Wildlife trafficking (including trade in protected marine species) is a multibillion dollar criminal enterprise that has expanded from a conservation concern to an acute security threat. This transnational activity is often backed by organized crime networks that connect poachers and traders in Africa to traders and buyers in Asia, Europe, and the United States. The net result is a devastating impact on wildlife and its habitat as well as communities, households and individuals caught up in a dangerous and illegal enterprise.

Illegal hunting and wildlife trade are a growing threat in West Africa, where wildlife trafficking hubs are emerging due to poor enforcement of laws and treaties meant to stem illegal wildlife crime and trafficking.\(^1\)

Well-established wildlife crime networks increasingly use West African ports as an exit point for a variety of wildlife products from across Africa. This is because West Africa has been relatively out of the spotlight on wildlife crime and trafficking compared to other African regions. Among the products passing through West African seaports and airports are large amounts of elephant ivory from Eastern and Central Africa, pangolin scales, wild birds, illegal timber, manatee skulls and skeletons,\(^2\) or leopard skins\(^3\) to name a few.

Wildlife trafficking and associated crime are complex. It involves a wide range of species, sophisticated smuggling techniques and corrupt government officials who benefit from established criminal networks that traffic in drugs, weapons, minerals, and other illegal contraband.

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\(^3\) The EAGLE Network. May 2016. Wildlife Law Enforcement Briefing.
There is a growing number of individual cases of wildlife crime across West Africa that clearly demonstrate this is an increasingly urgent issue in the sub-region, either as a source of wildlife products and/or as a transit point for illegal products from other regions of Africa. However, there has yet to be a comprehensive assessment of wildlife trafficking and crime in West Africa that would allow authorities and citizens to fight this growing threat more effectively.

WA BiCC is contracting Born Free USA, in partnership with the Freeland Foundation, who will work with national CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) authorities and regional institutions within West Africa to undertake the first comprehensive and extensive assessment of the state of wildlife crime and trafficking in West Africa.
OBJECTIVE 1: Evaluate the status and effectiveness of existing policies and judicial frameworks to identify the legislative gaps that constrain the fight against wildlife trafficking in West Africa. While intending to develop recommendations applicable to the whole West African sub region, the needs assessment will focus on seven representative countries selected for a more in-depth review given the current understanding of the dynamics of wildlife trafficking and crime in West Africa. These are: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

The Threats Assessment Team will:

1. Assess existing information: Consult regional/international forums at the global level (CITES Secretariat) and national level (CITES focal points) and review published outputs to support cooperation between countries. Confer with national authorities about legislation status, relevant national policies, and existing protocols on enforcement coordination between national authorities.

2. Launch country-level needs assessment: Consult countries on priority needs and organize a meeting with the seven focal countries to validate the list of priorities for action.

3. Develop and confirm assessment findings with target governments: Develop and confirm assessment findings with target governments: Compile key assessment findings, and use the meeting with seven focal countries to seek government validation on the findings.

OBJECTIVE 2: Document perceived and evidence-based impacts of wildlife trafficking on West African biodiversity by country and species, and define potential mitigation and capacity-building activities for the next four years.

The Threats Assessment Team will:

1. Undertake Fact-finding Missions: Undertake a series of fact-finding activities led in coordination with government authorities. After internal government consultations, the Team will proceed to conduct the field research phase of the Assessment.

2. Develop and present recommended activities to focal countries: Organize a regional meeting with the 7 focal countries to present and validate a program of recommended mitigation and capacity-building activities and develop briefings that the countries can use to present the main findings from the Assessment to decision-makers and partners.
Policy and legislative gaps and options identified.

Policy and legislative gaps that constrain the fight against wildlife trafficking and the impacts on biodiversity and economies in West Africa are identified and solutions are proposed.

Policymakers motivated to implement more effective responses to combat wildlife trafficking.

Government authorities and policymakers will lead fact-finding missions and organize roundtables focused on defining a response to wildlife trafficking that involves all stakeholders (local and national). Policymakers will help define priority recommendations for the development of an effective national and sub-regional response to wildlife trafficking, and lobby high-level decision-makers to implement the recommendations.

Increased capacity to implement enforcement measures.

Effective efforts to combat wildlife crime and trafficking rely on the awareness, and involvement of national authorities and committed non-government partners at all stages of enforcement planning and implementation.

The Assessment will increase the capacity of national authorities to develop a coordinated response to tackle wildlife trafficking at the local, national, and regional levels. It will also provide an opportunity to raise awareness of civil society about the issues and risks of wildlife crime. National authorities and committed partners will be able to better evaluate the effectiveness of current responses, and adapt them as needed, promote wildlife enforcement, and use mobile phone and other emerging technologies for data collection, networking, and reporting. Increased enforcement capacity will allow governments to implement adaptive responses to wildlife crime.
The West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change (WA BiCC) program is a five-year program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that aims to improve conservation and climate-resilient, low-emissions growth across West Africa.

Although regional in scope and design, WA BiCC focuses on targeted geographical areas to improve governance and policy over critical natural and human systems.

By working with core regional partners, Economic Communication of West African States (ECOWAS), Mano River Union (MRU), Abidjan Convention, and other key national and sub-national institutions, WA BiCC increases the capacity of institutions at all levels to address the three core WA BiCC components: (1) combatting wildlife trafficking; (2) increasing coastal resilience to climate change; and (3) reducing deforestation, forest degradation, and biodiversity loss.

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