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RHINO POACHING WORSENS IN AFRICA

July 24, 2021

... gory images of crudely de-horned carcasses littered in most parts of the continent continue – a threat to biodiversity.

By Peter Kayula



A tranquilised rhino is dehorned by a researcher in Zimbabwe to make the animal less attractive to poachers. Photo credit BBC, WWF

Poaching has risen sharply in the recent years across Africa, fueled by rising demand in Asia for ivory and rhino horns, coveted as traditional medicine and a status symbol and acquisition and adaptation of advanced technologies in the fight against poachers is not yielding the desired results.

The international community, prominent leaders, the civil society and experts involved in the fight against rhino poaching have also continued to raise their views on the likely consequences of a situation where more than 35, 000 elements are killed across Africa annually for their tusks amid concerns that African governments are not doing enough to stem the crisis.

The heavy rains that fall, especially across Southern Africa from November to March annually, provide cover for many poaching syndicates that take advantage of full-moon nights to invade game areas as they navigate the clogged waterways.

On another hand, a demand for meat from wild terrestrial or semi-terrestrial animals, termed "bush meat", a significant source of animal protein and a crucial component of food security and livelihoods in rural areas in many African countries, has also heightened.

In the Congo Basin, many communities derive tangible benefits from bush meat as a major source of livelihood and an estimated consumption across the basin range between one million tonnes and five million tonnes with annual harvest rates estimation ranging from 23 to 897 kg/km. This dimension is arguably far worse in the Gabon and the Equatorial Guinea.

A practical experience in Cameroun's capital Yaounde is alarming as an inventory done in 1995-96 of the four main markets estimated sales between 840 and 1,080 tonnes of bush meat per year, while estimate consumption in Bangui, the Central African Republic (CAR) capital, is 9,500 tonnes per year.

The trade in ivory starts mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, through the Central African Republic and South Sudan, using Ugandan as a transit point, this prompted Ugandan president Yoweri to call for a probe into the theft of ivory worth more than \$1million in November 2014. He ordered an investigation into a reported possible collusion between the country's wildlife agency and foreigners in the trafficking of ivory, according to updates from the news agency, AFP published in a local newspaper in June 2017.

Successful experience of the acquisition and adaptation of advanced technologies are limited to some countries. While it is hoped that they would change the landscape in the fight against rhino poachers, the incapacity of most countries in Africa to develop better biodiversity policies has in fact, prevented them from taking advantage of this privileged access to technology.

Uganda secured funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNPD) to procure surveillance drones that it has been a central focus will man parts of its protected areas, which are not routinely patrolled by rangers, and camera traps that will help identify poachers and intruders at porous entrances to game parks. the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) has announced, according to AFP.

The country started training a team of 28 digital forensic experts in April, eight of them from the UWA, to track online, illicit trade of wildlife and suspect communications. Sadly, enough, a 2020 report on illicit financial flows in Africa revealed that Uganda loses between \$7 billion and \$23 billion per year because of illegal wildlife trade. Tourism is Uganda's biggest foreign exchange earner at about \$1.6 billion annually, according to AFP.

Poaching incidents around the country went up in March last year when the country went into a total lockdown over Covid-19 although authorities are yet to tell the extent of the loss but say the incidents have since drastically reduced.

In comparison to Uganda, up to 2014, Botswana was globally considered a "safe haven" for wildlife but unfortunately rhino poaching in the country is getting far worse, according to a local journalist Oscar Nkala.

The government of President Mokgweetsi Masisi—in power since 2018—acknowledges the seriousness of the crisis explaining that at the rate at which the black rhino population is depleting, the country 's iconic species would be out by the end of the year.

"At the rate at which the black rhino population is depleting, I'm afraid our iconic species will be out by the end of 2021. There is a serious problem with poaching in this country and this must be stopped," said President Masisi, as quoted by Lifegate, a sustainable development outfit.

According to Oscar Nkala, by 2015, Botswana had imported over 100 rhinos from Zimbabwe and South Africa, mostly to Mombo, a high security sanctuary in the Moremi Game Reserve in the Okavango Delta. The facility, owned by Rhino Conservation Botswana (RCB), was chosen for its difficult terrain that can only be accessed by horse, boat or helicopter.

In a study entitled "Poaching as a security threat for Botswana and the region" published by the United States Naval Post Graduate School in September 2018, researcher, Kopano Baruti, attributed Botswana's high vulnerability to poaching to weak law enforcement, long and porous borders and the existence of ungoverned spaces in its own territory neighbouring countries.

In Zambia, a parliament Conservation Causes praised the Government's commitment towards wildlife conservation. The Zambian parliament Conservation Causes (ZPCC) vice-chairperson Anthony Kasandwe said the Government's decision to launch blueprints on wildlife demonstrated its willingness to conserve the country's wildlife, local newspaper reported.

The **Times of Zambia** article of April 22 2019, revealed that the country's Tourism and Arts Minister Charles Banda launched the 2018 National Parks and Wildlife Policy, the 2019-2023 Strategic Rhino Conservation and Management Plan and the 2019-2023 National Conservation Action Plan for Cheetah and African Wild Dog for Zambia.

"I must admit on behalf of the Parliamentary Conservation Caucus that the political will from the Government is immeasurable in Connection with conservation," Mr Kasandwe, a former Bangweulu Member of Parliament (MP) said.

He explained that protection of wild life depended on effective stakeholder collaboration, stressing that the objectives of the wildlife conservation and management initiatives would only be achieved through sustained engagements, the paper reported.

It is clear that the fight against rhino poaching in Africa may create losers and winners within individual countries, regions and between regions. Thus, tensions over the gory images of crudely de-horned carcasses should be expected to increase. Constructive responses should be responsibly planned-for in accordance with current national and regional objectives.

*Culled from July (https://panafricanvisions.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/PAV-News-Magazine-July-2021-Vol.-34.pdf)Issue of PAV (https://panafricanvisions.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/PAV-News-Magazine-July-2021-Vol.-34.pdf)Magazine

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