



Press Release

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Transboundary Information Sharing and Governance in Africa:

The need for the hour

A recent report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), provided an alarming account of the global biodiversity [1]. The report outlines, '*nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history - and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely*'. The effect of this fast-paced global biodiversity loss is creating a policy dilemma on two concepts – economic stake and species survival.

Adding to the threat of decline is poaching and illegal trade in wildlife products. Wildlife, human, drug, and arms trafficking form a quartet of transnational crimes which, according to the United Nations on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), rake in the most money for international criminal networks annually.

Global Finance Integrity (GFI), a Washington-based think-tank, puts the value [2] of transnational crime, which it defines as wider than this UNODC quartet, between \$1.6 trillion and \$2.2 trillion annually. As one of the UNODC quartet, GFI estimates wildlife trafficking has a global value of between \$5 billion and \$23 billion annually.

Despite conservation and enforcement measures in Africa, poaching and illicit trade has continued. Animal trophies and live animals, including the critically endangered apes, are traded internationally using concealed shipments and facilitated through the internet [3]. Reports are now emerging on the threat to more species including some of the endemic species

of Africa –the Giraffe [4] and the Pangolin [5].

African countries hold different policy frameworks on conservation and trade. Such differences in policies are also hindering cooperation on sharing information in addressing poaching and illegal wildlife trade from the continent, especially given countries often share the same transboundary ecosystems. Lack of a structured monitoring, reporting, and communication mechanism on illegal wild flora and fauna trade creates big gaps in transboundary conservation measures; these gaps are often exploited by well-funded and well-resourced illegal trade networks.

Other issues that are becoming an emerging problem is in finding a balance between wildlife conservation and the needs for agricultural and livestock rangelands by rural communities. Agro-pastoral conflicts [6], for example, have become a political problem especially in West Africa and Sahel region. With the rapid expansion of human settlements and the growing need for agricultural and range lands, conflicts between humans and wildlife are also increasing.

Discussions on wildlife and conservation in Africa will for the first-time feature in this year's Africa-Tokyo conference which brings together high-level government officials to set the continent's development priorities. The inclusion of science, technology and innovation in the forthcoming 2019 Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD) being held this month in Yokohama, Japan, signals the acknowledgement of need for technology for supporting sustainable developmental goals (SDG), especially in addressing SDG 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.*

Within the framework of SDGs, the conservation agenda will be spearheaded by the Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF), a coalition of seven countries in Eastern and Southern Africa in the fight against illegal wildlife trade. The side event organized by LATF during TICAD7 will raise awareness about the importance of including wildlife in development discussions in Africa.

LATF is a multilateral law enforcement organization, which can take the lead in communicating between countries on enforcement matters. LATF is the brain-child of wildlife law enforcement officers from eight Eastern and southern African countries and its formation was agreed at a meeting in Lusaka, Zambia in December 1992, under the auspices of Zambia's Ministry of Tourism. The Agreement is deposited with the Secretary General of the United Nations, New York and categorized as UN Treaty (Environment) no. XXVII.11 [7]. LATF has played a key role in transboundary enforcement efforts including facilitating joint enforcement operations in multiple countries in Africa as well as Asia. LATF has also worked with reputed academic institutions such as University of Washington (for DNA Analysis), University of Twente, Netherlands (information sharing policy research) and United Nations University (WEMS implementation) for bringing evidence-based policy in decision process.

"Illegal wildlife trade and trafficking is a global problem; therefore, effective cooperation and a robust data infrastructure and information exchange are integral elements in the fight against wildlife and forestry crime in Africa," said Mr. Edward Phiri, the LATF director.

The core theme of discussion during the side event will be to figure out a way forward for building a robust spatial data infrastructure for facilitating information sharing and governance frameworks to address illegal wildlife trade, human wildlife conflicts and agro-pastoral conflicts in Africa. 'The alarming loss of biodiversity is just not an environmental problem but also a social and economic problem' said Mr. Kaname Ikeda, President of Remote Sensing Technology Center of Japan (RESTEC). 'Advancement in spatial technology, especially for interception against poaching and illegal trade in transboundary landscapes in Africa, should be emphasized'.

This side event comes in the wake of the *Pan-African Conference on Strengthening Information Sharing Infrastructure and Governance Frameworks to Address Human-Nature Conflicts* [8]. conference held in Arusha, Tanzania in June, hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism of Government of Tanzania in partnership with United Nations Developmental Programme. The Arusha conference focused on improving governance and cross-border collaborations to address human-nature conflicts, as well as other challenges faced by African governments in their efforts to protect biodiversity on the continent. Opening the conference, Tanzania's Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism, Hon. Dr. Hamisi Kigwangalla, called for regional cooperation and partnership to secure sustainable funding and technical support to regional and national agencies to curb poaching and illegal wildlife activities. "Partnership remains a key factor to the success of conservation of wildlife in Africa," Hon. Dr Kigwangala said.

One of the key findings of the conference was the immediate requirement for a near to real-time spatial transboundary monitoring system that need to be hosted by an intergovernmental enforcement body and supported by African governments. Such a system should be interconnected with various line ministries managing the portfolios of wildlife, police, customs and border police. However, for a shared information system to be functional, it requires strengthening of information infrastructures and governance frameworks across Africa as well as increased regional and international cooperation, including technology transfer and capacity development efforts. "To effectively protect wildlife, including elimination of wildlife trafficking, we must act together and we must use every tool available in often resource-constrained contexts," said Brian McBrearity, Vice President at the African Wildlife Foundation. "Information is fundamental to solving this global issue. New technologies, applied to the wildlife context, can allow for more efficient information gathering, sharing and evidence-based decision making. Hopefully this will allow governments to more effectively stop wildlife trafficking and punish those involved in this illicit trade."

The conference also highlighted the need for strengthening LATF. Nearly 17 years since its formation, LATF is facing challenges related to funding, infrastructure and manpower. LATF does not have an independent facility and is housed within the premises of Kenya Wildlife Service in Nairobi. However, LATF is the only wildlife Enforcement network (WEN) within Africa, constituting of a governing council represented by ministers from seven sub-Saharan African countries, which can carry out transboundary enforcement efforts. Hence for strengthening transboundary enforcement measures, it is a must that the capacity of LATF be reinforced. This includes an independent office facilitated with a robust command and control center that can visualize spatial data on poaching and illegal wildlife trade. LATF is currently hosting the Wildlife Enforcement Monitoring System (WEMS-Africa) – a transboundary tool for monitoring poaching and illegal wildlife trade in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Republic of Congo (Brazzaville).

The upcoming 2019 TICAD 7 side event, organized by LATF, will feature experts from LATF, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, United Nations Developmental Programme (UNDP), the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), along with Japanese institutions such as National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES) and the Remote Sensing Technology Center (RESTEC) of Japan. During the event, representatives will discuss a strategies for building the capacity of LATF and the development of a spatial data infrastructure for addressing human-nature conflicts in Africa.

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