



A RAPID RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

ELEPHANTS IN THE DUST

THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT CRISIS



TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network



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PREFACE

*In Central and West
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action is taken.*



The African elephant, the largest remaining land mammal on the planet, is facing the greatest crisis in decades. Reports of mass elephant killings in the media vividly illustrate the situation across many African elephant range States. This Rapid Response Assessment provides an overview of the current state of the African elephant alongside recommendations for action to ensure its protection.

Results from monitoring and systematic surveys conducted under the UNEP-hosted CITES treaty reveal that poaching levels have tripled in recent years, with several elephants killed every single hour of the day. In Central and West Africa, the elephant may soon disappear from whole areas unless urgent action is taken.

Organized syndicates ship several tons of ivory at a time to markets in Asia, and hundreds of elephants are killed for every container sent. Indeed, this report documents nearly a tripling in the number of large-scale ivory seizures by customs authorities, revealing the scale and heavy involvement of international criminal networks that must be addressed.

The report, however, also provides optimism if action is taken by governments within Africa and in ivory market countries. Improved law enforcement methods, international collaboration with the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, the World Customs Organization and INTERPOL and measures to reduce demand can be implemented with success if countries and donors join forces. Indeed, large and previously se-

cure elephant populations in Southern Africa are evidence of the fact that both elephants and their habitats cannot only be well-managed, but, coupled with tourism, can also become a source of income.

Improved public awareness is also key. Many people including businessmen and women are often unaware that the ivory they may be exchanging as gifts could have been sourced illegally. Among other awareness activities, UNEP is currently working with its Goodwill Ambassador, actress Li Bingbing, and the City of Shanghai to bring the issue of ivory poaching to the attention of the public.

Resources must be made urgently available to provide the full scale of efforts needed to ensure the survival of the elephant. This year marks CITES' 40th anniversary. Its successful track-record shows that change is possible. Now is the time to take action.

Achim Steiner

UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director

PREFACE

At the African MIKE monitoring sites alone, an estimated 17,000 elephants were illegally killed in 2011 – a figure likely to be over 25,000 continent-wide.



Elephants are now at dire risk due to a dramatic rise in poaching for their ivory. Reports have reached CITES and the media on mass and gruesome killings of elephants, with their heads and tusks removed, from near every corner of their range in Africa. The CITES-led Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) and the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), managed under our partnership with TRAFFIC, together with African Elephant range States, have been gathering and analyzing data on the killing of elephants and illegal trade in ivory for over a decade.

Faced with increasingly alarming statistics from MIKE and ETIS, CITES initiated a UNEP Rapid Response Assessment to provide a graphic overview of the current situation, enriched with the latest elephant population status information from IUCN, and to identify ways to respond.

The results are quite devastating. Systematic surveys document a tripling in both poaching levels and the number of large-scale seizures of ivory intended for Asia over the last 5 years. At the African MIKE monitoring sites alone, an estimated 17,000 elephants were illegally killed in 2011 – a figure likely to be over 25,000 continent-wide. For many of the range states in Central and Western Africa, the extent of the killings now far exceeds the natural population growth rates, forcing their elephants into widespread decline and putting them at risk of extinction in those countries.

This report shows, through expert consultations with IUCN and elephant experts, that the total African elephant populations remain stable owing to effective protection in parts of Southern and Eastern Africa, where the majority of the elephant populations reside. However, poaching and the smuggling of ivory is

spreading further south and east, destined for illicit markets in Asia, requiring enhanced regional and international collaboration to combat these trends.

This report provides clear evidence that adequate human and financial resources, the sharing of know-how, raising public awareness in consumer countries, and strong law enforcement must all be in place if we are to curb the disturbing rise in poaching and illegal trade. The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) will play an increasingly important role in supporting range States, transit and consumer countries in tackling transnational organized criminal networks and in some cases rebel militia.

For the second time in the 40-year history of CITES elephants are facing a crisis. A well targeted and collaborative effort is required to put an end this senseless slaughter and ensure the survival of these majestic animals in the wild.

John E. Scanlon
CITES Secretary-General

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Surges in poaching, the illegal ivory trade and accelerating habitat and range loss have put African elephant populations at risk. This Rapid Response Assessment provides an overview of the status of elephants, poaching and illegal ivory trafficking along the entire ivory trade supply chain.

Findings presented here were obtained from a range of sources, including The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme, the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), the IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG), the African and Asian Elephant Database, the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), expert consultations and a range of other sources.

A pronounced upward trend in both the poaching of African elephants and the illicit trade in ivory is particularly evident from 2007 onwards. Illicit ivory trade activity and the weight of ivory behind this trade has more than doubled since 2007, and is over three times greater than it was in 1998. Viewing all of these data together and considering a range of other information, it is clear that African elephants are facing the most serious conservation crisis since the species was moved from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I in 1989, and a ban on commercial trade in ivory and other elephant specimens came into effect (the African elephant populations of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe subsequently returned to Appendix II, allowing them to trade certain elephant specimens under strict conditions, including on two occasions – in 1999 and 2008 – stocks of raw ivory).

Current population estimates suggest alarming declines in elephant numbers in parts of Central and West Africa, as well as an increasing risk of the local extinction of some populations. Previously secure populations in Eastern and Southern Africa are under growing threat, as a wave of poaching seems to be spreading east and southwards across the African continent. Currently, it is likely that the total continental population estimate is in the range of 420,000 to 650,000 African elephants (IUCN/AfESG 2013), with just three countries, Botswana, Tan-

zania and Zimbabwe accounting for well over half of these elephants. However, these numbers could change rapidly if present trends continue. In 2011, poaching levels were at their highest since MIKE began monitoring the trends in illegal killing in 2001, and indications suggest that the situation did not improve in 2012. Similarly, the seizure of large shipments of ivory hit an all-time high in 2011, indicating an increasingly active, profitable and well-organized illegal ivory trade between Africa and Asia.

Poaching is spreading primarily as a result of a rising demand for illegal ivory in the rapidly growing economies of Asia, particularly China and Thailand, which are the two major end-use markets globally. The high levels of poaching are, in some cases, facilitated by conflicts that, through lawlessness and ensuing abundance of small arms, provide optimal conditions for illegal killing of elephants. Further along the trade chain, highly-organized criminal networks operate with relative impunity to move large shipments of ivory off the continent and to markets in Asia. The prevalence of unregulated domestic ivory markets in many African cities, coupled with the large number of potential Asian buyers residing in Africa associated with infrastructure projects and resource extraction operations, also fuel the demand for ivory. This situation is further exacerbated in many countries due to weak governance and collusive corruption, at all levels. Poverty facilitates the ability of organized criminals to recruit, bribe or threaten locals and underpaid police, military personnel and wildlife rangers.

Poachers are becoming better equipped, conducting more sophisticated operations, and are better supported by illegal traders and criminal networks. A variety of smuggling methods by land, river and sea are used. Currently, the vast majority of the seized ivory is shipped in containers by ocean vessels from East African seaports, although in the recent past, some seizures have origi-



nated from seaports in West and Southern Africa, perhaps as an adaptation to law enforcement efforts directed at Indian Ocean seaports. There is also some criminal intelligence suggesting that fishing vessels moving between Asia and Africa may be involved in smuggling, and these are rarely inspected.

Elephants are also threatened by increasing loss of habitat and subsequent loss of range as a result of rapid human population growth and agricultural expansions. Currently, some models suggest that 29 per cent of the existing elephant range is affected by infrastructure development, human popula-

tion growth and rapid urban and agricultural expansion (see www.globio.info). The projections are that this figure may increase to 63 per cent by 2050, particularly in West, Central and Eastern Africa. Even if the current high levels of poaching are slowed, habitat and range loss will continue to threaten the future of elephant populations across the African continent. Disruptions and barriers to seasonal movements of elephants in search of water and forage are also critical threats as their current range becomes increasingly fragmented and disconnected, also leading to increasing human-elephant conflicts.

It should be noted that while African elephant populations in some parts of the continent may be suffering heavy poaching losses and increasing habitat loss and fragmentation, populations in other parts of the species' range, mainly those south of the Zambezi River, continue to be large, well-managed and healthy.

Immediate action is needed in terms of support, training and improved law enforcement in border regions on the ground, as well as in and around protected areas, if local extinctions of elephants in Africa are to be avoided in the near future. The African Elephant Action Plan, developed by African elephant range States and adopted in 2010, provides a broad, overarching framework for the actions needed to provide adequate protection and management of African elephant populations. Targeted law enforcement efforts at key points in the illegal ivory trade chain, and effective public awareness campaigns are needed in order to address the recent surge in poaching and to reduce the demand for illegal ivory in consumer countries. Nowhere is the need for demand reduction more critical than in China.

Unless the necessary resources can be mobilized to significantly improve local conservation efforts and enforcement along the entire ivory trade chain, elephant populations will falter, poaching will continue and illegal trade in ivory will continue unabated.

The CITES-mandated ETIS and MIKE monitoring systems continue to work together closely and in collaboration with the IUCN/SSC African and Asian Elephant Specialist Groups, which provide critical data on the status of elephant populations. Long-term funding needs to be secured for these programmes. Otherwise, the critical information base for assessing elephants in crisis will be lost, just at the time when an unprecedented surge in poaching and illegal trade is taking place.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The recommendations below are drawn from those adopted by the Standing Committee at its 62nd meeting (Geneva, July 2012), which were based on document SC62 Doc. 46.1 (Rev. 1); and those proposed by the Secretariat to the Conference of the Parties to CITES at its 16th meeting (Bangkok, March 2013), as contained in documents COP16 Doc. 53.1, 53.2.1 and 53.2.2. They also complement activities proposed in the African Elephant Action Plan, agreed by the African elephant range States in the sidelines of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Doha, 2010) (see document COP15 Inf. 68).

- 1) Support and enhance anti-poaching tracking and intelligence operations, through the development, training and education of tactical tracker and intelligence units in all protected areas.
- 2) Facilitate appropriate mandates to allow park rangers to pursue poachers and conduct patrols outside park boundaries, and develop international agreements to facilitate cross border cooperation to pursue, arrest and extradite poachers and illegal traders.
- 3) Strengthen anti-smuggling operations, customs controls and container search programmes (including the controls of small airstrips, and boats in ports and estuaries). Enhance and improve the use of controlled deliveries and forensic analysis to identify the source of ivory and support the investigations of the criminal networks operating along the entire illegal ivory supply chain.
- 4) Enhance national and international interagency collaboration to fight organized wildlife crime by supporting programmes that target enforcement along the entire illegal ivory supply chain, such as through the ICCWC and regional criminal intelligence units and networks, as well through judiciary training and the practical application of 'best practice' techniques and methodologies for conducting investigations and joint enforcement activities.
- 6) Reduce market demand for illegal ivory by conducting targeted and effective awareness-raising campaigns about the devastating impacts of the illegal trade in ivory, and aimed at potential or current buyers in East and South East Asia.
- 7) Strengthen national legislation as necessary, and strictly enforce relevant provisions to eradicate illegal or unregulated domestic ivory markets, especially in Africa and Asia.
- 8) Maintain and improve the connectivity of elephant landscapes in Africa by increasing the extent of conservation areas and the investment in their effective management and protection to help reduce habitat loss and consequent range loss. This requires prioritized land use planning in non-protected elephant habitat, and is particularly critical for regions with growing human population densities and agricultural pressures. This, in turn, will help mitigate human-elephant conflict.
- 9) Urgently assist and financially support the African Elephant Fund to enable elephant range States to improve their capacity to manage and conserve their elephant populations through improved law enforcement and anti-poaching activities, habitat restoration and conservation, dealing with human-elephant conflicts, and monitoring and research, as laid out in the African Elephant Action Plan. Provide access

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