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# THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES IN  
INDONESIA, SINGAPORE, THAILAND  
AND VIET NAM

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Illicit trade generates billions of dollars annually for transnational criminal networks. Among the most sinister and most profitable forms of illicit trade is the illegal wildlife trade. The illegal wildlife trade is more than just an ecological issue; it can have significant economic impacts by creating disruptive imbalances in ecosystems for sustainable growth, and more directly on eco-tourism markets. Wildlife crime is such an ominous challenge that its reduction is designated as a target in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Extensive poaching occurs on a commercial scale and natural resources are ravaged for short-term profits. These countries also serve as transit points and destination markets for wildlife and wildlife products that have been shipped across illicit global supply chains. In the coming years, hundreds of species in Southeast Asia are projected to go extinct. Governments must take stronger actions to tackle this form of illicit trade through concerted regional co-operation.

Long-term strategies to sensitize the public to the value of protecting natural resources and national heritage are important components of a holistic approach to combatting this form of trade. Unfortunately, the pace at which certain populations are dwindling, e.g. the pangolin, requires more urgent measures. The commitment and capacity of law enforcement in many countries is key to ensure sufficient wildlife populations for the longer-term strategies to be remain relevant.

In recent years, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam have been at the centre of the illegal wildlife trade debate concerning enforcement of wildlife crimes. Do legislative loopholes restrict effective enforcement to the protection of domestic species only? Is law enforcement co-

ordination across administrations and across borders progressing or standing-still while the march toward extinction of species continues?

Illicit trade is motivated by profit and wildlife crime is low risk and high reward. Controls can fail at multiple points in the trade chain leading to ineffective institutional responses. Corruption at maritime ports, airports and at land border crossings provide channels for the entry of a range of illicit products. Legal gaps and loopholes and un-enforceable provisions of laws permit the sale of illegal wildlife products. Traffickers operate with impunity in some public marketplaces. Proceeds of wildlife crime flow across borders and raise questions about the financial integrity of certain banks.

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## THE KEY FINDINGS

Southeast Asian countries are source, transit and destination markets for illegal wildlife trade. Traffickers do not discriminate between domestic and foreign wildlife species, which are shipped and consumed throughout the region.

Legal loopholes and gaps in implementation of laws continue to prevent effective prosecution of illegal wildlife trade. Illegal wildlife products can be licensed for export or sale through captive breeding programs or in open markets, often masquerading as legally obtained products.

International co-operation actions in the form of legal information sharing agreements, extradition treaties and global wildlife task forces have gained strength in recent years. Nevertheless, the ties between Southeast Asian countries and authorities in different, source and transit regions remain underdeveloped.

Inter-agency co-operation is recognized as a key to successful law enforcement efforts but the number of cases involving inter-agency co-operation for illegal wildlife trade investigations and prosecutions is low. Several countries have adopted 'wildlife enforcement networks' (WENs), yet few of these inter-agency frameworks are shown to be operationally active on a regular or proactive basis. Furthermore, anti-corruption authorities and financial intelligence units are included in WENs in only half of the countries studied.

Corruption risks are facilitators of wildlife trade in several of the countries studied. National border crossings are hot spots for corruption.

There is currently no effective system in place to tackle the illicit financial flows from wildlife trafficking sales. The majority of FIUs have not participated in investigations related to the laundering of proceeds of wildlife crime.



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**T**he OECD Task Force on Countering Illicit Trade stands ready to support governments in adopting robust governance frameworks to counter the illegal wildlife trade, and to implement the key recommendations below. OECD standards and analysis may provide useful tools for this purpose, including: the [OECD Recommendations of the Council on Public Integrity](#), the [OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation](#), as well as [Best Practices for Performance Budgeting in Government](#).

Based on the key findings above, countries should develop a national strategy on countering the illegal wildlife trade, and budget sufficient resources to monitor the implementation of actions it calls for.

- Governments should convene a Task Force that brings together relevant administrations (including police, customs, officers of the criminal courts, CITES enforcement agencies, and financial intelligence units) to design a national strategy.
- The national strategy should:
  - ➔ Reflect commitments under relevant international conventions such as CITES, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the United Nations Convention against Corruption, and reflects relevant targets of the SDGs.
  - ➔ Incorporate the findings from a legislative and capacity gap analysis to address shortfalls in existing laws, or enforceability gaps of law enforcement.
  - ➔ Include policy dialogues with central government administrations including participation at the ministerial level elevate the costs of illegal wildlife and benefits of mitigation measures for long-term economic and ecological prosperity.
  - ➔ Strengthen co-operation between law enforcement and wildlife conservations authorities, through the drafting of strategic objectives and joint-investigations.
  - ➔ Take into account the G20 High Level Principles on Combatting Corruption Related to Illegal Trade in Wildlife and Wildlife Products and call for the conduct of anti-corruption investigations by police and anti-corruption authorities on the back of arrests for wildlife crimes to identify and prosecute related criminal networks.
  - ➔ Reinforce the engagement of financial intelligence units in follow-the-money investigations related to wildlife crime, both at national level and in co-operation with international partners.
  - ➔ Foster international co-ordination and operations with relevant counterparts.