TWIX

Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange

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

TWIX AND ITS IMPACT

Confiscated ivory products. Photo: WWF / Mike Goldwater

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.

TWIX:
WORKING ON WILDLIFE TRADE

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

~70,000 seizure records
concerning wildlife enforcement registered within EU-TWIX

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

SADC-TWIX

The mandate for the establishment of a SADC-TWIX system 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.

SADC-TWIX was developed based on experience drawn from the highly successful EU-TWIX platform that has been operational since 2005 and connects over 1,200 enforcement and management officials dealing with CITES issues in close to 40 European countries (as of September 2019). The EU-TWIX database maintains information on close to 70,000 wildlife seizures.

THE TWIX PLATFORM

SADC-TWIX 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.

CONNECTING ENFORCEMENT ACROSS SOUTHERN AFRICA

data extraction
wildlife seizure database in development

monitoring and analysis
analyse trade trends and flows as they develop

enforcement collaboration
facilitates co-operation on wildlife crimes cases

REPLICATING TWIX FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

SADC-TWIX 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 SADC-TWIX.

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 SADC-TWIX in the near future.

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

INTERNATIONAL SCOPE

Unidentified pangolin scales seized in Malaysia

Dried abalone at a confiscation facility in Western Cape. Photo: Nicola Okes / TRAFFIC

SUPPORTING LAW ENFORCEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATION

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 SADC-TWIX 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
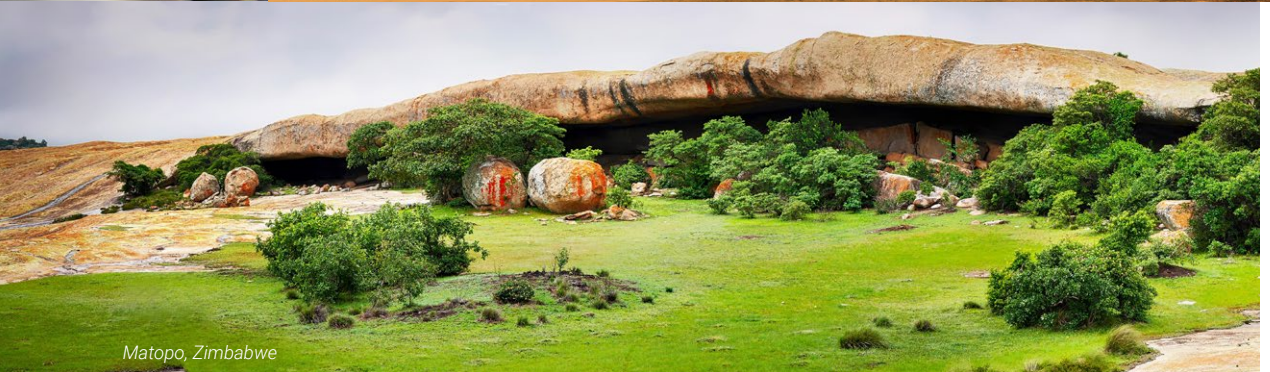
EXPANDING OUR REACH

The process of setting up a SADC-TWIX has been underway since February 2018. The SADC-TWIX mailing list has been operational since the 21st of May 2019 and the website was launched in January 2020. Close to 450 law enforcement officials from 12 Member States of SADC (Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe) have been nominated as TWIX Users, including officials from Customs, Police, Wildlife and CITES Management Authorities, Judiciary, National Security Services, Financial Intelligence Agencies, Forestry, and Fisheries Agencies.

May 2019–February 2020: 260 messages were exchanged on the SADC-TWIX mailing list.
Although SADC-TWIX has been operational for only a short time, it has already facilitated enforcement actions in the SADC region—for example, collaborative investigations by Customs agencies in Mauritius and Madagascar have been triggered by information exchanged on SADC-TWIX. Another investigation is underway between Namibian and Zambian Authorities and a third one between Zimbabwean and Mozambican authorities.

Common Hippopotamus Hippopotamus amphibius

Matopo, Zimbabwe

The SADC-TWIX website can enable users to:

✓ Extract and analyse seizure information, including the ability to create charts online and generate maps with trading routes
✓ 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

" 480 users have so far been nominated for access to SADC-TWIX by various law enforcement agencies in Southern Africa, with that number set to increase in the near future

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