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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Counting the Costs of Wildlife Crime

In an important step in the fight against wildlife crime, the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) and Conservation Strategy Fund (CSF) recently partnered on a project to better understand the current state of knowledge about the illegal wildlife trade (IWT), and the economics of IWT in southern Africa. This critical work was supported by USAID/Southern Africa through its VukaNow Activity.

IWT is the world's fourth largest illegal transnational activity, generating between USD \$7 and \$23 billion every year, and poses a major threat to the iconic wildlife species of southern Africa. Wildlife crime undermines the economic prosperity of countries and communities in the region, deteriorating their natural capital, social stability and cohesion, and threatening sustainable economic development, including the erosion of benefits derived from legal nature-based enterprises like tourism.

Since 2014, Namibia has seen a surge in wildlife poaching as a result of increasing international demand and depleting wildlife populations in other areas of the world. This has led to the loss of high-value species, such as elephants, rhinos, and pangolins, and concern about ecosystem impacts and associated economic losses. As a response to this surge in wildlife crime, a diverse range of public and private actors have ramped up their efforts to curb IWT, nationally and across borders. "These efforts have been relatively successful, slowing down the rate of poaching of rhinos and elephants, and increasing the number of arrests for activities related to these types of crimes. However, these investments are being made with little information on the costs of IWT and the benefits being generated by curbing it," said Angus Middleton, Executive Director at NNF.

It was with this in mind that NNF and CSF piloted and completed a cost benefit analysis (CBA) tool in May 2021, to support combating IWT in Namibia, while considering the new challenges raised by the sudden drop in tourism and increasing poaching risks in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

This type of economic information is important to justify the investments being made, and ensure that the benefits generated are greater than the costs and that economically viable solutions are being implemented. Although there is significant discussion on the negative impact of poaching on tourism and legal hunting, there is only a very limited number of studies quantifying the costs associated with these impacts in southern Africa. Integrated data and information on expenditure to fight IWT from different sources is also rarely compiled at national or regional level.

Juliette Perche, Environmental Economist at NNF explains: “The results of this economic study show that considerable investments are being made towards curbing IWT. The economic cost of curbing IWT was conservatively estimated at about N\$2 billion over ten years, with average yearly costs of about N\$250 million across government, private sector, and communal conservancies.”

The benefits of curbing IWT are significant and critical to the Namibian economy. Over the next ten years, the net benefits generated from protecting rhinos and elephants - including all tourism businesses benefiting from the presence of wildlife species - could amount to N\$18 billion for the Namibian economy, assuming the current situation remains stable.

Ms. Perche continued: “If investments in wildlife protection and fighting wildlife crime were to stop, Namibia could expect economic losses of about N\$5.4 billion over ten years. On the other hand, if poaching was curbed significantly, economic benefits could increase by more than N\$3.7 billion over ten years.”

According to Tania Briceno, an economist at CSF: “The CBA shows that it makes economic sense to invest in curbing illegal wildlife trade. Even though this study included primarily local financial benefits associated with protecting rhino and elephant populations, the results were very clear – benefits greatly outweigh costs.”

In the context of stringent government budget constraints and pressures, it is important to ensure that IWT-curbing initiatives can be sufficiently funded and that there is cooperation among actors to reap the collective benefits of a healthy wildlife population. It also appears essential to find other sources of financing to build resilience into funding sources.

The tool created in this project can forecast economic impacts based on different poaching rates, wildlife population size, tax rates, and prices. Through this project, NNF and CSF hope to raise awareness on the value of fighting IWT, and on the use of economics to fight IWT for better decision-making.

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About

The **Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF)** is a registered non-governmental organisation founded in 1987. It is a charitable and funding institution with an independent board of trustees. The foundation initiates, supports and promotes activities that conserve the environment, protect biodiversity and foster the sustainable and ethical use of natural resources. www.nnf.org.na

The **Conservation Strategy Fund Foundation (CSF)** is an international institution with 20 years of experience promoting the use of economic approaches for more robust and effective development policies and conservation interventions. Working primarily in developing countries, CSF strives to create enduring incentives for conservation by using economics to understand the tradeoffs of development decisions and the benefits of sustaining natural ecosystems. <https://www.conservation-strategy.org/>

USAID's VukaNow Activity ("VukaNow") is a multi-faceted, five-year regional activity, operating in Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, with the goal of significantly reducing wildlife crime in southern Africa. The Activity started in March 2018 and will end in March 2023. It currently complements four USAID-funded combating wildlife crime (CWC) landscape projects in three Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) namely the Great Limpopo (GLTFCA), Kavango-Zambezi (KAZA), and Malawi-Zambia TFCAs, and collaborates with landscape partners and stakeholders, including the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Secretariat, governments, and the private sector.

VukaNow's role is to catalyze learning and share information and best practices to enhance collaborative efforts to combat wildlife crime in southern Africa. VukaNow also supports novel and innovative approaches to combating wildlife crime, particularly through the use of purpose-built technology and wildlife forensics and oversees a robust grant facility to accelerate specific targeted interventions to address wildlife crime, including community engagement.

To access the full cost benefit analysis (CBA), please visit www.nnf.org.na, or contact Juliette Perche directly for more details related to the current state of knowledge of IWT and the economics of IWT in southern Africa dandreas@nnf.org.na