

A contribution to the global follow-up and review in the 2017 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the work of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

ERADICATING POVERTY AND PROMOTING PROSPERITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

Introduction

Planet Earth is home to over 13,000 known species of mammals and birds, tens of thousands of reptiles, amphibians and fish, some 250,000 flowering plants, and millions of insects and other invertebrates. Together these wild animals and plants form an integral part of the natural ecosystem and are vital for satisfying our needs for food, clothing medicine, leisure, and much more. Yet, many thousands of species are under threat because of human activities such as habitat loss and destruction, excessive hunting, pollution and illegal and unregulated international trade.

The international wildlife trade, both legal and illegal, has grown dramatically over the past few decades as improved transport systems have made it easier to ship wild animals and plants and their products anywhere in the world and the increase in human populations has created an increase in demand. Illegal trade in wildlife products is big business: commercial fishing and the timber trade aside, it is estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually and to involve more than 350 million wild plants and animals every year. Much of this trade aims to satisfy the demand for exotic pets, fashion items and ornamental plants. Products such as furs, skins and traditional medicines are also traded commercially in large quantities. CITES is increasingly being used to regulate international trade in commercially harvested marine and timber species, with the Convention now regulating trade in over 900 timber species, up from just 18 in 1975, and trade in many new commercially harvested shark and ray species, in addition to corals and other marine species.

Concerned about the overexploitation of many vulnerable species as a result of unregulated international trade, governments adopted the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1973. The treaty entered into force in 1975 and now has 183 Parties. The Convention places a joint responsibility on producer and consumer Parties for managing wildlife trade sustainably and preventing illegal trade. CITES regulates international trade in over 36,000 species of plants and animals, including their products and derivatives, ensuring their survival in the wild with benefits for the livelihoods of local people and the global environment. CITES has taken in the lead raising awareness of the surge in illegal trade in wildlife and in taking a coordinated approach to the fight against illegal wildlife trade, including through the establishment of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), a collaborative effort of five inter-governmental organizations (CITES, INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Bank and the World Customs Organization) working to bring coordinated support to the national wildlife law enforcement agencies and to the sub-regional and regional networks that, on a daily basis, act in defence of natural resources.

The animals and plants protected by CITES are known as CITES-listed species because they are included on three lists approved by the Parties called CITES Appendices. CITES protects these species from being excessively traded and exploited illegally and unsustainably in the wild as their extinction would have irreversible ecological consequences and negative economic and social effects. The CITES permit system seeks to ensure that international trade in listed species is sustainable, legal and traceable.

Implementation of the Convention depends on three sets of actors at the national level: the Scientific Authority tasked with determining the level of trade that would not be detrimental for a species; the Management Authority tasked with ensuring traceability by providing adequate legal documentation for trade to take place; and the Enforcement Authority focusing on the fight against illegal trade. Trade can only happen if it meets the following three conditions. First, the trade will not be detrimental to the survival of that species. Second, the traded animal or plant was not obtained in contravention of the laws of the exporting State for the protection of fauna and flora. Third, for any living specimen, the transport is organized so as to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment. For these conditions to be met, all actors at the national level need to work together.

CITES was referenced in the outcomes document of Rio+20, The Future We Want, which recognised “the important role of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, an international agreement that stands at the intersection between trade, the environment and development, promotes the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, should contribute to tangible benefits for local people, and ensures that no species entering into international trade is threatened with extinction”. It was

described in the first ever UN World Wildlife Crime Report of 2016 as “an agreement of remarkable scope and power” that “defines the rules that wildlife traffickers seek to circumvent.”

With human population and economic activity set to expand over the next few decades, the threats facing wild animals and plants will only become greater. CITES’ vision statement is to conserve biodiversity and contribute to its sustainable use by ensuring that no species of wild fauna or flora becomes or remains subject to unsustainable exploitation through international trade, thereby contributing to the significant reduction of the rate of biodiversity loss and making a significant contribution towards the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, including achieving the relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Further, the CITES Parties have committed to strengthen the contribution of the Convention to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and their targets as demonstrated by this submission. A [Ministerial Lekgotla](#) held in advance of last year’s seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties further explored the nexus between CITES and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Thousands of species are internationally traded and used by people in their daily lives for food, housing, health care, ecotourism, cosmetics or fashion. The main challenge for CITES, within the broader framework of the SDGs, is to make species conservation and the promotion of prosperity mutually supportive.

An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level

CITES’ expertise focuses squarely on how international trade in wildlife can be managed legally and sustainably and thereby contribute to sustainably eradicate poverty and ensure that no one is left behind. However, the definition of those “left behind” varies depending on the type of intervention. After more than forty years of implementation of the Convention, it seems that when the global (international trade) affects the local, especially rural communities and local youth, the local is often left behind – i.e. either completely bypassed or even exploited by that wealth-creating trade. This was specifically recognized by the CITES Parties at CoP17, with decisions being taken on livelihoods and rural communities, as is elaborated upon below.

At country level, CITES is driven by the concerns of its Parties that include range States, and consumer and transit States for more than 36,000 species. As such, it is governed by the experience of its Parties and responds to their needs to ensure that none of its Parties is left behind. Low-income countries are often the ones that have some of the most diverse and sought after wildlife. The Convention is implemented in a way to ensure that these countries can make legal and sustainable use of their wildlife resources to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity in harmony with nature.

At the community level, while Parties to the Convention are either States or regional economic integration organizations, significant efforts have been made in recent years to ensure that local and rural communities are not left behind and benefit from international trade. Resolution Conf. 16.6 (Rev. CoP17) on *CITES and livelihoods* recognizes that the listing of species on CITES Appendices can form part of a strategy to provide sustainable livelihoods for rural communities consistent with paragraph 203 of the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference *The Future We Want*.

Recent initiatives aim at maximizing the benefits of CITES implementation and trade for rural communities, in particular to support poverty eradication. This entails more specifically recognizing resource tenure and ownership, and traditional knowledge of or in rural communities associated with CITES-listed species, subject to any applicable national or international law. Recent initiatives also focus on strengthening community voices, actively supporting them to be involved in decision-making to derive benefits from conserving wildlife. The Conference of the Parties is also exploring the possibility of better engaging directly in CITES processes, including through the possible establishment of a committee of rural communities.

Like local and rural communities, youth is yet another constituency that risks being left behind even though, according to the United Nations Population Fund, some 1.8 billion people -- nearly one-quarter of the world’s population - is aged 10-24. Public surveys conducted in some countries show that youth in those countries are spending more time online and less time outdoors exploring nature. The future of wildlife depends on engaging, educating, and connecting the next generation of conservation leaders with animals and plants that they are increasingly unlikely to encounter on their own. Some published literature also raises concerns about trends in youths’ environmental attitudes, beliefs and behavior, suggesting a decline in personal responsibility for the environment, with youth tending to assign responsibility for the environment to governments.

Directly prior to the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, thirty-four young leaders from around the globe convened for the Youth Forum on People and Wildlife. Chosen from a pool of nearly 1,000 candidates, these youth delegates represent some of the best and brightest of the next generation of wildlife conservationists. During the forum, delegates engaged in skill-building workshops, and explored conservation and wildlife issues, including the impacts of wildlife trade. To avoid that possible disconnect between youth and wildlife, CITES Parties have [called](#) for an increased participation of youth in its decision-making processes and in wildlife management and trade in general. This theme was followed during [World Wildlife Day 2017](#) whose theme was “Listen to the Young Voices”

The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges

An important area that requires urgent attention is illegal trade in wildlife that is perpetuating poverty. Rather than lifting people out of poverty it puts them into a poverty spiral. The General Assembly put this issue to the fore in 2015 when it adopted resolution A/RES/69/314 on *Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife*. The United Nations and its Member States recognized that illegal wildlife trade contributes to damage ecosystems and rural livelihoods, including those based on ecotourism, undermines good governance and the rule of law and, in some cases, threatens national stability.

The SDGs specifically address tackling illegal trafficking in wildlife through specific Targets under Goal 15, as follows:

- 15.7 *Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products.*
- 15.c *Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities.*

The changing scale and nature of illegal wildlife trade is well known. Today we are not confronting small scale subsistence poaching; rather we are dealing with industrial scale poaching. While legal and sustainable wildlife trade is a multi-billion dollar legitimate business, the CITES Secretariat does not place a value on illegal wildlife trade, but it notes that some estimate it is worth at least USD 5 billion annually (excluding timber and marine wildlife) and up to 20 billion. Illegal logging is also particularly problematic and lucrative. A 2012 World Bank study “Justice for Forests” reports that illegal trade in timber deprives States of over USD 10 billion in annual revenue. Some of the other most lucrative illegal wildlife commodities include tiger parts, elephant ivory, rhino horn and exotic birds and reptiles. CITES has cooperated fully with the production of the first UNODC [World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species](#) produced in response to a request from the United Nations General Assembly.

Illegal trade in wildlife has become a sophisticated transnational form of crime, comparable to other serious organized crimes, such as trafficking of drugs, persons, arms and counterfeit goods. It is driven by rising demand, and is often facilitated by corruption and weak governance. There is strong evidence of the increased involvement of organized crime groups and non-State armed groups. Illegal wildlife trade undermines the rule of law, threatens national security, and degrades ecosystems. Criminals often exploit impoverished local communities by encouraging them to engage in illegal harvesting in exchange for a small payment, which exposes them to the risk of injury from dangerous animals or arrest by the authorities. Illegal wildlife trade is a major obstacle to sustainable development and the efforts of rural communities and indigenous peoples striving to manage sustainably their natural resources.

Valuable lessons learned on eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity

Succeeding over the medium to longer term to combat illegal trade in wildlife trade requires us to engage more deeply with local communities who have the most to lose from illegal trade, as well as the most to gain by preventing it. Such efforts extend beyond combatting wildlife crime to determining how natural resources are best managed and how local communities may derive development benefits from conservation through the sustainable use of wildlife – which can take many different forms, from wildlife-based tourism to the consumptive use of plants and animals. It is from this engagement with local and rural communities that valuable lessons can be learned in order to strike the right balance between trade and conservation to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity. CITES has shown how well regulated legal trade and combating illegal trade in wildlife helps to preserve the wildlife assets that underpin wildlife based tourism, which when done well generates local jobs and serves to protect wildlife. This interrelationship is being highlighted during 2017, the UN International Year for Sustainable Tourism for Development.

On the frontline of conserving, using and managing wildlife, CITES works with rural communities and indigenous peoples, those who are the first-hand experts of local animals and plants. These groups of individuals are indispensable allies and, when directly involved in managing their local natural assets, are the best guardians of a species. CITES engages with them to understand the spiritual, cultural, social, economic and ecological values of traded species and helps ensure that they directly benefit from any associated commerce. CITES builds upon local traditional knowledge to protect species, while concurrently generating income. This combination has a positive impact both on the livelihoods of local communities and on the status of wildlife populations. Wildlife trade benefits many people along the harvest and trade chain, from the communities where fauna and flora are harvested to those working in value-added industries in the trade chain. Through its global outreach, CITES impacts on the livelihoods of people across the globe.

The management and conservation of vicuñas represent one of CITES' success stories. Vicuñas, the smallest of all camels living in the high Andes, were strictly protected under CITES in 1975 because they were critically endangered. In response, range States developed plans to manage the remaining herds sustainably and those proved successful. As a result, CITES Parties agreed a few years later that some vicuña populations had recovered sufficiently to transfer them to a lower level of protection and allow the partial re-opening of trade in their wool. This has produced valuable income for the local communities, who in turn have become an effective anti-poaching force. In one Peruvian village alone over 1,000 people are employed directly or indirectly through the harvesting of vicuña wool.

Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of poverty eradication and achieving prosperity

The lack of an integrated and holistic approach is the issue most likely to negatively affect the realization of poverty eradication and the achievement of prosperity. This is at the very core of the SDGs. Nevertheless, being aware of this issue does not guarantee that such an approach will be implemented across-the-board in the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. CITES Parties and their Secretariat have adopted such a combined approach in the implementation of the Convention both in the regulation of trade and in the fight against illegal trade. It is thanks to this approach that wildlife can be used sustainably to promote prosperity for all.

International trade in CITES-listed species rests on three pillars: sustainability, legality and traceability with the bulk of the work taking place at national level. Although CITES is legally binding on States it is not self-executing. This means that it cannot be fully implemented until specific domestic measures have been adopted for that purpose. National laws for implementing CITES are critical to ensure that trade in protected species is legal, sustainable and traceable. Only through adequate legislation which is permanently up to date and efficiently enforced, both at the borders and within countries, can CITES really work and sustainably contribute to the prosperity of its Parties. Adequate national legislation is key to effective wildlife trade controls by the State agencies charged with implementing and enforcing the Convention and therefore to the Convention's contribution to the realization of poverty eradication and achieving prosperity.

One of the main challenges in the implementation of the Convention is also one of the key emerging issues for the implementation of the SDGs and for the eradication of poverty and the promotion of prosperity: relevant actors need to work together and pull in the same direction. Just like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is integrated, indivisible and interlinked in nature, the eradication of poverty is part of an integrated approach. Considering that the 2030 Agenda has 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, the temptation is great to pick and choose a specific goal or target above others. While the United Nations and its Member States have highlighted many times that the SDGs are integrated and indivisible, the great emerging issue the High-Level Political Forum could focus on is to propose concrete guidance on how this can be done on the ground.

Areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required

The High-Level Political Forum, in its role as source of high-level policy guidance for countries in their implementation of the SDGs and in their attempts to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity, could focus its efforts on how countries, within their limited resources and capacities, can adopt an integrated approach.

The guidance of the High-Level Political Forum could be valuable in providing concrete examples on how low-income countries – often the ones left behind – can implement the SDGs in an integrated manner. As a forum, this is the perfect venue to exchange experiences and highlight success stories. The challenge in an integrated and holistic implementation of the SDGs at the national level is the same, writ large, as the one

faced by CITES Parties in their implementation of the Convention and in ensuring that actors at the national level work together.

Along the same vein, to privilege an integrated and holistic approach, the High-Level Political Forum could also provide useful policy guidance on how to ensure that countries' economic and environmental policies mutually support each other. In this respect, wildlife trade can be seen as a natural bridge between the two. Such a valuable trade would not exist without the existence of precious wildlife, but the trade itself cannot occur if it is not environmentally sustainable and legal. The third pillar of sustainable development is also brought in with the current efforts to ensure the livelihoods of local and rural communities.

Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in poverty eradication

As the High-Level Political Forum looks towards the future, it could encourage the use of wildlife in a sustainable, legal and traceable manner to accelerate progress in poverty eradication. Wildlife, both terrestrial and aquatic, is a source of wealth, beauty and prosperity. The responsible and sustainable use of wildlife must be part of a comprehensive approach to achieving poverty eradication, food security, sustainable development, including the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, economic growth, social well-being and sustainable livelihoods. CITES provides the tools to achieve this objective.

Within this context, it is important to avoid over-simplification. In relation to policy, one size does not fit all and a bottom-up approach is particularly apposite. In this spirit, CITES is looking forward to taking into account the outcomes of the voluntary national reviews as it is only by listening to these voices, in coordination with the voices of youth and rural communities, that real progress will be made to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity in harmony with nature.