A TOOL TO FACILITATE THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE BETWEEN THE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW
The Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange (TWIX) is an online tool developed to facilitate the exchange of information and to promote co-operation between the management and control authorities of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) to contribute to the reduction of illegal wildlife trade.

The African continent is one of the largest legal and illegal exporters of wildlife products in the world. The majority of African nations are signatories to CITES, yet many of them continue to experience high levels of poaching and illegal trade. High consumer demand from Asia for a plethora of illicit wildlife products continues to pose challenges to conservation actions, whilst national enforcement agencies are often hampered by a lack of resources and the existence of transboundary administrative barriers. If wildlife crime detection and prosecution efforts hope to succeed, international co-operation and information sharing between enforcement agencies is vital.

**BACKGROUND**

**TWIX AND ITS IMPACT**

**WORKING ON WILDLIFE TRADE**

- **US$7-23 billion**
  annual estimated value of global illegal wildlife trade

- **~60,000 seizure records**
  concerning wildlife enforcement registered within EU-TWIX

- **110+ staff**
  nominated by governments to be part of AFRICA-TWIX

**TWIX FOR THE SADC REGION**

The mandate for the establishment of a TWIX system for the Southern African region emanates from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Law Enforcement and Anti-Poaching (LEAP) Strategy that aims at reducing the level of poaching and illegal trade in wildlife fauna and flora and enhancing law enforcement capacity in the SADC Region by 2021.

The TWIX system for the Southern African region is developed based on experience drawn from the highly successful EU-TWIX platform that has been operational since 2005 and connects more than a thousand enforcement and management officials dealing with CITES issues in 38 European countries (28 EU Member States and 10 neighbouring countries – as of March 2019). The EU-TWIX database maintains information on over 60,000 wildlife seizures.
The TWIX for the Southern African region shares its development with the AFRICA-TWIX platform, which connects more than one hundred officials from six countries of the COMIFAC (Commission des Forêts d’Afrique Centrale) region, namely Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Gabon.

AFRICA-TWIX has facilitated several enforcement actions in Central Africa – for example, seven suspected wildlife traffickers from local freight services and Customs were arrested following information sharing and collaboration via AFRICA-TWIX concerning a seizure of 28 elephant tusks in Bangkok in late 2017. Collaborative investigations by INTERPOL and Congolese authorities have also been triggered following information exchange on the AFRICA-TWIX platform.

**Supporting LEAP strategy objectives:**

- **enforcement**
  - minimisation of wildlife crime and illegal trade
- **resource management**
  - ensuring sustainable trade and use of natural resources
- **regulation**
  - enhancement of legislation and judicial processes

**REPLICATING TWIX FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA**

TWIX for Southern Africa was developed following the success of a similar platform in operation within the European Union (EU). In addition to a mailing list that allows for the rapid exchange of wildlife-seizure related information between enforcement, the EU-TWIX platform includes a database that allows officials to submit wildlife seizure data for access and analysis by fellow officials – a feature replicated for Southern Africa.

Building capacity to include support for the identification of wildlife species and their derivatives to aid in wildlife crime investigations is an ongoing activity we hope to bring to TWIX for Southern Africa in the near future.
Recent years have seen numerous international commitments made between African nations concerning wildlife conservation and sustainable wildlife trade. The implementation of TWIX is in part a response to such regional and international recommendations and declarations and an effort to support signatories to fulfill their obligations and implementations.

Declarations and Commitments that the TWIX for Southern Africa is helping to support include:

- London Conference Declaration on Illegal Wildlife Trade
- Arusha Declaration on Regional Conservation and Combating Wildlife/Environmental Crime
- Kasane Statement on the Illegal Wildlife Trade
- African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa
- The SADC Law Enforcement and Anti-Poaching Strategy and the action plan for its implementation – the LEAP Strategy

The process of setting up a TWIX system for the Southern African region has been underway since February 2018. 70 agencies from 10 countries have expressed their interest and commitment in joining a TWIX system. These include agencies from: Angola, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zambia. Furthermore, agencies of the Seychelles have also raised their interest in joining a TWIX system.
400 users have so far been nominated for access to TWIX by various law enforcement agencies in Southern Africa, with that number set to increase in 2019 and 2020

Cynthia Ratsimbazafy, TWIX Project Manager

The TWIX for Southern Africa website can enable users to:

- Extract and analyse seizure information + trade trends
- Find rescue centres to re-home live specimens
- Access training materials and wildlife ID guides
- Consult relevant laws and regulations
- Find links to other websites related to wildlife trade
- Access archived messages from the mailing list
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