

TIME FOR ACTION, NOT WORDS OR HAND-WRINKING, ON POACHING

The weekly killing of East Africa's elephants and rhinos adds up to a death toll that demands action, not more words, hand-wringing or international publicity that focuses on the authorities' helplessness to end the bloodshed, rather than actually ending it.

International media stories and interventions by prominent local and foreign dignitaries, such as Hilary Clinton, help build a global platform of public opinion on which conservation campaigns can be founded, but many of the answers to poaching require action and attitude changes from within Kenya.



Poaching is a global issue, albeit complicated by national boundaries, murky middlemen and illegal international trade, but there is still a need to think in national terms, explore what is hindering our efforts to curb this escalation and devise ways of reversing the situation.

Internally, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is the primary agency tasked with combating poaching in the country. But this should not be misconstrued to mean that it is the only agency. An effective anti-poaching effort requires alliances. These alliances are not currently coalescing because:

1. KWS has a defensive attitude when it comes to dealing with the Private Sector/Civil Society in terms of developing partnerships, particularly in the context of poaching. One consequence of the defensive attitude is that information on poaching is held back within KWS. Yet open shared information indicating hot spots, trends, targeted species, etc. does not bring criticism. Rather it cements anti poaching alliances and partnerships. Good, open and transparent information is therefore a must.
2. For a long time, there has been no formalized enforcement agency collaborating with KWS as an equal partner such as the Police, the Army, Immigration and Customs, yet much of the East Tsavo poaching is due to illegal immigrants for example. However, KWS should be applauded for launching an inter-security agencies anti-poaching unit in August this year.
3. KWS and other institutions such as Kenya Forest Service (KFS) need to avoid agency conflict and rivalry. This is particularly important when they are neighbours in protected areas.
4. KWS's ability to discuss and partner with local communities in anti-poaching efforts is inadequate and needs to be revitalized.

In addition, corruption-free mechanisms at KWS need to be put in place to address corruption risks and threats in poaching. Additionally, the Intelligence Unit and security within KWS should be enhanced including vetting and seconding the head of security from an outside agency.

Externally, Kenya is a conduit nation for the movement of ivory and rhino horn from such trophies captured elsewhere. Kenya Airways may not be knowingly involved, but its flight networks make it a target for such consignments to be shipped to Thailand and China from many Africa airports. Mombasa Port has become recognised as a target for consigning such contraband. Much of the movement to the Port will be by road transport across the borders with Uganda and Tanzania. Therefore there is a strong and urgent need to apply better standards and regular application of procedures for inspecting cargo at points of exits. In particular, modern techniques should be applied to finding these illegal trophies hidden in containers.

As the recent Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species Conference of parties 16 (CITES CoP16) recognised, China is the primary importer of illegal ivory. This will continue as long as the prices remain high (eg 1/2 kg ivory fetches USD1000). China and Thailand are not the only culprits in the demand for illegal ivory. Some African states, e.g Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), have strong illegal domestic markets, which are allowed to operate without hindrance from their Governments.

China must be encouraged to become partners in African conservation (after all China is very zealous and strict in protecting its own elephants). At the Presidential level, Kenya (plus other African states) and China should work on eliminating the demand for illegal ivory and rhino horn. Education materials in Chinese should also be produced for the Chinese nationals working in Kenya. Many of them may not be aware of ivory as an illegal trade. Lastly, to address the illegal domestic markets in Africa, an effort should be

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Price that half a kilogramme of ivory is sold in the illegal market and especially in China.

made to put these on the African Union (AU) Agenda and to get curative action. The AU should name and shame.

These internal and external issues as seen by the Kenya Wildlife Conservation Forum – a forum that facilitates discussions on conservation and wise use of wildlife in Kenya, must form the basis for taking action on what is needed to address the current and future poaching threat in Kenya.

In addition, there has to be explicit recognition that wildlife management is a legitimate form of land use on Community and Private land. This is important when one remembers that 60% of Kenya's wildlife occurs outside of protected areas. The Wildlife (Conservation and Management) Bill 2013 recently published and presented to Parliament provides an opportunity to bring about some changes that will encourage this form of use and the ability for such land users and owners to take responsibility for management, including assisting with curbing poaching, and derive real income and share benefits when adjacent to protected areas. In addition, the Bill brings into play much stiffer penalties for poaching, including minimum penalties. There is therefore a strong need to have the Bill formally approved by Parliament as soon as possible. In addition poaching should be recognized as an economic crime and prosecuted accordingly, especially as it undermines the achievement of Vision 2030.

The tools to stop the killing are all there. What is needed is a willingness to get them out of the box, be pro-active and single-mindedly and openly use them. ●

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