

TRAFFIC TRAINS THE ECUADORIAN MILITARY TO COUNTER ILLEGAL TIMBER TRADE AND OTHER WILDLIFE CRIMES

There is much yet to be done to guarantee that biodiversity issues are integrated in all planning and decision-making by governments, the private sector and other relevant bodies. On the enforcement side, the military sector can play various key roles. On the one hand, operational planners in the military sector need tools to integrate environmental concerns during the course of military operations in order to reduce their impact. On the other, there is an important potential for mainstreaming biodiversity considerations into military operational tasks in order to increase positive inter-ministerial impact. This potential is enormous. The military in Ecuador have a great number of staff members on the ground, exercise military intelligence prior to any given intervention, develop considerable knowledge on criminal psychology, and are constantly monitoring extensive areas throughout the country. Mainstreaming biodiversity into this key sector means providing human capital to environmental efforts, increasing effectiveness in enforcement and decreasing overall public costs. This effort, described below, was focused on training the military to take a primary role in combating illegal trade.

As part of an inter-ministerial initiative following the signing of a co-operation agreement between the Ecuadorian Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Defence last year, both parties prioritized the need to plan capacity-building strategies for military staff. Instead of being regarded as merely a component or by-product of programmes and products, capacity building had become an explicit priority. TRAFFIC was invited to respond to this need and designed creative and novel interventions. The EcoFondo Fund sponsored the implementation of this complex multidimensional capacity development initiative.

TRAFFIC's strategy

Successful military operations begin with thorough strategic planning, seeking to have the highest impact. TRAFFIC's strategy aimed to upgrade this military competency in order to increase positive environmental impacts



Training army personnel at Orellana Military Base to take a primary role in combating illegal wildlife trade. Photographs: TRAFFIC

on the ground. TRAFFIC needed to be a catalytic agent, promoter and educator, and a key facilitator. Turning words into inter-ministerial action is no easy undertaking: tools need to be developed, new skills learned and institutional frameworks need to evolve.

The first priority was the design and implementation of in-house professional training courses in selected military bases. As a result, TRAFFIC has subsequently assisted with the training of 300 navy, army and air force personnel to increase the impact of the country's military in tackling crime relating to the illegal harvest and trade in timber, fisheries and other wildlife. In summary, TRAFFIC trained the military to develop better operations against illegal trade, as well as sensitizing them to biodiversity conservation issues in their daily defence operations.

Intensive three-day courses were undertaken at six military bases where those taking part gained an understanding of the dependency of social and economic systems on ecological systems, the seriousness of wildlife crime and its impacts, as well as methods to improve enforcement strategies. Participants also gained hands-on experience of dealing with wildlife crime and learned how military roles can support environmental authorities.

Plans were also drawn up during training, aimed at increasing the impact of actions at the local and provincial levels, while the establishment of an emergency telephone line is planned so as to facilitate co-ordination between staff in both the Ministries taking part. A significant output of this effort has been the integration of wildlife crime issues into daily military operations.

An additional outcome of the in-house training was the inclusion of the National Intelligence Secretariat, who linked military intelligence personnel with the Ministry of the Environment to enhance their efforts to curb illegal timber operations in Ecuador's key biodiversity hotspots.

The second priority was one intended to have massive biodiversity awareness outreach. One thousand high-level military staff members are now taking a 100-hour online course on "Biodiversity as a Strategic Resource", explaining why it forms an integral component of national security issues.

The online modules include specialized content on environmental security, biodiversity as an element of national security priorities, and

environmental law and military competencies. The course was launched in early June 2015 by the Ecuadorian Minister for the Environment and is being implemented by the Armed Forces University—ESPE—through their 30 specially trained course tutors. It will be re-packaged in order to address troops and other specialized military target groups.

"It has been a huge privilege and responsibility for TRAFFIC to be entrusted by two major Ministries to help facilitate this strategic initiative against wildlife crime," said Bernardo Ortiz, TRAFFIC's former Regional Director for South America. "Inter-ministerial collaboration is vital to ensure a clear vision where specific roles and responsibilities are spelled out for implementing agreed joint action plans to address wildlife crime."

"This initiative goes way beyond environmental education campaigns or enforcement-only based strategies—the usual approaches to combat illegal wildlife trade in Latin America. We are helping to develop intelligence-based strategies, combining the use of cutting-edge technology with action-oriented training in order to have higher impact on the ground," said Ortiz.

Simultaneously, the initiative is advancing on technological aspects, as the increased co-ordination between Air Force personnel and the Ministry of the Environment has meant improving the use of drone technology to increase timber trade monitoring. Trials have shown that five hours of drone surveying can substitute an entire week of roadside patrols, with levels of immediacy and control never previously available.

The third priority relates to developing environmental curricula, to be included in military careers. Intensive negotiations on this subject have been held with military authorities, and the subject is on the agenda.

Enforcement strategies need human capital to be effective. This experience is one step in this direction.

Ana Puyol, E-mail: anapuyol@hotmail.com

Bernardo Ortiz von Halle,

E-mail: berni8681993@gmail.com