildlife based tourism industry and natural resource base.

3. Environmental and wildlife security issues are therefore vital national security interests in Africa because most citizens are engaged in daily struggles to survive and the local populations depend on the environment for their livelihoods. The prevention and combating of crime involving natural resources such as water, forests, wildlife and the environment in general should therefore be the primary concern of the global community as the Kenya's economy, like most of sub-Saharan Africa, is primarily dependent on natural resources. This is because any crime committed involving natural resources not only threatens biodiversity and degrades the environment, but also deprives the local population of their livelihoods and heritage.

II. Overview of Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade

4. Poaching and illegal trafficking in wild animals, plants and their parts and derivatives is a global phenomenon that has serious implications for biodiversity, ecosystems and national economies. It also threatens sustainable conservation of biodiversity which is driving many species towards extinction. Much of this trade is from developing countries, which contain most of the world's biodiversity, to developed ones, which provide the demand. The trade is demand driven targeting rare, protected and highly endangered species of wildlife and is driving many species to the brink of extinction. This demand and price for wildlife products in the illicit market continues to drive poaching. Growing affluence and economic growth in East and South-East Asia has increased demand for natural resources, especially that of wildlife and wildlife products. In addition, the decision by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Parties to grant a one-off sale of elephant ivory to Southern African countries in 2007 and the urge for sale of ivory stockpiles have enhanced the problem.

5. Most hit species on commercial scale are elephants, rhinos, plain game for bush meat and plant species such as East Africa Sandal Wood (*Osyris lanceolata*) and indigenous tree species for timber and charcoal. This leads to environmental degradation with adverse effects such as climate change, global warming and water scarcity. The economic value of the specimen lost through this illicit trade has not been established but has serious implications on national economies.

III. Situational Analysis of Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade in Kenya

6. Kenya has a population of over 30 000 elephants, the fourth largest in the world and a rhino population of 1 044 individuals as at end of 2014, the third largest in the world.

7. These rhinos and elephants, which are in both Government and privately or communally held land, have become targets for poaching. Poaching has become more organized, sophisticated and international in nature and is occurring across their ranges including in those areas that were hitherto considered safe havens. Proliferation of small arms in the region and in the hands of citizens in areas hosting wildlife is a big threat to the security of wildlife as these weapons are used in poaching in addition to committing other crimes.

8. Kenya remains an important link on trade routes to international destinations for illicit consignments of wildlife products and particularly ivory. As a country, Kenya is concerned with the use of her entry/exit points for trafficking of wildlife products. Over the years, several consignments of ivory have been intercepted locally and in other parts of the world with reports linking some of the seizures to have originated from Kenya.

9. Kenya's proposal to fight poaching of elephants and rhinos won backing during the 16th Conference of the Parties (CoP) by CITES meeting on wildlife trade held from 3rd to 14th March 2013 in Bangkok in Thailand. We have since submitted an 'Ivory trade Action Plan to reduce poaching & Ivory Trafficking' after being identified as one of the eight countries of concern with respect to increased illegal trade in elephant ivory. The objective is to enhance cooperation among States and Non-State Agencies to ensure elephant poaching and illegal trade in elephant ivory is reduced if not eliminated. The five thematic areas of action as outlined to CITES authorities are being implemented with support from the Government and other stakeholders.

IV. Strategies for Combating Wildlife Crime and Enhancing Wildlife Conservation

10. In an effort to combat these conservation challenges and enhance wildlife security, the Government of Kenya through Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and other agencies has taken various policy, legislative and operational measures with great success. KWS is actively collaborating with the local communities neighbouring the National Parks and Reserves and has also been working closely with other law enforcement agencies within Kenya, regionally and internationally to ensure that poaching and illegal trafficking of wildlife species and their products is curbed.

11. To prevent and combat trafficking in wildlife species and their products, KWS has established and strengthened specialized security units which are deployed throughout the country. As Kenya still remains an important link to international destinations for illicit consignments of wildlife and their products, the strengthening of these units as well as enhanced collaboration with Customs and other Government agencies have adopted as some of the strategies of winning the war against wildlife trafficking.

12. KWS law enforcement units work very closely with other law enforcement agencies in all matters of wildlife security at local, regional and international arena. Structured engagement with law enforcement agencies, Government institutions, local communities and other conservation stakeholders have been intensified. Regionally, cross-border collaborations between Tanzania and Uganda have also been put in place to address crimes of trans-boundary nature and have yielded results in tackling crime along the shared borders. INTERPOL and Lusaka Agreement Task Force have been instrumental in facilitating, coordinating and offering support where required. Other strategies include leveraging on the provisions of Wildlife Conservation and Management Act (2013), implementation of species specific conservation action plans and establishment of wildlife forensic laboratory, amongst others. As a result poaching has been on the decrease since 2012 as evidenced by a 45.7 percent and 40.7 percent reduction in poaching of elephants and rhinos respectively in 2014 compared to 2013.

V. Challenges in Combating illegal Wildlife Trade and Implementation of Conservation Practices

13. Wildlife crimes in Kenya have been evolving over time and presenting new challenges to wildlife conservation. Poaching has become more organized, sophisticated and transnational in nature and is occurring across their ranges including in those areas that were hitherto considered safe havens. Proliferation of small arms in the region and in the hands of citizens in areas hosting wildlife is a big threat to the security of wildlife as these weapons are used in poaching in addition to committing other crimes. In addition, wildlife trafficking has become highly sophisticated and organised and could be linked to other serious crimes. The huge profits made from illicit wildlife trade acts as an incentive to organized crime networks because of the major financial benefits derived from relatively minimal time, investment, low risks of detection and lack of serious punishment. Destruction of wildlife habitats due to increasing human population, poverty, socio-economic factors, amongst others also poses a challenge in wildlife conservation and law enforcement. Wildlife conservation also face challenges posed by the existing vagaries of weather and it is projected that climate change is expected

to be one of the gravest threats to peace and security in the 21st century. Climate change poses a serious and is a growing threat to the wildlife and national security as it will cause drastic ecosystem change that could change the resource base, contribute to food and water scarcity and accelerate conflict over those resources. Biopiracy is also emerging as one the threats to wildlife conservation.

VI. Critical Priority Action Areas

14. Kenya is committed to combating wildlife crime and guaranteeing security of wildlife and its habitats. However winning this battle calls for concerted efforts by the Global community in the following areas:

- 1) Sustained total ban on international ivory and rhino horn trade;
- 2) Demand reduction in consumer states in South East Asia;
- 3) Sustained awareness campaigns targeting the consumers of ivory and rhino horns on the risks of elephant and rhino extinction as a result of their consumerism;
- 4) Strengthening regional and international cooperation (more funding support to regional and international institutions);
- 5) Create an information sharing and operations network within the Region and other source, transit and consumer countries;
- 6) Strict custom regulations and better policing of international borders;
- 7) Investment in wildlife law enforcement (capacity building, equipment, enforcement operations).

VII. Conclusion

15. Poaching and wildlife trafficking poses a great threat to national, regional and international conservation efforts. As it is the trend in the region and globally, these forms of wildlife crime is projected to increase if not addressed. The prevention and combating of these crimes should therefore be the primary concern of the global community as it undermines security across nations. As a Global community, we need to enhance local, regional and international cooperation in order to guarantee the security of our natural heritage and our citizens.