

No boundaries

Prosecutors, magistrates and judges meet to combat wildlife crime



Twenty two participants attended a regional judiciary and prosecutor workshop in Windhoek, Namibia, last week as part of the USAID-funded Combatting Wildlife Crime Project in north western Namibia and the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation area: KAZA.

The purpose of the workshop was to assist with improving investigations, prosecutions and case management against wildlife trade criminals. It aimed to increase the awareness of the seriousness of transnational wildlife crime, and to unlock higher level support within the prosecutorial and judicial sectors of southern African countries.

The workshop was hosted by the KAZA Secretariat, WWF in Namibia, and TRAFFIC: a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants.



Frederick Dipotso from the KAZA Secretariat

Speakers provided an overview on wildlife crime within the KAZA region and looked at how to tackle transnational wildlife crime more successfully. All five of the KAZA countries – Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe – were represented by members of their judiciary, senior prosecutors and advocates.



The workshop was opened by Honourable Deputy Minister Bernadette Maria Jagger of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) followed by an informative presentation on protected areas in Namibia by Colgar Sikopo, the Director of Namibia's Parks and Wildlife within the MET.

Participants witnessed a practical session whereby members of the MET wildlife investigation unit and the Namibian police acted out a search and seizure scene involving the arrest of three people, and the search of a vehicle containing real contraband hidden in various locations. The practical was very well-received and was one of the first times that many of the participants had witnessed a search and seizure operation, as well as genuine contraband.



The workshop also aimed to support the steps required to improve international cooperation in criminal matters, such as using mutual legal assistance and extradition as tools to overcome the barriers of sovereignty and the differences in their legal systems.



The US Ambassador to Namibia, Lisa Johnson, closed the workshop and emphasized the need to tackle wildlife crime at all levels, noting that wildlife crime was linked to international narcotic and arms syndicates.

For a workshop to succeed, it must resonate with the participants. Astrid Hewicke, a prosecutor in Katima Mulilo, Namibia, said that it was a success: “The highlight was watching members of NamPol conducting a search. It really brought home the reality of what these people [investigators and police] do in the field. The interactions were awesome.”

This regional workshop followed on a series on national workshops for prosecutors and magistrates in Namibia. In the near future, Zambian magistrates will be paying a field visit to Sioma Ngwezi National Park, to witness the operations of Wildlife Police, and prosecutors and magistrates in Angola will be participating in a series of wildlife crime workshops.

First, it was no boundaries for criminals. Now the police, prosecutors and judiciary are working across Africa’s borders to protect wildlife.

Partners in the Combatting Wildlife Crime Project are encouraged to submit stories.
If you need help with writing or reporting,
contact Siphwe Lutibezi: communications@wwf.na



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