

Wild appetite

Globalization is fuelling the international demand for plant and animal products, says Steven Broad, Executive Director of TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network.

Not surprisingly, globalization and the rapid economic development of many countries are having an immense impact on trade patterns, nowhere more so than in China. Some 20 per cent of the world's population, ever more people are gaining the affluence and interest to purchase wildlife products from around the world.

Already the effects of consumer-led demand in China are being felt in the world's poorest economy—Africa, a continent rich in natural resources, yet lagging behind in economic development. In 2007, China's investment alone in Africa was estimated at \$15 billion, and is forecast to reach \$30 billion by 2015.

This huge Asian investment in Africa's resources has the potential to bring many positive benefits through increased wealth generation. But there is also the possibility it will lead to even greater exploitation of the continent's natural resources. Without proper control and governance, the danger is that foreign investors will take much and put little back in return.

Already we see evidence of this in the wildlife trade sector through the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), a database of worldwide ivory seizures. In 2007, the message from analysis of the ETIS data was clear: Asian-run organized crime syndicates based in Africa are increasingly implicated in an escalating illegal trade in elephant ivory. There is also evidence of commercial-scale illegal ivory operations involving Chinese nationals in African Elephant Range States.

Asian links clearly exist in the activities of criminal syndicates in other spheres of trade in natural resources too. In May 2007, TRAFFIC launched a report into illegal logging which revealed that China's import statistics included ten times more timber from Tanzania than was documented by Tanzania's export records. TRAFFIC also reported an increase in uncontrolled timber harvesting in southern Tanzania, largely as a result of demand from Asia. A few days later, authorities in Mozambique seized containers of illegal logs awaiting export—a staggering 1,000 cubic metres of timber. The logs had been sold by timber operators to Chinese companies and were awaiting export.

In January this year, President Kromah of Sierra Leone placed a temporary ban on timber exports to halt the damage to his