CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA
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CITES

Fifty-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 14-18 July 2008

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Compliance and enforcement

NATIONAL WILDLIFE TRADE POLICY REVIEWS

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

2. The present report provides information on progress made in reviewing national wildlife trade policies, including implementation of Decisions 14.21 to 14.24 adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its 14th meeting (CoP14, The Hague, 2007). These Decisions are as follows:

   Directed to Parties

   14.21 *Exporting and importing countries are invited to carry out national wildlife policy reviews in order to facilitate a better understanding of the effects of wildlife trade policies on the international wildlife trade.*

   14.22 *Parties that undertake a wildlife trade policy review on a voluntary basis are invited to share relevant details of their reviews and lessons learned with other Parties.*

   Directed to Parties and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

   14.23 *Parties and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations should provide feedback on the draft of the wildlife trade policy review framework, as well as financial and technical assistance for conducting the national trade policy reviews.*

   Directed to the Secretariat

   14.24 *Contingent on the availability of external funding, the Secretariat shall, in collaboration with relevant international organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and with interested exporting and importing Parties:*

      a) *facilitate a review of their national policies regarding the use of and trade in specimens of CITES-listed species, taking into account environmental, social and economic issues and relevant policy instruments;*

      b) *compile information voluntarily provided by the Parties regarding their national wildlife trade policy reviews and make this information available to other Parties;*

      c) *report at the 57th and subsequent meetings of the Standing Committee and at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the progress made with regard to the implementation of this Decision; and*

> d) seek external financial support from bilateral, multilateral and other interested donors and partners to support further wildlife trade policy reviews and related capacity-building activities.

Progress made in the implementation of Decisions 14.21 to 14.24 since June 2007

3. As stated in paragraph 18 of document CoP14 Doc. 15, Madagascar, Nicaragua, Uganda and Viet Nam were selected to conduct national wildlife trade policy reviews in the context of a joint project developed by the UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development, the University of Geneva's Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) and the CITES Secretariat.

4. Review teams in the four pilot countries (referred to below as 'reviewers') conducted the national reviews with technical assistance provided by national steering committees, and the international project partners mentioned in paragraph 3 above. Financial support to the project was provided by the European Union and the Geneva International Academic Network. An international workshop, involving national and international project partners, was held in February 2007 to examine and discuss the methodology contained in the *Draft framework for reviewing national wildlife trade policies* (referred to below as the 'framework' and contained in document CoP14 Inf. 17). Thereafter, throughout the course of the national reviews, pilot countries tested the framework and adjusted it to local conditions and needs.

5. Two national workshops have been organized during the past year in each pilot country to bring relevant stakeholders together for discussions on the scope of the policy review, the roles and responsibilities of concerned institutions or bodies, existing or draft policy instruments, the identification of policy impacts, species of concern, problems associated with the content or implementation of policies, recommendations for policy improvements and follow-up. The first workshop also served to launch the review and the second offered stakeholders an opportunity to comment on the preliminary results contained in the draft review report.

6. The CITES Secretariat and/or UNEP participated in these workshops to provide support and guidance to national teams responsible for conducting the reviews and met high-level decision-makers responsible for developing and adjusting policies. IHEID representatives were also present in some of these workshops.

7. Field work undertaken by the national teams enabled reviewers to meet with local communities, particularly those living in remote areas and in close contact with CITES-listed species. IHEID studies on the human dimension and social dynamics and impacts of wildlife trade policy, undertaken in parallel to the national reviews, allowed academics specialized in social sciences to do more in-depth field work in local communities. Several dozen interviews were conducted with local authorities, harvesters, producers, indigenous people, representatives of civil society, etc. to understand their perceptions of wildlife policies, legal and illegal wildlife trade and related issues. Many interviewed were not aware of the existence of the Convention and felt excluded from the development and implementation of CITES-related policies. This may result from several factors. Firstly, governments are quite often willing to consult local stakeholders but have faced challenges in identifying the technical means and allocating the financial means needed to reach them. Secondly, such stakeholders may simply not be visible to policy makers as a discrete interest group affected by, and affecting, wildlife trade policies. Consequently, the introduction of a local dimension to the CITES implementation process already appears as one of the major value-added aspects of the policy review.

8. International consultants were hired to assist the national teams with analysing the information collected and drafting the final report for each country. All four reports were expected to be completed by the end of May 2008. They will be made available in their original language (with an English translation, where necessary) on the CITES website.

9. A side-event and a two-day workshop were convened in parallel with the 23rd meeting of the Animals Committee (Geneva, April 2008) to share the results of the reviews, provide feedback on the draft wildlife trade policy review framework and agree on ways in which the project could be

followed up. Particular attention was devoted to disseminating the main findings and lessons learned by the four pilot countries.

10. The results of the four policy reviews will be summarized in a synthesis report to be circulated as an information document at the present meeting.

<u>Feedback received on the policy review framework</u>

11. The four pilot countries, the international project partners and independent experts provided feedback on the framework. Overall, the structure provided by the framework was perceived as useful. It was recognized that the framework should be technically sound, politically relevant and above all practical. The focus on implementation, impact identification and policy effectiveness was found helpful for understanding the discrepancy between formal compliance (the ideal world of written laws, action plans, trade bans, etc.) and real compliance (what is really happening on the ground) with existing policy.

12. During an international workshop held during April 2008 to bring the project to conclusion, national and international project partners drew attention to the difficulties of identifying the impacts of wildlife trade policies. Impact identification, included as a stand-alone component of the framework and designed to play a central role in the review, was the most challenging part of the review for the national teams. Reviewers recognized the value and importance of identifying the biodiversity, social and economic impacts of their wildlife trade policies. They suggested, however, that impact identification would serve the review better as an integrated part of the framework's policy analysis section. Some reviewers recommended that social and economic impacts be merged into a single category as they were often difficult to distinguish from each other. This would mean that only two kinds of impacts (biological and socio-economic) would need to be considered. Questions were also raised about the degree of sophistication and scientific rigour needed for identifying policy impacts.

13. It was recognized that measuring the impacts of a policy is more demanding, in terms of the methodology and information required, than evaluating the manner and extent to which a policy was implemented. Several adjustments in the framework were suggested to provide better guidance and options for impact identification and to encourage creative ways of dealing with human, financial and technical resource limitations.

14. During the April workshop, reviewers also pointed out the need for more flexibility in the policy analysis section of the framework. The criteria of policy completeness and relevance, coherence and effectiveness were found to be rather abstract, as well as overlapping. Reviewers also wondered whether such terms were too constraining and therefore did not lend themselves to local adaptation or encourage creative thinking (e.g. the identification of other useful criteria). It was suggested that identifying fundamental problems, figuring out their causes and proposing possible solutions could be a more practical way to analyse the data and the information collected.

15. Rather than focusing on only policy content and implementation, it was suggested that it would be better to also consider practical functioning or operation of a policy. This would help to identify more accurately and precisely policy problems and solutions under existing and available information or other resource constraints. Reviewers pointed out that, unless the policy reviews were able to identify a country's fundamental problems (not derivative or symptomatic ones), understand their root causes and confront them, countries would continue recommending the same remedies with little effect (e.g. more workshops, meetings, studies and reports that are rarely used or implemented). Developing 'home-grown' solutions in the light of existing problems and constraints was the main challenge identified by the reviewers for the recommendations and follow-up section of the framework.

16. A final version of the framework, which incorporates the feedback received, will be made available in the second half of 2008.

<u>Preliminary findings and some lessons learned from the policy reviews</u>

17. The four reviews have revealed both strengths and weaknesses in the development and implementation of national wildlife trade policies. In some countries, CITES policy goals and

instruments are explicitly articulated. In others, there are no written policies specific to CITES but rather a set of decisions, practices and provisions that direct CITES implementation.

18. A salient finding of the pilot process of reviewing wildlife trade policies was the striking amount of knowledge and human capacity existing in the four countries. Formal science, hard data, traditional knowledge, skills, memories/histories, 'home-grown' mechanisms and examples of good practices relevant to CITES were found dispersed throughout central and local administrations, enforcement agencies, villages, universities, NGOs, firms of consultants, the wildlife industry, businesses, local harvesters, indigenous communities, etc. Unfortunately, this dispersed knowledge and capacity has not always been effectively linked up, resulting in knowledge and capacity 'fragmentation'.

19. The reviews revealed national differences in the quality and quantity of knowledge available for policy making. They also indicated the need to integrate and make better use of dispersed information and capacity. It was suggested that coordination mechanisms should be adapted or created to enable the pooling of skills, resources and approaches used to achieve shared CITES objectives. These coordination mechanisms might be within government or between government and other stakeholders and might be formal or informal (even electronic) in nature. Their success could be enhanced by clearly identifying the role of each stakeholder in contributing to the goals of CITES, setting clear rules for cooperation and conducting an inventory/stocktaking of the relevant information that is available.

20. The four pilot reviews mapped and analysed 'value chains' for species of conservation concern (e.g. *Swietenia macrophylla*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Caiman crocodilus*, *Pachypodium* spp., *Mantella* spp. and other amphibians, *Prunus africana*, *Hippocampus* spp., butterflies, insects and ornamental plants) to identify the sequence of transactions and stakeholders involved in wildlife trade. Hotspots for illegal wildlife trade were also described in one of the reports. There are important success stories that are not well-publicized and that can serve as South-South examples of sound wildlife management and sustainable trade contributing to conservation and poverty reduction. Efforts undertaken to identify stakeholders of varying degrees of influence were particularly useful in pinpointing the relevant actors and human populations in marginalized areas or regions that are most affected by CITES-related policies and that benefit least from wildlife trade.

21. The value chain approach suggested in the framework showed that, without substantial local efforts in favour of conservation, written policies aimed at protecting CITES-listed species are always likely to remain insufficient. The role of local communities appears to be critical in implementing and enforcing CITES-related legislation. Local communities are an important source of information about which species are being harvested in what quantities and by whom. They can also provide information on the value of those species and their products, and the evolution of related prices. In the absence of local engagement in the monitoring of conservation and sustainable use practices, there is a risk that species listed under CITES may be little more than species protected on paper. Worse, if there was little or no consultation before adopting written policy measures aimed at protecting species (e.g. access and harvesting restrictions), such measures might generate disrespect for established rules among local people and accelerate harvesting pressure. This has been particularly evident for timber species illegally traded after a long-term moratorium on legal trade was declared.

22. Wildlife trade policies and CITES implementation often move in multiple and varied directions rather than in a single, unified and coherent one. What is labelled as a 'wildlife trade policy' actually may be a fragmented mix of policies, each with a different time-frame, scope and scale. These include management plans for different species, regulations authorizing or prohibiting trade, research activities, enforcement actions, awareness campaigns, etc. Different government agencies and other stakeholders participate in the formulation and implementation of these different policies.

23. One of the reasons that may explain the capacity and knowledge fragmentation mentioned in paragraph 18 above is that almost all wildlife trade policies seem to have been developed as a response to emergencies or pressures from particular stakeholders (e.g. a conflict of interest over access to a particular biological resource). Policies decided in a rushed, ill-informed and non-consultative manner to alleviate a problem in the short run are often incomplete and unsuccessful in the long-run. These policies are often based on perceptions that are not backed by evidence and may

generate perverse, undesirable or displacement effects (e.g. negative impacts on the livelihoods of the rural poor, an increase in illegal activities, heightened pressure on other species, etc.).

24. In the four pilot reviews, the lack of resources for implementation was identified as a constant problem. Policies and laws are generally developed and enacted without allocating the necessary financial resources to implement them. Where financial resources have been allocated, the actual cost of implementing wildlife policies, laws, action plans, conservation plans and management plans often turns out to be much higher than the available financial resources. A number of donors are keen to finance the design of policies, laws and plans but do not always allocate money for their implementation since they consider that this is the responsibility of the recipient countries. Sometimes donors seem to favour financing an additional project for the development of new laws and plans, rather than the implementation and enforcement of existing laws and plans. Indeed, they often do not want to fund 'running costs', that is, the regular staff and operating costs of an agency doing the work for which it is responsible. Inadequate and unpredictable funding contributes to policy ineffectiveness and undermines a government's ability to make long-term strategic decisions that would deliver more effective results. Some participants in national workshops highlighted the importance of moving out of the 'vicious circle' of formulating policies or plans, holding meetings and workshops to discuss them, failing to implement the policies or plans that were adopted, formulating new policies or plans, holding additional meetings, etc. This vicious circle characterizes the wildlife decision-making process in countries heavily dependent on external aid.

25. The lack of political will is another pervasive problem, perhaps more important than the lack of resources and fragmented capacity. This is a governance problem. Policy makers are often bound by short-term mandates and by either their own or others' short-term interests. Few decision makers are willing to face the considerable challenge of affecting people's interests in order to protect species of high economic value or to promote sustainable use of species of high aesthetic value.

26. A key lesson for future reviews is that wildlife trade policies are more than just written statements of objectives, laws and regulations. Moreover, their implementation involves more than just the designation and funding of institutions. Policy also comprises what government and other relevant stakeholders say and do on a daily basis. It is thus reflected in their public statements as well as in their decisions and actions related to wildlife trade (e.g. non-detriment and legal acquisition findings, communication between scientific and management authorities, awareness-raising and training, law enforcement, decisions on quotas, permit issuance or acceptance, etc.).

Science/policy interface

27. Discussions about the science-policy interface are not new but the CITES policy reviews may bring a new dimension to the debate. They may also provide useful recommendations for concrete ways in which to bridge the gap between science and policy and, in so doing, contribute to biodiversity conservation, socio-economic development and more effective generation, management and use of scientific information.

28. Effective CITES implementation requires the correct preparation and provision of advice by Scientific Authorities and the correct consideration and use of that advice by Management Authorities. However, the authorities required by CITES for its proper implementation are still not fully operational in some countries. Adherence to CITES by the four pilot countries not only posed new challenges but also created new needs, which called for the establishment of new policies (goals, measures, instruments, etc.), for which new types of institutional structures did not exist. There has been an adjustment of existing agencies, organizations and individuals to enable them to serve in their roles as Scientific, Management and Enforcement Authorities, often without clear coordination mechanisms and proper understanding of CITES requirements. Parties accommodate CITES requirements to designate institutions in diverse ways, dedicate different numbers of staff and designate various types of scientific authorities (universities, individuals, etc.) whose staff may or may not be paid.

29. Science plays a crucial role in supporting and contributing to sound policy development. Many of the most high-profile and controversial issues in CITES are critically dependent on the input of scientists and Scientific Authorities. The pilot reviews highlight the importance of sound scientific information

as a component that is critical to a firm foundation for effective wildlife trade policies. In this connection, it was recognized that the formulation and implementation of clear and rational wildlife trade policy is highly dependent on relevant, reliable and objective scientific information.

30. During the side-event mentioned in paragraph 9 above, the Deputy Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Uganda to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva provided some reflections from an exporting country of wildlife about the interface between science and policy. A copy of her keynote address is contained in the Annex to this document (in English only).

31. The review teams found that many of the challenges in implementing CITES involved social science questions. For instance, stakeholders involved in wildlife trade and conservation often say that policies and laws exist but are not adequately applied. The four pilot reviews tried to understand why policies and law were so perceived, by asking the following questions:

   – were they promulgated with the intent of applying them or just to respond to political pressure or to comply with an obligation?

   – was the scientific evidence provided during the policy-making process relevant? and

   – were the resulting policy recommendations truly implementable in light of significant resource constraints faced by a number of countries?

32. In some countries, there is good coordination between Management and Scientific Authorities. However, the division of work and the role of the Management Authorities, as decision-makers and users of 'advice', and of the Scientific Authorities, in their role of suppliers of 'advice', are not always clear. For instance, is the evidence or advice provided by Scientific Authorities legally binding? Should scientists advocate the acceptance of their advice? Who has the last word in authorizing wildlife trade under Articles III, IV and V of the Convention? There may often be tensions between the decision-making power of Management Authorities and the evaluation of available evidence by the Scientific Authorities. For instance, complaints were made about the improper interference of high-level policy-makers in the final decision to issue a CITES permit. Two important issues surfaced during the national workshops after some scientists realized that the reviews were taking place in their countries: a) whether there was sufficient scientific knowledge in government for taking sound policy decisions and complying with CITES scientific requirements (e.g. non-detriment findings) and; b) whether there were ways in which the pervasive problem of insufficient communication between scientists and decision makers could be resolved. The lack of coordination, and frequent presence of competition, between Management and Scientific Authorities squander significant time and effort, and undermine the ability of CITES to achieve its objectives.

Evidence-based policy making

33. An important recommendation generated by one of the reviews is the need to move from a reactive to a proactive conservation approach. Such an approach recognizes the central role of human beings in the success or failure of strategies related to the conservation and sustainable use of wild fauna and flora. It is also based on the best available evidence and is capable of bringing together all policies in a coherent framework. Responding rationally to species population declines, biodiversity loss or illegal trade requires an understanding not only of the biology of the species and of ecosystems, but also of the social and economic consequences of related policies, and of how multiple stakeholders and policy options might interact.

34. The United Nations, in its guide to the Millennium Development Goals, states that "Evidence-based policy refers to a policy process that helps planners make better-informed decisions by putting the best available evidence at the centre of the policy process". The policy reviews suggest that CITES implementation and compliance monitoring schemes (e.g. non-detriment and legal-acquisition findings, the issuance and acceptance of CITES documents as well as the related tracking of trade, the Review of Significant Trade, national reports, the National Legislation Project, etc.) generate useful information for policy-makers. The practical use of data generated under these schemes may develop a culture of evidence-based policy- making. Of course, evidence is not only hard data generated by academic research or monitoring mechanisms, it is also the historical experience and

know-how of those charged with implementing CITES and the traditional knowledge of local communities.

35. This approach stands in contrast to opinion-based policy and helps CITES authorities and stakeholders to make better decisions. If Parties are interested in developing a policy in which non-detriment findings (scientific evidence) are more influential, they would need to develop some agreement as to what constitutes the 'evidence' needed to address different types of detrimental or beneficial practices for the conservation of the species. This means being more explicit about the role of research and evaluation *vis-à-vis* other sources of information. The international expert workshop on non-detriment findings being organized in November 2008, pursuant to Decisions 14.49 and 14.51 adopted at CoP14, is expected to clarify and develop guidance on the generation and evaluation of scientific evidence needed for determining whether proposed trade is sustainable or unsustainable in terms of biodiversity conservation.

Importance of partnerships in conducting policy reviews

36. Involving governments, international organizations, academia (University of Geneva's Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, University of Antananarivo, University of Central America, Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES) of Hanoi National University), an independent think tank (Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment, based in Uganda) and individuals with relevant expertise has proven to be very fruitful for both steering and learning from the reviews. The very purpose of this partnership was to take an integrated approach to wildlife trade policies. This has allowed international and national partners to consider the various dimensions of pervasive problems in the regulation of wildlife trade in order to suggest and promote the best possible overall solutions. The policy review can take longer when done in partnership, but the risk of insufficient coverage or legitimacy is reduced.

37. Regulation of wildlife trade for conservation purposes requires sometimes solutions which are not provided by governments, or the established networks around them, even though governments remain accountable for such trade regulation. Alternative solutions often imply the creation of new alliances at different levels. For instance, public-private partnerships may generate more financial and human resources for conservation. Cooperation between national and local authorities may do the same and also ensure stronger engagement of provincial and local stakeholders in the implementation of the Convention. One of the pilot reviews emphasized the need to look at policies depriving the rural poor of access to protected areas and was in favour of some regulated use by neighbouring communities to serve as an incentive for supporting such protected areas. For instance, a Memorandum of Understanding was concluded in one country that sets out the sharing of benefits among central government, local communities, private landowners and private sector operators that have access to biological resources in a given area.

Follow-up

38. The four policy reviews recommend reforms and follow-up activities to ensure policy coherence, streamline operational procedures, reduce duplication of efforts and maximize the limited resources available for conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

39. Recommendations will be disseminated to policy-makers involved earlier in the process. Some reviews recommend the adoption of new integrated and coherent wildlife policies that reduce the burden currently placed on governments and non-governmental players and that make better use of the existing capacity and strengths of different stakeholders to contribute to effective CITES implementation. By focusing on outcomes (e.g. positive biodiversity, social and economic impacts) rather than outputs (e.g. meetings, reports and recommendations), these policies should improve governance over wild fauna and flora.

40. The environmental ministers of Central America have adopted a decision in the context of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) to develop a regional wildlife trade policy. Regional trade agreements might play a crucial role in the development of evidence-based wildlife policies in that region.

<u>Recommendations</u>

41. The Standing Committee is invited to commend the efforts of the four pilot countries and take note of this report describing some of their findings and lessons learned.

42. Regional representatives to the Standing Committee are requested to advise the Secretariat of:

    a) any Party in their region that may have undertaken a national wildlife trade policy review and that may be interested in sharing relevant details of their review and lessons learned with other Parties;

    b) any Party in their region that may be interested in carrying out a national wildlife trade policy review; and

    c) any Party or intergovernmental or non-governmental organization in their region that may be interested in providing financial or technical support for conducting wildlife trade policy reviews.

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

Bridging the Science-Policy Development Gap

Key Note Address

To

Launching of the Pilot Wildlife Trade Policy Review Project Country Reports

By

H.E Cissy Taliwaku

Deputy Ambassador of the UN Permanent Mission of Uganda in Geneva

21st April 2008

Distinguished Delegates and Observers to the CITES Animals Committee, Representatives of Diplomatic Missions in Geneva, Members of the Pilot Country Teams and International Partners in the CITES Wildlife Trade Policy Review Project, CITES Secretariat staff, Ladies and Gentlemen. Permit me to extend very warm greetings from Uganda and the Ugandan People; the Pearl of Africa and a Country greatly Gifted by Nature.

On behalf of my Country, allow me to extend our appreciation and gratitude to the CITES 14th Conference of Parties, Development Partners, UNEP, IHEID and the CITES Secretariat as planning and implementation coordinators, for having identified Uganda as one of the few 'pioneer' Contracting Parties undertaking a national wildlife trade policy review program – together with our distinguished colleagues from Madagascar, Nicaragua and Viet Nam. For Uganda, this is a timely opportunity within an on-going process nationally.

Uganda 1986 to date has undergone wide national policy and legal reforms, aimed at bolstering overall sustainable development, with a focus on social and economic transformation, and fully conscious of the plight of natural environment and the associated resources in the long term. Wildlife Conservation as a program in Uganda has and continues to benefit from the above process, both at national and sector level; focused provision within the 1995 Constitution, and major provisions for Land, Water, Wildlife, Forestry, Wetlands, Environment, Local Governments, Minerals, Trade, Energy, Gender, etc. This is inline with the World Charter for Nature, that;

a) Mankind is a part of nature and life depends on the uninterrupted functioning of natural systems which ensure the supply of energy and nutrients,

b) Civilization is rooted in nature, which has shaped human culture and influenced all artistic and scientific achievement, and living in harmony with nature gives man the best opportunities for the development of his creativity, and for rest and recreation,

c) Lasting benefits from nature depend upon the "maintenance of essential ecological processes and life support systems", and upon the "diversity of life forms", which are jeopardized through excessive exploitation and habitat destruction by man,

Uganda's Draft Policy Review Report highlights the importance of sound scientific information as a component that is critical to a firm foundation for sustainable trade in wildlife resources. In this connection, UGAnda welcomes this opportunity to provide some initial thoughts on the subject of 'Bridging the Science-Policy Gap'.

I have been made aware that the CITES Animals Committee, one of the two scientific committees under the Convention, is having its 23rd meeting this week in this conference centre. I'm also aware that a workshop on wildlife trade policy reviews is taking place in the International Environment House located a few kilometers from here. Each meeting is likely to discuss issues of relevance to the other. The scientific meeting is expected to discuss some policy matters or matters that have policy implications and the policy meeting is expected to discuss some scientific matters or matters that have scientific implications. This side-event therefore offers an opportunity as linkage between the two meetings.

Formulation and implementation of "user-friendly" and effective wildlife trade policy is highly dependant on relevant, reliable and objective scientific information on the ecological processes and life support functions of the natural eco-systems. Historically and traditionally, this form of information has been identified as difficult to come by, let alone cope with in a manner that ensures sustainable development of the natural ecosystems, particularly wildlife conservation in relation with livelihoods for humankind. This type of information, its derivation and application meets with the reality of providing tangible solutions and/or benefits to day-to-day practical and dynamically complex problems. Such realities include harvesting for consumption and possible income generation by the impoverished rural communities and addressing the wide array of human-wildlife conflicts.

The challenges involved are much broader and deeper than any one can ordinarily imagine, particularly so for nations with poorer economies, and/or impoverished rural communities. As such, the wildlife trade

policy review project is more than timely as a tool to attempt to address the above issues, at least for Uganda, and we regard this not as a challenge per se but an opportunity.

The wildlife trade policy review project, at least for Uganda, has involved – and shown the importance of – the social sciences as well, e.g. public policy, socio-economic development, and governance. These 'soft' sciences have the ability to help bridge the divide that may exist between complex domain of ecological science and policymaking. The CITES Policy Review project has looked at the social and economic impacts of wildlife trade policy as well as its conservation impacts.

The project has shown that we should not be striving or waiting for perfect scientific information on which to base our policy decisions, as that would be impossible to achieve in a timely manner if at all. Rather, we should be taking and implementing policy decisions based on the best available scientific information. Such information may come from sources both within and outside government. However, it should all be carefully assessed for authenticity and reliability. Scientific information also needs to be presented (transcribed or translated) in a manner which makes it understandable, appreciated and usable by policymakers.

Science informs policy. It has been suggested, though, that the determination as to whether we know enough to act is inherently a policy question, not a scientific one. Taking into account the best available scientific information, Governments must decide how much they need to know in order to act and how much risk of no action or uncertainty is acceptable to them.

The divide between scientific knowledge and policy is not always clear and it may often be overstepped. There is a need for mutual respect across the science-policy interface, and in particular willingness to work in a cross-disciplinary manner. None the less, there is more need to invest in and prioritise closing of this gap in the long term.

Discussions about the science-policy gap are not new but the CITES Policy Review project may bring a new dimension to the debate. It may also provide useful recommendations for concrete ways in which to bridge the gap–and, in so doing, contribute to biodiversity conservation, socio-economic development and more effective generation, management and use or application of scientific information.