

Africa-China wildlife trade¹ and the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC)

A briefing paper by

TRAFFIC²

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, works to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature

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Introduction

China is Africa's largest trading partner, with overall trade values estimated to be more than 1 trillion Chinese Yuan (USD 160 billion) per annum. The rising influence of China within the African continent creates multiple opportunities for growth in trade between key African countries and China, including within the wildlife trade sector—the trade of wild fauna and flora products, including timber and fisheries.

With this come risks and opportunities. Sustainable utilization of Africa's wildlife resources can lead to positive development and growth for trading partners, while unsustainable wildlife trade depletes Africa of its natural wealth, and illegal trade leads to a growth in organized criminal activities. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon noted in April 2012, illicit trade flows undermine State sovereignty and represent threats to peace and security.

This week's 5th Ministerial Conference of FOCAC provides an opportunity for countries to transform the wildlife trade dynamics from Africa to China, leading to a significant reduction in illegal trade and supporting legal and sustainable trade in Africa's wild plants and animals. These positive outcomes can be achieved through enhancing governance along the entire trade chain for wildlife commodities, from source to end-user, and through providing targeted financial support from China to African nations.

Wildlife Trade

In terms of overall wildlife trade, the major sub-Saharan African nations trading with China are Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa and Tanzania. For fisheries commodities, Mauritius, Namibia, the Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania are amongst the leading exporters from Africa to China. Furthermore, Ethiopia has significant exports of medicinal & aromatic plants to China.

Within Africa, China's most significant growth in overall commodity trade links has been via partnerships with various countries. China has also increased its investment in Africa in a number of sectors, including mining, manufacturing, forestry and fisheries. Following each of the four FOCAC Africa-China Ministerial conferences, significant financial investment has been pledged to support agriculture and rural development in Africa, including investments in development of forestry and fisheries.

Although the rapid growth in Chinese investment and aid in Africa has largely been welcomed, there have been some concerns including unregulated trade in natural resources. This has negative impacts on local environments and even on human communities in certain African countries, where governance and law enforcement are not effective in controlling extractive activities, including those involving timber, fisheries and other species of wild fauna and flora.

1. "Wildlife trade" is here considered to be the offer, sale, or exchange of any animal or plant resource originating from the wild, whether by legal or illegal means. The trade covers a diverse range of goods, ranging from timber, medicinal, fish and other animal or plant food products, tourist curios and skins, also live animals and plants.

2. Founded in 1976, TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, is a non-governmental organization who works to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature.

Recommendations

TRAFFIC urges FOCAC to follow similar commitments to those made at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Beijing in 2011, which resulted in the Beijing Forestry Declaration being passed. Specific clauses in the APEC statement highlight addressing concerns with illegal logging and associated trade and encouraging conservation, sustainable use and rehabilitation of forest resources. Standards, like the timber legality framework developed through TRAFFIC's collaboration with WWF on the Global Forest & Trade Network (GFTN) and the FairWild Standard for harvesting of wild plants, already exist to assist with these processes, as do international Conventions such as CITES and the CBD.³

Awareness-raising is needed to ensure the private sector engaged in wildlife trade industries or businesses is kept informed of any relevant new legislation or administrative requirements. Communication materials aimed at shipping companies and agents should be developed to encourage compliance with legal, sustainable, verifiable requirements for transport of timber and other natural resources from Africa to China.

In addition to supporting the efforts of African countries to eradicating the poaching and trade in endangered species such as elephants and rhinos, hunted to meet demand for their parts which predominantly comes from Asian countries, TRAFFIC urges China to continue to enhance its law enforcement controls on these products. In tandem with increased law enforcement effectiveness, the development and implementation of well researched public outreach campaigns, using targeted strategies to influence consumer behaviour, will be necessary to reduce demand for products of illegal origin.

Finally, TRAFFIC encourages China to provide targeted financial support to initiatives that promote the aforementioned actions, and to train and support African professionals to achieve these goals.

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Illegal Wildlife Trade

Poorly regulated trade brings with it the problem of illegal harvest and trade in wildlife resources. In Africa, this is largely due to inadequate law enforcement capacity and training; inadequate laws and/or policies; insufficient resource management capacity; a lack of efficient co-operation at national and sub-regional levels between agencies (particularly enforcement and Customs officers); and lack of collaboration between exporting, transit countries and their counterparts in China. These, in turn, lead to tax revenue losses for all countries trading, and the risk of irreversible depletion and loss of Africa's biodiversity. Furthermore, there is also strong evidence of the growing involvement of organized criminal networks in the illegal trade, some involving Chinese nationals.

Illicit trade in wildlife is often masked as part of legitimate exports of other natural resources such as timber, the main commodity in trade from Africa to China. Several recorded seizures of ivory, rhino horn, abalone, sharks, sea cucumbers and pangolins - at various points along the trade chain - have involved these products disguised within timber cargo shipments to China. Less than 2% of cargo traffic is inspected before leaving Africa, which enables criminals to conceal the true origin, ownership and content of container cargo.

International Co-operation

There are many opportunities for China and African nations to co-operate on the enhanced management and exploitation of wildlife resources in Africa, particularly through regional agreements and forums such as FOCAC. FOCAC is a valuable platform through which to enhance international co-operation to address the illegal and unsustainable harvesting and trade in timber, fish, medicinal and aromatic plants and other wild fauna and flora products, such as ivory and rhino horn. High level political commitment is needed so that critical forums such as FOCAC can play an instrumental role to ensure that the wildlife resource trade chains from Africa to China do not involve illegal logging, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and other destructive activities at source.

Sustainable trade

Specific support to encourage sustainable trade should become a key element of China's aid policy in Africa. For example, TRAFFIC urges China to enhance its international commitments towards wildlife protection by addressing wildlife trafficking in Africa through on-the-ground public awareness efforts with Chinese nationals based in African countries. Furthermore, China should consider entering into joint efforts with the governments concerned to support law enforcement and strengthen regulatory controls over wildlife trade and assist with capacity building to enforce those controls.

TRAFFIC believes it is essential that engagement involves all the players along the wildlife trade chain, including the private sector, to ensure their operations fully consider China's international commitments to CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and are in compliance with environmental and social laws and regulations in China and Africa. Companies, factories, processing plants, shipping companies, timber importing companies and other stakeholders must be transparent and held accountable to, and responsible for, operating in a legal, sustainable and verifiable manner.

3. CITES: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity.

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