

UN-DESA Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Development Goal 15: Progress and Prospects

Introduction

In this session, we focus on Target 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”.

Why was this target needed? Because the single greatest threat to many species today is poaching for the illegal trade. For example, 100 years ago maybe a million tigers roamed Asia. By 2011, that was down to about 3,200. Within the last 15 years, we have lost three subspecies of rhinos, and are on the brink of losing two entire rhino species. African forest elephants declined by 62% between 2002 and 2011 due to illegal hunting for their ivory. And it’s not just these high profile species, but multiple others that are affected: pangolins, song birds, tortoises, sharks and rays and more.

Many of these large, charismatic species play critical ecological roles as top predators, seed dispersers and ecological engineers. Their loss has multiple implications, including loss of food security for marginalized rural people, and reduced resilience to climate change. Moreover, the illegal trade is often driven by organized criminal groups with links to other forms of organized crime, facilitated by corruption along the trade chain. Wildlife enforcement agencies are often under-resourced, with low capacity. Unlike some other forms of organized crime, wildlife crime is often not treated as serious crime, so tends to be low risk and high gain.

In recent years, however, the world is treating this much more seriously. Here at the UN, in addition to SDG15.7, the General Assembly has passed three increasingly strong resolutions on the illegal wildlife trade over the past three years, with the Friends of Wildlife Group driving the agenda. Other relevant UN conventions are those on Transnational Organized Crime, and on Corruption. In addition have been multiple CITES resolutions, and a number of global conferences on the issue over the past few years. The global framework and mandate could not be stronger.

So what must we now focus upon? What recommendations can we make to the global community as they assemble in New York in July to review SDG 15?

Given this strong mandate, critical now is ensuring effective implementation on the ground. We know from experience in some countries that where we do the right thing, poaching can be reduced to almost zero. Key components include:

- Involvement of multiple sectors, from the judiciary, forestry and agriculture, port and customs management, and ensuring alternative livelihoods for communities;
- Reflection of such a multi-sectoral approach in National Development Plans and regional frameworks;
- Developing comprehensive systems of protected areas, and managing them effectively;
- Ensuring the rule of law, increasing penalties for wildlife crime to shift the paradigm to high risk and low gain;
- Dealing with corruption along the wildlife chain, including by following the money;
- And critically, ensuring the engagement of local and indigenous people at all stages.

Finally, this requires resources. In addition to national resources, the international community needs to step up, as called for in the Addis Ababa Action Plan.

This morning we will hear from three critical perspectives.

First, Midori Paxton, Head of Ecosystems and Biodiversity at UNDP Global Environmental Finance Unit.

Second, John Scanlon, currently Special Envoy at African Parks, and former Secretary General of CITES.

Third, Dr Samuel Kasiki, Deputy Director of Research and Planning at Kenya Wildlife Service.