



## Illegal wildlife trade must be punished

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01 July 2020 | [Crime](#)



TRACING THE MONEY: Legislative changes are necessary to increase the applicability of anti-money-laundering laws to the illegal wildlife trade. Photo: FILE

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In its first global report on the illegal wildlife trade, the Financial Action Task Force (FAFT) has described it as a global threat with links to other organised crimes such as slavery, drug trafficking and the arms trade.

The report expressed concern over the lack of focus on the financial aspects of wildlife crime and suggested that all member governments should apply money-laundering laws.

The findings of the study are based on inputs from countries in 50 jurisdictions, including Namibia, which is a member of the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG) jurisdiction.

A total of 22 of the 45 respondent countries indicated that they considered themselves as a source for wildlife crime, 18 as transit countries and 14 as destination countries.

All but nine said they were impacted by the risks of financial flows linked to the trade.

Billions a year

The illegal trade is estimated to generate revenues of up to US\$23 billion (N\$396.8 billion) a year and criminals frequently misuse the legitimate wildlife trade and other import-export businesses as a front to move and hide illegal proceeds from wildlife crimes.

The report said funds are laundered through cash deposits, under the guise of loans or payments, e-banking platforms, licensed money value transfer systems, and third-party wire transfers via banks.

On the extravagant mark-ups of the illegal wildlife trade, the report said the price of a rhino horn can reach US\$65 000 (N\$1.1 million) per kilogram, but has also been known to be as low as US\$9 000 (N\$155 250) per kilogram.

Criminals trafficked approximately 4 500 African rhino horns between 2016 and 2017, generating between US\$79 million (N\$1.36 billion) and US\$292 million (N\$5 billion).

The price paid to elephant poachers can be US\$200 (N\$3 450) or less.

Namibian investigation

The report specifically mentioned a study carried out by Namibia's Financial Intelligence Unit in 2017 on the illicit finance risks arising from domestic rhino and elephant poaching.

It said this study considered the domestic wildlife resources, the number of nationals known to be involved in domestic or regional wildlife crimes, domestic seizures, and suspicious transaction reports relating to illegal wildlife trade.

It further noted the vulnerabilities of domestic money value transfer services and cash couriers, and found that proceeds may also be laundered through payments made under export contracts to supply goods to Namibia.

It asked all governments to report back within 12 months on the action they have taken.