Illegal wildlife trade in times of crises

Second UNCTAD Illicit Trade Forum
Palais des Nations, Geneva, 6 September 2022

Ms Ivonne Higuero,
Secretary-General, CITES

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNCTAD
CITES

- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

- Signed on 3 March 1973, entered into force in 1975

- Over 38,000 species listed in 3 Appendices

- CITES has 184 signatory Parties: 183 States and the EU

Legality

Sustainability

Traceability
Illegal Wildlife Trade

• UNODC & WEF have listed Illegal Wildlife Trade 4th most lucrative in world, after drugs, human trafficking and guns
• Value uncertain but probably more than $20bn/year
• Organized criminal groups are sophisticated, corrupting, profit-focused and obstruct justice
• Crisis situations breed confusion and can help facilitate crime
Illegal wildlife trade

Illegal trade can involve:

Specimens that cannot be commercially traded
Specimens that can be lawfully traded, but not in accordance with CITES
Transnational organized criminal groups and corruption
COVID-19 pandemic

- During 2020, border closures limited transport options
- CITES trade data showed seizures dropped
- Not clear if this meant illegal trade was down
- Annual Illegal Trade Reports from CITES Parties would provide a better picture
- Future analysis of trade data will provide a clearer picture of COVID impact
- CITES role in prevention of spread of zoonotic diseases
CITES Illegal Trade Database – seizure records (2016-2020)

Number of CITES related seizure records

Year

2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

Number of CITES related seizure records

25,000

20,000

15,000

10,000

5,000

0
ETIS & MIKE

• ETIS – illegal ivory trade
• MIKE – illegal killing of elephants
• Fewer sites visits possible during COVID
• Fewer records provided
• BUT more partnerships with local groups
• Providing training
• Providing resources
Steps to Combat Illegal and Illicit Trade

- E-permits
- Training/Work with Parties
- Article XIII
- Anti-corruption
- Anti-money laundering
- Partnerships e.g. ICCWC
- Proactive Policies
e-CITES

- Currently more than a million permits a year (paper)
- Electronic permitting promises
  - Better security
  - Better traceability
  - Much less open to abuse
  - Easier and faster reporting
  - Less work

- Now working with UNCTAD and other partners and e-CITES is being tested by a number of Parties
Work with Parties

• CITES Secretariat works constantly with Parties to provide guidance and training on implementation of the Convention

• The Convention requires due diligence from Parties which means fully satisfying themselves that the trade conforms to regulations

• Secretariat provides guidance on the impact of crises and suggests mitigations
Partnerships

- Partnerships are at the heart of our operations
- ICCWC
- Other MEAs
- CITES operates at the center of a network that takes in business, industry and conservation
International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime

ICCWC

Coordinated action to combat wildlife crime

[Logos of CITES, INTERPOL, UNODC, and another logo]
ICCWC response to COVID-19

- Many ICCWC activities highly impacted by COVID-19
- Alternative implementation options where possible; focus on progressing work virtually; postponing in-person meetings
- ICCWC:
  - Front line response: Operation Thunder 2020 & 2021 supported virtually
  - Online capacity building/trainings/webinars/mentorships, etc:
- CITES-led activities:
  - Update training/materials on safe handling of CITES-listed species
  - Online support
    - Virtual sessions/webinars (e.g. combating wildlife crime linked to Internet)
    - Online training on CITES & enforcement matters (WCO series & upcoming West/Central Africa support)
Proactive policies to stop vulnerable people being drawn into illegal wildlife trade during times of crises

• Important to build political will and inclusion of all affected groups

• Demand-side has to be addressed as well as supply-side

• Imaginative and bold funding decisions needed. Individual countries shouldn’t bear the brunt of actions that benefit us all
Thank you for your attention!

www.cites.org

Stay in touch: