



# Wildlife Poaching Threatens Economic, Security Priorities in Africa

6 September 2013

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## Key Points

Increased demand for ivory and rhino horn in Asia stems from a rapidly expanding wealthy class that views both commodities as luxury goods that enhance social status as well as a growing number of ready buyers within Africa who serve as dealers to clients in Asia. Increased demand for ivory and rhino horn triggered rapid upticks in poaching in Africa in 2011 and 2012, with similar trends predicted for 2013.

Criminal elements of all kinds, including some terrorist entities and rogue security personnel, often in collusion with government officials in source countries are involved in poaching and movement of ivory and rhino horn across east, central, and southern Africa. We assess with high confidence that traffickers use sophisticated networks and the complicity of public officials in order to move ivory and rhino horn from relatively remote areas to markets and ports of export, perpetuating corruption and border insecurity in key eastern, central and southern African states. We judge some of these networks probably are the same or overlap with those of other illicit goods such as drugs and weapons.

Poaching presents significant security challenges for militaries and police forces in African nations (e.g. Kenya, Tanzania, Congo-Kinshasa, South Africa, and others), which are often outgunned by poachers and their criminal and extremist allies. Corruption and lack of sufficient penal and financial deterrents are hampering these governments' abilities to reduce poaching and trafficking.

Material and training, legal, and diplomatic support probably could have a significant impact on the trajectory of the illicit rhino horn and ivory trades, and would also represent a relatively cost-effective way to gain new insights into the behavior of implicated criminal groups and associated trafficking networks. However, the widespread complicity of military and government officials in the trade hinders potential partnerships.

## Uptick in Demand For Ivory and Rhino in Asia Fueling Rise in Poaching

**Increased demand for ivory and rhino horn in Asia stems from a rapidly expanding wealthy class that views both commodities as luxury goods that enhance social status as well as a growing number of ready buyers within Africa who serve as dealers to clients in Asia.** Increased demand for ivory and rhino horn triggered rapid upticks in poaching in Africa in 2011 and 2012, with similar trends likely for 2013. Wildlife trafficking has doubled since 2007 and is now “the fourth-largest transnational crime in the world,” with yearly revenues reaching an estimated \$17 billion, according to *Al Jazeera*, the English-language news service of the influential pan-Arab news channel *Al-Jazirah*. The UN Environment Program (UNEP) reported on 6 March that elephant poaching has doubled in the last decade.

- China’s rapid economic development and a sharp rise in private consumption, have increased demand for ivory. Chinese customers often believe that they are purchasing legal ivory and are often unaware that elephants were killed in order to obtain their ivory.
- In China and Vietnam, rhino horn is widely regarded as an effective traditional medicine, and it has recently become trendy among young urbanites as a hangover cure.
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) estimates that out of the approximately 472,000 elephants living in Africa, 25,000 were killed in 2011, and the organization expects that the total for 2012 was even higher, according to a 19 February article by French news agency Agence France Presse (AFP). Rhinos are also under increasing poaching threat—the number poached for their horns in South Africa grew from 13 in 2007 to 668 in 2012, according to the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF).
- The Tanzanian government is concerned that the country’s elephants would be gone in seven years if current poaching rates continue. The number of elephants killed by poachers in Kenya increased eight times from 47 in 2007 to 387 in 2012 according to an 11 May report in the *Daily Nation*, the widely circulated Nairobi-based independent newspaper.

## Poachers and Facilitators Are Armed Actors and Military Personnel

**Demand for rhino horn and ivory so outpaces supply, and is so lucrative, that criminal elements of all kinds, including some terrorist entities and rogue military officers, are becoming involved in countries across east, central, and southern Africa.** Once smallscale enterprises, operations are increasingly sophisticated, targeting and killing animals with weapons including semiautomatic guns and rocket-propelled grenades, that threaten not only the animal populations in the region but civilian populations as well.

- Parks in central Africa have been heavily poached in the recent past. Militia elements have been implicated alongside military forces.
- Armed actors move ivory in exchange for arms and use existing smuggling operations to facilitate the movement of ivory throughout central Africa. Militia forces may offer ivory to local officials in exchange for the guarantee of safe refuge in the region.

- South Africa has seen a steep rise in rhino poaching in recent years, reportedly organized by armed crime syndicates who pay and arm local hunters. While South Africa is not yet a significant source market for ivory—even though it is recognized as a major export hub on the continent, with seizures being made in the Western Cape and Cape Town harbor—officials expect to see growth in elephant poaching, especially as rhino numbers dwindle.

### **Networks Use Common Facilitation Routes**

**Traffickers use sophisticated networks and the complicity of public officials in order to move ivory and rhino horn from relatively remote areas to markets and ports of export, perpetuating corruption and border insecurity throughout Africa.** These networks probably are the same or overlap with those of other illicit goods such as drugs and weapons.

- Air and sea shipments of illegal wildlife, in particular, are difficult to detect given the opportunity for alterations to shipping documents, which often obscure the African origin of the containers as well as their true contents. Criminal syndicates arguably take advantage of this lack of oversight and inspection of containerized shipping when trafficking illegal wildlife products.
- Criminal syndicates likely take advantage of the high volume of maritime containerized cargo for trafficking wildlife products. The primary reason for lax oversight and inspection is a lack of resources and corruption at African and East Asian ports.

### **Exacerbating Insecurity, Undermining African Economies**

**Poaching presents significant security challenges for militaries and police forces in African nations, which are often outgunned by poachers and their allies.** Corruption and lack of sufficient penal and financial deterrents, in addition to lack of trained, funded and staffed wildlife protective services are hampering these governments' abilities to reduce ivory poaching and trafficking.

**The illicit ivory and rhino horn trade is enabled by systemic corruption, but also exacerbates corruption by introducing high-value illegal products to influential individuals along the supply chain, from rangers to customs officers, police, and military.** In their participation, these players actively subvert government controls, resulting in further reduction in government effectiveness, less civil society engagement, and the deterioration of civilian trust in the state. By inducing widespread movement of armed poachers and traffickers, the ivory and rhino horn trade also exacerbates border insecurity, particularly across porous borders.

- Poachers have begun using increasingly sophisticated weapons and equipment, including rocket launchers, M-16 rifles, and night vision goggles, according to an April 2013 report prepared by environmental NGOs including the World Wildlife Fund. This has led rangers and armed forces to use more aggressive tactics to combat poachers, thereby increasing the risk of casualties to themselves, poachers, and surrounding communities.
- The price of rhino horn has increased to around \$60,000 per kilogram in Vietnam—twice the value of gold and platinum, but penalties for trafficking rhino horn are minor in comparison.

- In Tanzania, collusion between criminal syndicates and government officials who purportedly defend Tanzania's wildlife is extensive and has helped enable the killing of roughly 10,000 of the country's elephants annually, according to a statement by the chairman of Tanzania's natural resources committee in December 2012.

**The illicit ivory and rhino horn trade arguably weakens macroeconomic and fiscal stability, deters investment, contributes to income inequality, and hinders growth at all levels of an economy.**

Tourism revenues are particularly threatened by unmitigated poaching.

- In January 2013, the Kenya Association of Tour Operators petitioned their government to adopt a stronger wildlife bill, referring to the growth in elephant and rhino poaching as “economic sabotage.” Several other countries with substantial wildlife tourism industries, including legal hunting, are similarly affected—for example, Gabon, Cameroon, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa.
- According to the World Bank's World Development Indicators data for 2011—the most recent year for which data are available—tourism revenue (classified as an export by the World Bank) represents approximately 5.5 percent of Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 6.2 percent of Tanzania's GDP, and 5.8 percent of Uganda's GDP.

**Opportunities Depend on Transparency of Host Governments, Awareness Campaigns for End Users**

Material and training, legal, and diplomatic support probably could have a significant impact on the trajectory of the illicit rhino horn and ivory trades, and would also represent a relatively cost-effective way to gain new insights into the behavior of implicated criminal groups and associated trafficking networks. However, the widespread complicity of local civilians as well as security forces and government officials in the trade hinders potential partnerships.

**Protection**

International assistance—possibly via military and various aid channels—could help to improve the effectiveness of anti-poaching initiatives in Africa as well as investigation capacities throughout the ivory and rhino horn supply chains.

- Material and training support requested by African states to improve counter-poaching operations include overhead infrared, night vision goggles, communications equipment, and investigation kits. Furthermore, enabling more rigorous and coordinated forensic analysis, including DNA testing, across source, transit, and consumer countries would result in better information on the age and origin of confiscated rhino horn and ivory, and therefore a more accurate understanding of trade networks.
- Customs controls and container-search tactics at ports and airports in key consumer, transit, and source countries are significantly lacking. International efforts to assist host governments with improved security procedures and protocol at ports probably would also have the added benefit of streamlining port operations at some of the most congested ports in Africa.

## **Legal Systems**

Existing legal infrastructure throughout the ivory and rhino horn supply chain falls far short of what is needed to curtail the trade, and African nations have very few bilateral agreements on penalties and jurisdiction for prosecuting poachers and traffickers. International assistance to support strengthening the judiciary in key countries in Africa and Asia could improve prosecution and protection efforts.

- Improved surveillance and law enforcement in consumer countries like China, Vietnam, and Thailand, where inspections and interdictions of cargo from Africa may have increased could increase the likelihood that wildlife traffickers will use alternative ports and mechanisms to evade detection.