



Engaging Communities in Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade:

# Lessons from Southeast Asia



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## Background

Poaching and associated illegal wildlife trade (IWT) in Southeast Asia and the Lower Mekong Region in particular is devastating populations of iconic wildlife species such as tigers and pangolins, and causing severe declines of other wild cats and primates, bears, reptiles, sharks and rays, as well as a host of lesser known commercially valuable plants and tree species.

The emphasis in most policy debates and conservation spending, both globally and in this region, strengthening “top-down” law enforcement, and on changing consumer behaviour to reduce demand for illegal wildlife species. These responses often inadequately consider the significant impacts of IWT on Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) who live alongside the threatened wildlife, and their combating it.

Building on previous experiences in Africa, the IUCN CEESP/SSC Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (IUCN SULi), IUCN Viet Nam, the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), TRAFFIC – the wildlife trade monitoring network, and the ICCA Consortium (Indigenous Peoples and

Community Conserved Territories and Areas Consortium) held a workshop for Southeast Asia with a focus on the Lower Mekong Region named *Beyond Enforcement: Involving Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade* in Hanoi, Viet Nam, on November 15–16, 2016. The workshop was supported by the German “Polifund” initiative, implemented by GIZ on behalf of BMZ and BMUB; by USAID through the Wildlife Trafficking, Response, Assessment, and Priority Setting (Wildlife TRAPS) Project; and by the Austrian Ministry of the Environment through its broader support to the Beyond Enforcement initiative.



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Representatives of NGOs, government agencies and IPLCs presented their experiences and the lessons they had learned on effective approaches to combating IWT through community engagement. The workshop statement summarises the key messages, insights and views emerging from presentations and discussion at this workshop. This workshop focused on the Lower Mekong Region but drew on case studies from across South and Southeast Asia.

## 1. IWT in Southeast Asia needs to be urgently addressed, but it is difficult

- a. Southeast Asia is usually viewed as a demand region for IWT, but it is in fact a major source region, in which high levels of poaching for IWT (particularly timber; elephants; rhinos; primates; bears; cats; turtles, tortoises, and other reptiles; pangolins; birds; and sharks, rays and other fish) have acute and widespread conservation and local community impacts. Snaring is highly destructive, indiscriminate, and widespread in the region.
- b. This region has high levels of rural poverty and inequality and is experiencing rapid and intensifying economic development and escalating movement of people and goods. These are major risk factors for IWT.
- c. Economic development in the region is characterised by creation of local economic or special economic zones. While these can bring local jobs, they can also inadvertently facilitate IWT.
- d. There is increasing, and increasingly secret, internet and mobile phone-based trade, sometimes in response to increased enforcement efforts and/or market dynamics. This brings a new set of consumers into IWT.

- e. Enforcement of wildlife laws is generally very weak, and sometimes non-existent. While some efforts to tackle IWT have been made by some countries over recent years, there remain large, open, effectively unregulated marketplaces for illegally sourced wildlife (particularly in border areas) and there is low enforcement capacity and conservation awareness. In some countries, core conservation functions are essentially carried out by NGOs, as State presence and/or capacity is entirely lacking in wildlife areas.
- f. In general, community land/resource tenure and customary rights, laws and practices of IPLCs are often not legally recognised and may be actively undermined by State interventions, including government concessions, conservation laws, and protected areas.
- g. In Southeast Asia there is often a major overlap between hunting of species for local use and trade of wildlife into national and international markets, in part due to widespread use of indiscriminate snares. IPLC members may be involved in all these forms. For example, village hunters may go hunting primarily to meet family needs, but may also take additional species and/or sell their catch to visiting traders when there is a demand.
- h. In recent years there has been an increase in poaching for IWT by “outsiders” (i.e. non-community members), including the military.
- i. Hunting bans are widely imposed in Southeast Asia, but are frequently ignored in practice (both by IPLCs and enforcement authorities). Where they are enforced, they may have negative impacts on community livelihoods and their motivation to contribute to conservation.
- j. Hidden drivers of IPLC involvement in IWT can include servicing debt to money lenders (debt bondage) and generating cash to pay for needs like medical bills.
- k. Heavy forest cover in the region, coupled with depletion of conspicuous species, means options to generate incentives for species conservation from tourism based on viewing wildlife are very restricted.



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## CASE STUDY 1

### Can harsh enforcement worsen poaching and IWT, while harming poor people?

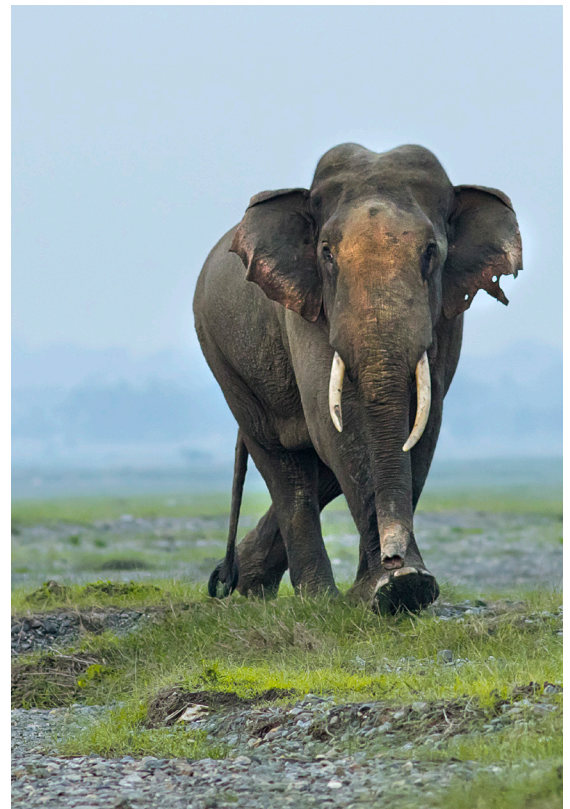
Sharon Koh Pei Hue (WWF Malaysia) highlighted the impacts of IWT enforcement on IPLCs in Sabah, Malaysia and the knock-on impacts on their willingness to support conservation, on one hand, and poach, on the other. WWF Malaysia has found that around 85% of hunting is for subsistence, with around 15% for trade. Most subsistence hunting is from protected areas and is technically illegal. However, people's reliance on wildlife seems to be increasing, which may be because these communities are getting poorer, with loss of land and livelihood options. Enforcement against hunting has been stepped up in recent years but is applied indiscriminately: there is little attempt to distinguish between subsistence and commercial hunting. IPLCs are soft targets: most people arrested are IPLCs rather than the more powerful traders who capture most of the profits. Financial penalties mean IPLCs have to find funds to pay, which may lead to them selling land. Imprisonment can mean a catastrophic loss of income for families. Stress and resentment leads to IPLCs becoming aggressive, and at times even aiding poachers. Meanwhile, many rangers have become demotivated because they feel hated by communities. This approach creates barriers to building constructive relationships with IPLCs and appears very unlikely to succeed in the long term. Sharon called for the “top down” approach needs to be balanced by a “bottom up” approach, which could include supporting land tenure rights and traditional rights to small scale hunting as part of the solution.

*Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of WWF Malaysia.*

- I. The impacts of IWT on communities are varied and serious, and can include:
  - (i) Decreased availability of species for subsistence and cultural use, and corresponding loss of traditional knowledge and management practices;
  - (ii) Decreased availability of species important for local income generation;
  - (iii) Increased levels of human-wildlife conflict, resulting from decreased levels of predators, with corresponding increases in species that damage crops (such as wild pigs);
  - (iv) Increased habitat degradation due to burning practices associated with IWT, with knock-on impacts e.g. soil fertility;
  - (v) Social breakdown, as behaviour changes from communally-minded (where everything is shared) to individually-minded (where individual benefit maximisation becomes the prerogative). This shift is likely to take place as a community becomes more integrated into the market economy;
  - (vi) Decreased local security as a result of influx of arms;
  - (vii) Social and health problems resulting from associated trade in and use of narcotics.

## 2. Effective enforcement is critical – but frequently inadequate or poorly targeted

- a. There is in many countries in the region little State field-level “ranger” capacity, with inadequate training and no performance incentives. Cultural and political factors mean there is often no support from higher levels for rangers to engage with local people.
- b. Even where there are IWT interventions based on strong community engagement, this can be undermined by lack of effective and timely State enforcement to protect IPLC rights/stewardship and stop poaching, particularly by outsiders.
- c. Yet in those countries and contexts where enforcement is strong, IPLCs potentially suffer the most despite generally receiving the lowest level of benefits from their involvement in the trade, they are a “soft target” for law enforcement against IWT and are often targeted while more powerful players are untouched and continue to remove much higher value wild products (including timber) without prosecution. Fines may result in scarce land or other assets being sold, imprisonment can deprive an entire family of the primary income earner – so penalisation can plunge poor people into a downward spiral of increasing poverty and thus reliance on returns from IWT.
- d. Observing corrupt officials engaging in IWT and seeing kingpins being overlooked while local community members are targeted by law enforcement can drive resentment and anger and undermine trust. This makes collaborative conservation approaches impossible and fuels more IWT and of higher value species.
- e. Strengthening State enforcement capacity and incentives to tackle IWT, in a way that effectively tackles syndicates, kingpins and corrupt officials, is therefore a critical priority in the region to underpin community efforts against IWT.



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### 3. Enforcement is far more effective where communities are motivated and active partners

- a. Effective State-level enforcement against poaching for IWT will be enhanced by cooperative relationships with motivated IPLCs. These can involve, for example, IPLCs being wildlife guardians or rangers, participating in joint enforcement with State agencies, providing intelligence and information to authorities, carrying out field monitoring of illegal activities or of resources.
- b. This raises the question of what interventions and approaches are likely to support and motivate strong IPLC engagement to combat poaching. In many cases IPLCs are distrustful and resentful of conservation authorities (due to the legacy of dispossession of ancestral lands for protected areas or loss of rights to wildlife) and have little incentive to protect wildlife.
- c. IWT interventions are often driven by a “crisis” mindset, but it is critical to consider and build in to project design methods to sustain impacts over the long term and after project intervention periods.
- d. Wildlife steward/guardian/ranger programs based on paying local people to do these jobs is a common approach taken to promote community involvement in combating poaching. However, these interventions may not be sustainable in the long term, as they rely on ongoing external financial inputs and may not be culturally and socially embedded.
- e. Interventions should recognise and build on the traditional knowledge, traditional governance systems, and traditional resource management practices of communities, while acknowledging that communities are undergoing social and cultural change and that some traditional activities may have become unsustainable.
- f. Hunting wildlife (as well as fishing and use of plants) is often traditional and deeply culturally and socially embedded, and there are often conflicts between customary practice and conservation laws. Restrictions on customary use of wild animals and plants, if enforced, may be perceived as illegitimate, and can cause anger and resentment and drive some people to support IWT.
- g. It is important for interventions to identify who exactly at local level is engaged in IWT, and effectively change their behaviour.

#### CASE STUDY 2

#### How can increasing community benefits, incentives and stewardship stop poaching for IWT?

Om Sophana (Mlup Baitong, Cambodia) presented the results of a community-based ecotourism (CBET) project. The project area is located inside Kirirom National Park, which is part of an elephant corridor that connects Aural Wildlife Sanctuary to the Cardamom Mountains.

Before the project, villagers were heavily dependent on forest resource extraction, including wildlife hunting, timber cutting and non-timber forest product (NTFP) harvesting. Uncontrolled extraction had led to severe forest loss and degradation. In 2002, Mlup Baitong established a CBET project (including homestays, camping, waterfalls, wildlife viewing) with a view to enabling communities to sustain and improve their livelihoods while better managing and conserving wildlife.

The project has provided training, helped developed local management institutions, and built infrastructure. It now generates income for community members that is directly linked to the state of the forest, in order to provide incentives for conservation and promote a sense of ownership and pride. It now benefits around 900 households in nine villages. Poaching has declined significantly (and almost stopped), as has illegal logging. Notably, the project is now entirely locally owned, with Mlup Baitong phasing out support several years ago.





- h. Lack of knowledge among community members about the larger conservation context and threats to biodiversity may contribute to local poaching for IWT; increasing their knowledge may help change poaching behaviour.
  - i. People's motivations for combating IWT can be financial and non-financial, tangible and intangible. Tangible incentives can be critical to motivate conservation action, as meeting livelihood needs will typically come first for people, particularly those living in poverty. Wildlife products have high value and the significance of financial incentives for poaching for IWT need to be recognized and countered.
  - j. Benefits gained by community members need to be directly contingent on conservation effectiveness in order for these benefits to reliably enhance conservation. Benefits can provide incentives for conservation (e.g. nature-based tourism, payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes, wildlife use under sound governance conditions) or can provide alternative sources of income/protein that reduce the incentives for poaching.
  - k. The dense forest habitat in much of the region limits the potential for using wildlife based tourism as an approach to create direct incentives to conserve wild species.
- l. Lack of legal recognition of customary tenure and rights, or the overriding of these by State land allocations, means development of a stewardship ethic and sustainable resource management is often lacking. Recognition of community stewardship rights, in particular land tenure, may be a critical underpinning for conservation action, although alone often not enough to motivate conservation action.
  - m. Identifying livelihood options that generate enough income to compete with the illicit income from IWT can be challenging, particularly where those involved don't have skills/capacity to pursue other livelihood options.
  - n. Use and trade of wild species has major livelihood importance in the region, and where well managed and legal can provide incentives to conserve landscapes and species, including species other than the ones traded. Making links between communities and the market, enabling value-adding, enhancing trade access to new technology and ideas in order to increase local benefits from use and trade of wildlife are big challenges. However, benefits from use may be inadequate to motivate conservation where recognition of secure community land tenure is lacking.
  - o. However, the forms of wildlife use or other alternative livelihoods supported should be culturally appropriate, chosen by communities, provide broader conservation benefits where possible, and support traditional practices and governance. Interventions should be rooted in a deep understanding of the local context – while a wide range of case studies exists to share and learn from, there is no “replicable model” given the diversity of any given situation.

- p. Interventions need to build in consideration of equitable and transparent benefit-sharing within the community, fully including women; sound compliance mechanisms (which can include social stigma); and clear accountability and financial governance mechanisms. Channelling benefits to women rather than men has been effective in supporting long-term success of interventions in a number of cases.
- q. Local livelihood innovations (community forestry, ecotourism, wildlife enterprises) may be limited because subject to multiple levels of government discretion and cooperation.
- r. Best practices e.g. FairWild Standard and other third party certification and compliance mechanisms can help foster sustainability and promote compliance in use of wildlife.
- s. In assessing whether a livelihood intervention will benefit conservation, those planning the intervention need to assess not just a potential decrease in illegal harvesting, but any land use and ecological impacts of suggested alternatives. For instance, where intensified cultivation is proposed the impacts of clearing forest need to be assessed.

## 4. Solutions can't be imposed on IPLCs from outside

- a. Interventions against IWT are likely to be more sustainable when planned and led by IPLCs themselves, or with IPLCs integrally involved in design and decision-making
- b. Establishing trust is a vital first step, and can take a long time. Building one-on-one personal relationships (rather than having a changing series of external consultants) is important.
- c. Interventions will be more effective when they respond to self-determined IPLC priorities, needs and values in a meaningful way rather than imposing external values or conceptions of community needs. This will require enabling IPLCs to participate in relevant meetings at various levels and articulate and present their views and priorities.

### CASE STUDY 3

#### Community engagement and better enforcement: two sides of the same coin?

Chavalit Vidhthayanon (Seub Nakhasathien Foundation, Thailand) discussed community forestry projects in the country's Western Forest Complex, a natural World Heritage Site home to about 2,000 people who sporadically poach for subsistence and local/international trade. The foundation works particularly with the Mae Jun community of Um Phang Wildlife Sanctuary (about 40 villages, mainly Karen). Its work has focused on supporting co-management of community forests and rivers, supporting income streams that do not rely on unsustainable harvest, and making enforcement more effective. Livelihood options include sustainable harvesting of NTFPs (such as dyes for textiles) and value-adding for commercial markets, and eco-tourism.

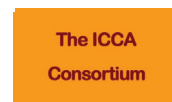
Enforcement efforts have focused on capacity building for local patrol officers. The Foundation's work has led to recovery of forest areas and better management of rivers, including fish sanctuaries. Their research indicates that poaching has been reduced, with the number of tigers and their prey recovering.

The full workshop report is available at:

[https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/be\\_hanoi\\_communique.pdf](https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/be_hanoi_communique.pdf)

The workshop presentations are available at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B2tS2L57A9YINVJWTGFEWkxLbXM>



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