

Workshop on demand-side strategies
for curbing illegal ivory trade

Will Demand Reduction of Ivory Work for the Conservation of Elephant?

28-29 January 2015
Hangzhou, China

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Demand-side strategy for curbing illegal trade

This is certainly not stranger to CITES, for whatever mechanism is considered for curbing illegal trade and related activities, this is part of CITES mission.

But why is there so much interest in addressing demand reduction as a conservation mechanism?

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Leaving aside whether it will work or not, what are the advantages of a “demand reduction” approach?

- Popular with western NGOs
- Easy to explain to the public and the media
- Reduce western opposition to policies/
stigmatization of whole nations
- May win environmental awards, media plaudits
- Proven excellent mechanism for NGO fundraising

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March 1979
CITES CoP 2

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The main topic of CoP2: Vicuna (CITES Appendix I)

- Illegal trade flourishing in UK (London) and USA (NY and California)
 - Felipe Benavides, father of the vicuna, statements:
 - “60,000 vicunas left. Demand must be eliminated in market countries, otherwise vicunas will soon go extinct.”
 - “Called upon Scotland Yard and the FBI to eliminate ‘the demand for this deadly trade’.”
- “I will personally shoot dead anyone I find poaching my vicunas.”

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Three years later...

...March 1982

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March 1982, Two Major Crisis

1 – Vicunas

- In spite of some successful cases of confiscation and conviction, a few poachers shot, major public campaigns in market countries, displays in NY, LA and SF airports, for all purposes eliminating the illegal demand... poaching in the Andes continued unabated.
- Problem not solved.

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March 1982

2 – Crocodylians (All large, Nile, Saltwater, American Alligator and some Caiman species on CITES App. I; the rest on App. II)

- Illegal trade flourishing: three million (3,000,000) skins a year from Bolivia alone; (3 Ministers involved in illegal trade)
- Wide spread demand: Italy, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan
- Illegal trade appeared unstoppable.

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How were these two crisis defused and the specific species saved from extinction?

In both cases, conservationists concluded – separately but with identical results - that

1. Resources (vicunas and crocodilians) were easily accessible to local populations
2. It was not the demand fuelling illegal trade, but...
 - ... the absence of motivation for the conservation of the species by those sharing the habitat; and
 - ... the extreme poverty of small communities leading to desperate actions for their survival, even for low profit.

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But their most important conclusions were that as traditional mechanisms, including elimination of the illegal demand (Vicuna), have completely failed to reduce poaching, there was a need to involve and motivate the local communities by transferring ownership of the resources and developing mechanisms that will benefit them economically and socially, such as developing a legal supply to satisfy the demand

Two factors rendered the conservationists work easier

- NGOs were not the multinational businesses and fundraisers that they are today.
- The new disease affecting (contaminating) the conservation efforts, the Celebrities, were not yet present to gain publicity with false solutions.

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Vicunas - Target: The campesinos
Benavides' Major arguments

- *“The vicunas belong to you, you should draw the main benefits from them.”*

The outcome

- CITES CoP16, 2013: Ecuador became the 5th country of the Andes to see its vicunas population moved from I to II
- Trade is flourishing; the populations of vicunas are thriving; permanent livelihoods are created and..

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The Crocodilians

Tireless efforts by the IUCN Crocodile Specialists Group and CITES Secretariat, in conjunction with the most important traders, led to the development of several projects in Latin America, In Africa, in South East Asia.

Note: an appeal to increase demand

“Save a croc: buy a (croc) handbag”

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The outcome

From the hopeless situation of illegality existing in 1982,

now

The supply of legal crocodilian skins exceed the demand

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How do we reduce demand?
How do we achieve demand reduction?

Here are some important considerations, specific to ivory:

- Market for ivory is mature. Is it possible to ban demand once it is well-established?
(Alcohol in the USA; marijuana today)
- Is demand reduction best understood as a “cooperative” model or a “directive” model?

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More specific questions to be asked ...
and answered about this market

- What are the factors generating the increase in demand for illegal ivory products?
- Is it possible to curb the demand with the situation prevailing on supply?
- Are suggestions for achieving the reduction of demand achievable? (Funding)
- Would the global reduction of demand have a positive impact on the conservation of the African elephant (poaching)?

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But assuming the demand reduction/elimination of ivory could be achieved, would it have a positive conservation effect on the African elephant?

We are not dealing with animals
and trade.

We are dealing with people.

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Who are these people?

1. On the demand side

Highly skilled artists whose cultural and traditional knowledge has been transmitted through generations for several centuries.

History, Heritage

The collectors: private collections, museums, musicians

Is it reasonable to believe that such cultural part of China can be removed by denying access to an available source of supply?

2. On the supply side

Poor local & rural communities having to share their land and lives with a destructive animal which will continue to produce ivory

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No solution to the conservation of the African elephant will be achieved unless we take the following factors into account

1. Supply will be maintained as elephants will continue to produce ivory at the rate of 75 to 100 tons a year from natural mortality; old catches of ivory are regularly found around Africa.
2. The poverty existing in large parts of the African continent is one of the factors fuelling the illegal activities on the supply side.
3. The lack of incentive in being part of the conservation process.

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Raymond Bonner once stated

“The future of African wildlife is in the hands of Africans, and depends on their willingness to tolerate it.”

“If Africa’s wildlife is to be saved, it will not be with celebrities appeals, more firearms, anti-poaching units or ivory ban, it will require radical policies and changes in attitude.”

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In the Wall Street Journal, Arancha González, the Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, wrote

“It may not be possible to stop the wildlife trade, the worldwide demand for these animals and the products they provide is just too strong.

But... let's focus on designing a global legal framework to ensure that communities have the incentives to conserve wildlife, rather than destroy it.”

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My conclusions

The current poaching situation is not fuelled by the increase in demand but by the absence of legal supply, and was created by the ill-advised decision of CoP14.

(CITES Presentation: Increase in poaching, illegal trade...)

Let us hope that CoP17 will produce positive result on provision of a legal framework for ivory trade, otherwise, the disappearance of ivory carving will mean the death of the African elephant, as African communities will be stuck with a highly destructive animal with no value...

... in which case, there will be no one to save the elephant

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Thank you!

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Unfortunately, Botswana is in the process of proving just that!

Abstract

“While conservationists and politicians applaud the recent growth of Botswana’s elephant population, farmers and residents of northern Botswana struggle to live with elephants who destroy crops and threaten livelihoods...”

RACHEL DEMOTTS, Washington, USA & PARAKH HOON, Virginia, USA, 2012

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Celebrities Non-Sense 1

« When the buying stops, the killing can too»

Actor Jackie Chan

“Proposals from prominent Chinese citizens such as artist Yuan Xikun and basketball player Yao Ming, calling upon lawmakers to save the image of the country by ending ivory trade, have drawn overwhelming support in social media”.

Wildaid

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Celebrities Non-Sense II

Prince Williams said the following in Washington, DC, 8 December, 2014

« Some members of the private sector are already leading the way. Air New Zealand recently set an important precedent on the transport of wildlife parts by banning the carriage of all shark fins on its planes - whether or not it was legally obtained. Many other airlines followed their lead, and although this was perhaps a simpler ban to implement as all shark fins require a permit, it does demonstrate the powerful role that the private sector can play in interrupting the supply chain, if they choose to do so. »