



Strengthening Law Enforcement Capacities against Illegal Wildlife Trade

Partnership against Wildlife Crime in Africa and Asia

Context

The illegal wildlife trade (IWT) with products such as ivory, rhino horn and pangolin scales continues to be one of the biggest illicit economies worldwide, largely controlled by transnational organised crime syndicates. The main drivers are high profit margins and demand while low risk of prosecution due to partly weak governance, corruption, underfunded law enforcement and insufficient regional and international cooperation are enabling conditions. IWT and poaching not only threaten fragile ecosystems but also destabilize security, economy, and local livelihoods in the affected regions.

Organised crime syndicates span their networks from range states in Africa via transit countries to main destination markets in Asia. These networks often overlap with other illicit transnational economies, such as the trafficking of drugs and timber or money laundering. Therefore, targeting organised IWT requires enhanced transcontinental, cross-border and intersectoral cooperation to effectively prosecute transnational criminal structures.

Our approach

The approach of the Partnership against Wildlife Crime to tackle transnationally organised wildlife crime is based on two closely intertwined pillars:

- **Capacity building of law enforcement agencies (e.g. wildlife authorities and judiciaries)**
- **Strengthening cross-border and intersectoral collaboration**

To tackle poaching and IWT successfully, it is crucial to adopt an intelligence-led and collaborative inter-agency approach between relevant actors such as rangers, investigators, police, prosecutors, customs and financial investigation authorities. The measures supported by the Partnership are components of an integrated multi-level approach to cross-border cooperation. Major success stories such as the dismantling of Malawi's leading IWT syndicate in 2019 can only be achieved by the joined forces of this multi-level approach.

Capacity building and human rights trainings of law enforcement agencies

Capacity building, including human rights trainings, of various law enforcement institutions is essential to the described multi-level approach. This encompasses trainings for CITES management and wildlife authorities as well as for police and judiciaries in the African and Asian focal regions of the project. The professional development of investigators, prosecutors and judges, including sensitization for IWT, pre-trial meetings, court room monitoring, and the follow-up of wildlife crime cases has proven particularly effective. Another important aspect of continuous capacity building is the support of animal units for the detection of illegal wildlife products.

Project name	Partnership against Wildlife Crime in Africa and Asia
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV)
Project region	Global with focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia
Duration	10/2021 - 09/2025
Implementing Partners	Relevant Ministries, Regional Organisations (SADC, COMIFAC), CITES Management Authorities, National Law Enforcement Authorities, NGOs: AWF, APOPO, FZS, LWT, TRAFFIC, WCP, WCS, WWF

Published by



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Sniffer dogs and rats against IWT

The use of detection dog units against IWT has a proven track record, especially when it is embedded into an intelligence-led law enforcement system. The Partnership supports regionally coordinated and internationally certified canine units operating in Malawi, eastern Zambia and cross-border regions. These units combine tracking and detection dogs that operate within and outside protected areas, along national borders and at major traffic hubs. The routine and intelligence-led operations include deployments at airports and borders as well as the support of concrete investigations by searching specific targets (e.g. vehicles and properties). The majority of the currently supported dog handlers is female, making them meaningful role models in the still male-dominated law enforcement sector. Significant seizures of ivory, rhino horn, pangolin scales and illegal weapons as well as various arrests of higher-level wildlife traffickers have resulted from such operations. Additionally, the canine units have powerful deterrent and educational effects and increase the visibility of efforts against wildlife crime.

Moreover, the Partnership supports the piloting of giant pouched rats against IWT. The rats have so far been deployed for the detection of landmines and tuberculosis in Africa, Asia and South America. Through the support of the project, they are now successfully being trained to detect illegal wildlife products, even in well-concealed and narrow environments such as shipping containers. Once ready for deployment, the rats can be used complementary to sniffer dogs and broaden the application range for animal detection units against IWT.



Wildlife Detection Dog Unit
© Malawi Police Service



Rat during training © APOPO



Confiscated elephant tusks © WWF

Strengthening intersectoral and cross-border cooperation

Furthermore, the project supports several initiatives to enhance cross-border and intersectoral collaboration for targeting organised wildlife crime syndicates. For instance, the Partnership has established the Sub-Regional Counter Wildlife Crime Platform between the wildlife authorities of Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia. The regular meetings of the Platform have created trusting relationships between the participating agencies guided by newly adopted standard operating procedures (SOPs). The SOPs facilitate cross-border collaboration and information exchange based on harmonised approaches including human rights principles. The revised Law Enforcement and Anti-Poaching Strategy (LEAP) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) explicitly highlights the Sub-Regional Platform as a role model for regional cooperation that is meant to be upscaled to other regions.

Additionally, the project continues to support the TWIX system in Southern and Central Africa (SADC-TWIX and AFRICA-TWIX) through ongoing training and continuous development of databases and reference materials. TWIX (Trade in Wildlife Information eXchanges) is an online tool facilitating confidential exchange of non-sensitive investigative information between law enforcement agencies across borders.

Finally, the Partnership supports enhanced collaboration against IWT between Africa and Asia. After the successful enactment of a mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT) between Mozambique and Vietnam, the project now supports the collaboration of Vietnam with Angola and Nigeria to further strengthen the bilateral cooperation in the transcontinental prosecution of IWT.

Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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Cover picture Regional Platform © GIZ
Dog unit © GIZ
Collaboration between Asia and Africa © WCS

As at August 2023

On behalf of Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and
Development (BMZ)
Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation,
Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV)

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