



Environmental Crime – The Trafficking of Wildlife and Timber



Transnational organized crime is found wherever money can be made from illicit dealings. One source of income is environmental crime, in particular the trafficking of wildlife and timber. The problem is particularly acute in developing countries as under-resourced Governments often lack the capacity to regulate the exploitation of their natural assets. Rather than promoting economic progress, poorly managed natural wealth can lead to bad governance, corruption or even violent conflict.

Environmental crime is a global phenomenon but this fact sheet deals with just two of the largest flows: **Wildlife trafficking from Africa and South-East Asia to Asia**, and **trafficking in timber from South-East Asia to the European Union and Asia**. The sale of elephant ivory, rhino horn and tiger parts in Asia alone were worth an estimated \$75 million in 2010. Clearly the impact of this flow is much greater than the relatively small income it generates for criminals. The trade in illegal timber from South-East Asia to the European Union and Asia was worth an estimated \$3.5 billion in 2010.¹

Wildlife trafficking from Africa and South-East Asia

Overview

Widespread poverty, coupled with a lucrative overseas market for exotic animal products, have resulted in massive poaching of African and South-East Asian wildlife. In addition to the damage this causes to natural ecosystems, it also impacts on the tourism trade that comprises a key part of many national economies.

Elephants, rhinos and tigers represent three of the biggest endangered species killed for their skins and/or bones. Ivory, rhino horn and tiger parts are among the most popular large animal ‘commodities’ being trafficked from various parts of South-East Asia and Africa into Asia. There are also numerous smaller wild species that are harvested in South-East Asia for traditional medicine, food and decor products, as well as being captured live for the pet trade.

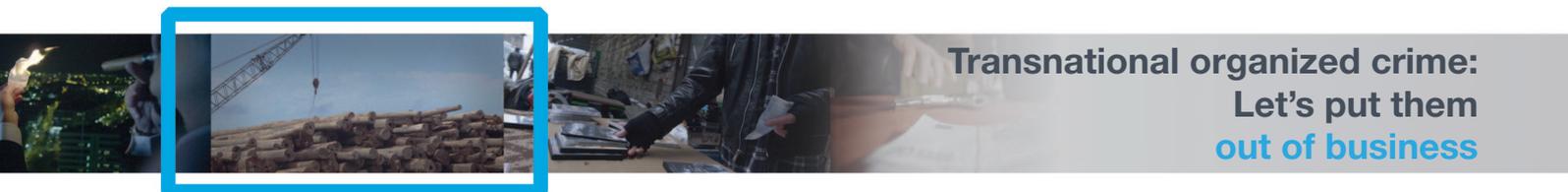
The involvement of transnational organized crime groups

Well-organized criminal groups have turned illicit environmental exploitation into a professional business with lucrative revenues leading to the exploitation of endangered and protected species in national parks. Every year, thousands of cases of poaching are reported by authorities in Africa and Asia. Representing just one incident, a reported 450 elephants were killed in early-2012 in the Bouba Ndjida National Park in northern Cameroon by poachers.²

Well-organized commercial ivory poachers are involved in the trade to, or through, many Asian countries. Between 1989 and 2009, there were at least 55 very large ivory seizures, with an average volume of 2.3 tons. In the destination markets, these shipments were worth about \$2 million apiece at the wholesale level.³

Flows and prices

Elephants, rhinos and tigers are three of the best known wildlife species that are killed for their parts. Almost all elephant ivory comes from African elephants and most is exported to



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Asia. Both African and Asian rhinos are targeted, and the few remaining tigers in the world are found in Asia.

Elephants: In 2010, an estimated 7,500 elephants were killed to satisfy demand in Asia, most in Central Africa. There are, on average, 92 ivory seizures a month, or about three per day.⁴ While the value of illicit ivory depends on where in the world it is located, estimates place the total amount entering the market at about \$100 million a year. There are vast disparities between prices paid in source countries and those in destination countries. While a kilogram of raw ivory sells for \$15 in Africa, it can fetch around \$850 in Asia. Value may also be added to the raw material in the form of carving. The true value of the objects seized may be much greater than the weight of the ivory alone would imply.⁵

Rhinos: After years of being killed for their horns, the world's wild rhino population now number just 25,000.⁶ While seizures are smaller, rhino horn is worth far more than elephant ivory per kilogram and illicit horn retailed in Asia at about \$8 million per year in 2010.⁷ As with elephant ivory, prices paid in source countries may be as little as 1 per cent of the final retail price which, after the horn has been shaved or powdered for sale, has at times reached \$20,000 to \$30,000 per kilogram.⁸ South Africa is one of the most targeted countries by rhino poachers – in 2007, 13 rhino were poached in the country; by 2011 this had jumped dramatically to 448, with numbers anticipated to exceed 600 by end-2012.⁹

Tigers: Tiger parts continue to fetch high prices, with skins retailing for up to \$20,000 in China, and raw bones selling for up to \$1,200 per kilogram.¹⁰ As all parts of the animal are sold, it is possible that many tigers are disappearing unnoticed. Based on reported poaching figures, however, this market is worth around \$5 million per year.¹¹

Trafficking from Africa to Asia: Flows and prices

While poaching affects a number of African countries, some are affected much more than others. Central Africa is the main source of elephant ivory, while Southern Africa is targeted for rhino horn. Animal parts are illegally shipped or transported by air to Asia through a variety of routes, often concealed in legitimate cargo, with criminal syndicates taking advantage of the growing legal trade between Africa and Asia.

Trafficking within Asia: Flows and prices

Asia serves as a source, transit, and destination region for a large share of the endangered animals poached in the world, with Myanmar, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cam-

bodia the most affected source countries. Cross-border wilderness areas represent a particularly vulnerable point for transnational trafficking. This, coupled with corruption, allows criminal networks to move illicitly harvested animals with relative ease.

Both tigers – for their skins and bones – and rhinos – for their horns – are sourced within Asia. There are now only around 3,200 tigers left in the wild, down from an estimated 100,000 at the beginning of the 20th century¹², and the hunting of these animals is a deliberate and systematic crime with evidence that 'commissioning' of poachers may occur. Asia is home to three of the world's five rhino species and their killing has been so severe that experts have warned that they may be extinct within our lifetime.¹³ In addition to these big animals, a variety of local wildlife species are targeted. Many of these animals may be transported alive to destination markets, although when trafficked, many die in transit.

Trafficking in timber from South-East Asia

Overview

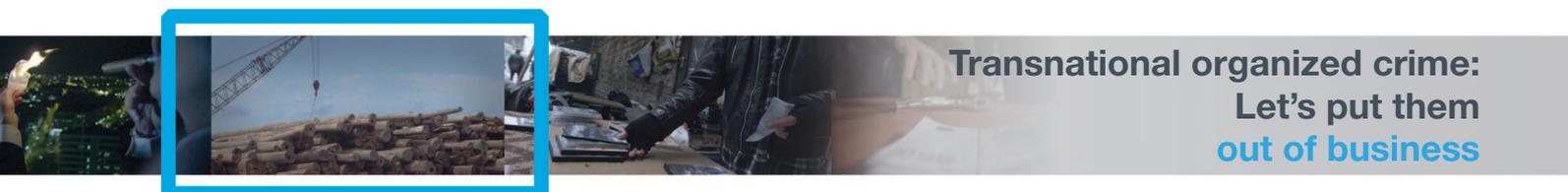
South-East Asia is home to some 7 per cent of the world's old-growth forests and many unique tree species. Regrettably, the region is experiencing the fastest deforestation rate on earth. Some of this deforestation is due to illicit logging, and in this way, organized crime contributes to irreversible environmental damage. Forests are critical in absorbing carbon from the atmosphere and this crime therefore has a global impact. Local communities are also affected through environmental damage, corruption of officials, violence and loss of income and livelihoods.

It is estimated that Asian and European demand for illicit timber makes up more than half the global market. The EU has been estimated to import about 20 per cent of the illegally felled timber in the world, and China around 25 per cent.¹⁴

Corruption and the involvement of organized crime groups

Traffickers often rely on fraudulent paperwork to move illegal timber across borders. Methods used include fraudulently declaring a protected hardwood as an ordinary variety or falsifying certificates of origin, thereby declaring wood sourced in a protected area to be from an authorized source.

One of the repercussions of this illegal trade is the impact it has on corruption. In many instances, the paperwork needed to move illegal timber is not forged but rather bought from corrupt officials in timber source countries. Illegal logging gangs can also receive varying degrees of assistance from corrupt officials.



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Flows and prices

Due to the bulk of the product, timber is generally transported by sea or by road, entering through official border crossings. Purely clandestine smuggling is rare, and either fraudulent paperwork or bribery of customs officials is used.

With an annual market volume of some 10 million cubic metres, timber trafficking out of South-East Asia into Europe and Asia is worth around \$3.5 billion a year.¹⁵ In the past, some bilateral timber flows have been mostly illicit. For example, it was estimated that at one point in the early- to mid-2000's, 98 per cent of all the timber leaving Myanmar for China overland was illegal. Similarly, at the height of Indonesia's illegal logging problem, 80 per cent of the timber coming out of the country was illegal. At the time, the Indonesian Government estimated that this trade was costing them \$4 billion annually – a figure five times larger than the country's 2004 health budget. At the time, deforestation was occurring at a rate of two million hectares a year – an amount equivalent to 300 football fields every hour.¹⁶

In 2010, an estimated 10 million cubic metres of illegal timber was imported into the EU and China from South-East Asia, with an import value of roughly \$3.5 billion.¹⁷ Most of this was in the form of furniture and other finished products, but raw timber was also involved. The primary source of illicitly harvested timber was Indonesia. Indonesian wood is frequently misrepresented as coming from Malaysia and often trans-shipped from other parts of the region.

What is being done?

Many international conservation agreements have been signed, among the most influential of which is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which has been adopted by 175 countries. Under the Convention, states that do not take measures to protect endangered species are subject to escalating international pressure, which can ultimately result in trade sanctions.

UNODC's work in countering environmental crime spans local, regional and global initiatives. The Office is a member of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), a partnership between the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, UNODC, the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO). The ICWC works to bring coordinated support to the national wildlife law enforcement agencies and to the related sub-regional and regional networks. In mid-2012, UNODC, in partnership with other members of the ICWC, developed the Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit which

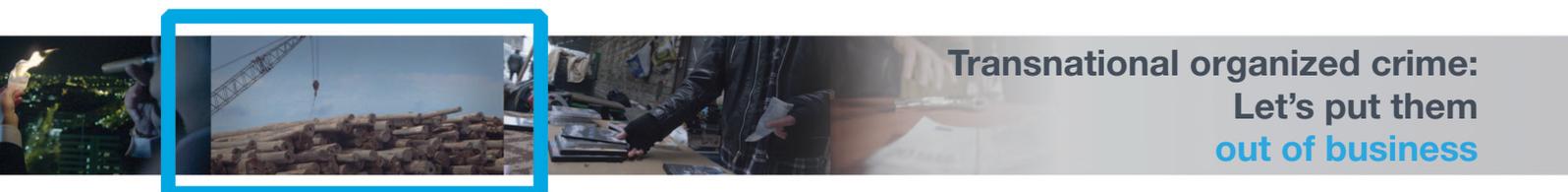
is aimed at assisting Governments in identifying strengths and weaknesses of their criminal justice responses to wildlife and forest crime.

At the local and regional levels, UNODC works extensively to tackle various forms of environmental crime. In South-East Asia in particular, UNODC conducts widespread research to better guide countries on wildlife trafficking illegal logging and advocates among Governments to increase efforts to protect natural resources and convict perpetrators of crimes against the environment. Critically, UNODC's work in this area also involves working with authorities to improve laws and increase international cooperation to respond to these crimes.

International NGO's such as the WWF are also key in lobbying Governments for greater action against environmental crime and collaborating with them on conservation issues. They also build awareness among the general public at the global and local levels and drive debate around these concerns.

Aside from these international and national initiatives, the role of the public is essential. Here are some of the things that can be done:

- **Demand reduction:** Consumers have a big – if not the biggest – role to play in breaking the trade in wildlife and illegal timber. As an informed consumer, you can help reduce demand by being aware of which species are under protection. This includes being conscientious of products used in traditional medicine such as rhino horn or tiger bones and paying careful attention to labelling when buying exotic timber.
- **Eco-tourism:** As a tourist, you can choose your routes, visits and destinations carefully and support eco-tourism. It should also be a given that no animals and wildlife products – and particularly not those listed above – are taken back home.
- **Publicity:** High-level personalities can publicly speak out against these crimes. In some countries, traditional practices and beliefs, and the greed for status symbols are hindering the efforts to curb wildlife crime. Influential public voices can help to dispel myths, expose the cruelty of poaching and highlight the illegality of the origin, thereby building support for change.
- **Awareness-raising:** Often, the lack of knowledge and awareness leads to careless consumption of illegal wildlife prod-



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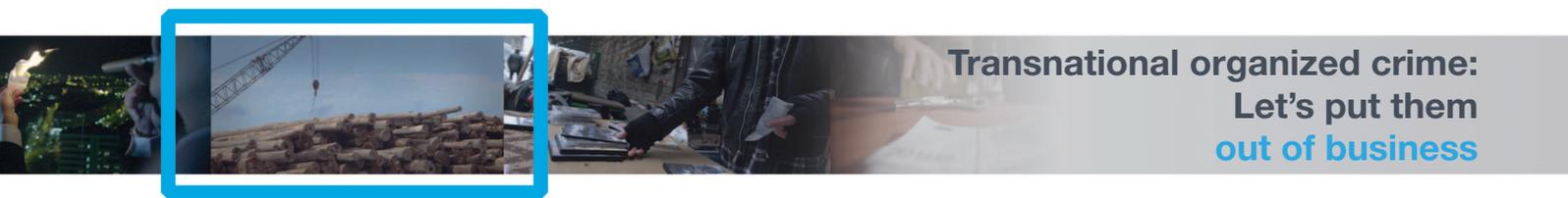


- ucts. Governments, NGOs and individuals can help spread information about these issues within society.
- Providing alternatives and sustainable livelihoods: As poverty is one of the main factors driving illegal trading of wildlife, supporting legal income-generating activities can be an important measure that indirectly helps to curb environmental crime.
- Business: Companies can take action through smart and sustainable business decisions. In the timber trade especially, companies should check certificates ensuring that products are of a legal origin. If companies refuse to buy illegal timber and wood products, it will lead to less revenue for traffickers, and therefore less deforestation.

Disclaimer

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- ² Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Press Release - CITES Secretary-General expresses grave concern over reports of mass elephant killings in Cameroon http://www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/2012/20120228_elephant_cameroon.php
- ³ UNODC: The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment. 2010 http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf
- ⁴ UNODC: The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment. 2010 http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf
- ⁵ UNODC: The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment. 2010 http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf
- ⁶ United States of America Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, 'Ivory and Insecurity: The Global Implications of Poaching in Africa', written testimony of John E. Scanlon: Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). 24 May 2012, Washington D.C., the United States of America http://www.cites.org/eng/news/SG/2012/20120525_SG_US-Senate_testimony.php
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