

Summary of the ECOSOC event on 31 March 2015

Description

The event, entitled “The Illegal Wildlife Trade and Decent Work”, was organized by the Missions of Germany and Gabon to the United Nations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), to highlight the ever increasing illegal wildlife trade and its devastating impact on the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development.

The illegal wildlife trade is big business. Not including the illegal trade in timber, it exceeds \$19 billion annually. The trade is heavily capitalized, and often involves part of the same criminal networks as those that are involved in drugs, weapons and human trafficking. The illegal wildlife trade fuels conflicts and undermines national and regional security. The revenue generated is in some cases being used to contribute to instability.

In addition to its harmful effects on species and ecosystems, the effects on human livelihoods, community integrity, income-generating decent jobs, sustainable development and national economies is equally pervasive.

1) The illegal wildlife trade affects individuals directly. Trafficking networks often hire or even coerce local people to poach. Even when poachers are from outside the community, local people are conscripted (often under pressure) to help provide food, accommodation, information and to act as guides. This incentivizes people to drop out of the formal economy and enter the illegal underground economy.

2) The trade undercuts the food security and sovereignty of local people who often depend directly on the consumption of wildlife. Many rural people depend on access to wildlife and fish resources. For instance, in the forests of tropical Africa, mammal harvests by rural people exceed a million metric tons of meat a year. About a billion people, largely in developing countries, rely on fish as their primary animal protein source, and this is threatened by illegal fishing that largely benefits traders, middlemen and consumers in wealthy countries.

3) The illegal wildlife trade destabilizes the livelihoods of many local peoples whose occupations depend on the presence of wildlife. Many communities, for example those in southern Africa, are involved in the community based management of wildlife resources for trophy hunting. Trophy hunting provides for local livelihoods, meat for consumption, cash and other development incentives for communities. The trade is also a direct threat to decent jobs in the

wildlife tourism industry – employment in hotels and lodges, as guides, transportation, tours, and cultural performances.

4) The illegal wildlife trade corrupts the local and national institutions that seek to manage natural ecosystems and resources for development goals. Good governance and the rule of law are imperiled. The jobs of those involved in managing fish and wildlife resources – community leaders, government officials, police, ecoguards, rangers, and park staff – are misdirected. The United Nations Secretary-General said on the occasion of World Wildlife Day on 3 March that the “illegal wildlife trade undermines the rule of law and threatens national security; it degrades ecosystems and is a major obstacle to the efforts of rural communities and indigenous peoples striving to sustainably manage their natural resources”.

5) The illegal wildlife trade robs nations of their wealth. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, wildlife watching represents 80 % of the total annual sales of trips to Africa, with wildlife viewing safaris as the most popular product. In Kenya and Tanzania for example, tourism, most of which is wildlife based, is worth some 12% and 17% of the GDP of those countries respectively, employing several hundred thousand people in each country with important linkages into many other parts of the economy.

Outcomes

The primary outcome of the panel discussion was to show how the issue of the illegal wildlife trade is a multifaceted problem requiring an urgent, stepped up global, regional and national multidimensional response.

Policy Recommendations

Some key policy recommendations included:

First, supporting the outcomes of the just completed Kasane Conference, in Botswana, which built on the 2014 London Conference. The 2013 meeting of African countries in Botswana, called for:

- eradicating the market for illegal wildlife products
- ensuring effective legal frameworks and deterrents
- strengthening law enforcement
- promoting decent work, sustainable livelihoods and economic development.

The Conference also called for the UN General Assembly to address effectively the issue of the illegal wildlife trade at its sixty-ninth session, in line with the Kasane Conference statement. The efforts of the "Group of Friends on Poaching and Illicit Wildlife Trafficking" of UN member states to develop an ambitious draft UN General Assembly resolution was welcomed and member states were encouraged to support this effort as much as possible.

Secondly, it was recalled that the Millennium Declaration of 2000 urged that “prudence must be shown in the management of all living species and natural resources, in accordance with the precepts of sustainable development. Only in this way can the immeasurable riches provided to us by nature be preserved and passed on to our descendants.” Member states were called on to reiterate this call in the historic Political Declaration that will be adopted at the Heads of State Summit in September.

Thirdly, it was noted that supporting country level work is key. In this vein, the increased funding support domestically in countries and from the international community, the European Union, bilateral aid and through the multilateral system was seen to be encouraging.

Fourth, it was indicated that the volatility of the job market in less developed countries may lead impoverished persons to engage in illicit activities as an escape route from poverty. Examples from the Africa region abound, such as piracy, smuggling of minerals, illegal fishing and indeed trafficking in wildlife. Therefore, new development strategies need to focus on the creation of decent work opportunities and growth as integral parts of their design rather than as an after-thought. Providing job guarantees to potential and active poachers, for example, could reduce their resorting to illegal activities as a way of providing for their families. While wildlife trafficking, and the involvement of organized crime, are not caused by poverty, they increase poverty and are an obstacle to sustainable development.

Fifth, sound social protection is a political, economic and social necessity, and a prerequisite for inclusive growth. Social protection is an essential concern for African countries because it extends social security to the labour force, enabling them to protect and build their human and physical capital, including in times of unemployment. Lack of employment matched with lack of social protection reinforces vulnerabilities and drives people to extreme risks in securing a livelihood.

Sixth, it was noted that countries dealing successfully with protection of endangered species and poaching and trafficking had put

multifaceted national policies in place, including establishment of protected areas, enhanced legal measures, and supporting strategies, including the involvement of local communities. Nepal and Gabon provided examples of these. Nepal has recently celebrated two zero-poaching years. One of the reasons cited for this success is that local people have acquired a stake in wildlife conservation. Communities along the borders of Nepal's wildlife reserves receive 50 cents of every tourism dollar earned. Thus, protecting the animals that attract tourists makes clear economic sense to them.