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

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**Third African elephant meeting**
**Gigiri, Kenya**
**1-3 November 2010**

# COMPILING AND UTILIZING DATA ON ILLEGAL KILLING OF ELEPHANTS FROM A VARIETY OF UNOFFICIAL SOURCES

1. The discussion paper attached, on compiling and utilizing data on illegal killing of African elephants from a variety of unofficial sources and the potential for integration with MIKE, was prepared by the IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group.

2. The discussion paper pertains to agenda item 6 of the provisional agenda of the third African elephant meeting.

**Discussion Paper**
**Prepared by the IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group Secretariat**
**October 2010**

## Compiling and utilising data on illegal killing from a variety of unofficial sources and the potential for integration with MIKE

The scale of illegal killing varies dramatically throughout the range of the African elephant. We are beginning to understand these dynamics and their links to influencing factors more thoroughly through the findings of the CITES Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme and the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS). The IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) has received feedback from a number of elephant managers and experts that there is additional information and knowledge on the scale and dynamics of illegal killing which is not captured in the MIKE system. This discussion paper attempts to clarify these information sources and to identify the opportunities for and challenges to the integration of this information with MIKE. The intention is not to create a parallel system, which could result in a duplication of effort and consequent waste of resources, but to ensure that, to the extent possible, all information available can contribute to providing a more comprehensive picture of levels of illegal killing of elephants across their range.

*Objectives of MIKE*

Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP15) on Trade in elephant specimens and its Annex II outline the role of MIKE in monitoring illegal killing of elephants and the role that information plays in the conservation landscape for the species. Annex II states that:

> *'the overall aim of this system is to provide information needed for range States and other Parties to CITES to make appropriate management and enforcement decisions, and to build institutional capacity within the range States for the long-term management of their elephant populations by improving their ability to monitor elephant populations, detect changes in levels of illegal killing, and to use this information to provide more effective law enforcement and to strengthen any regulatory measures required to support such enforcement.'*

The specific objectives of MIKE are:

*i) measuring and recording levels and trends, and changes in levels and trends, of illegal hunting and trade in ivory in elephant range States, and in trade entrepôts;*
*ii) assessing whether and to what extent observed trends are related to changes in the listing of elephant populations in the CITES Appendices and/or the resumption of legal international trade in ivory;*
*iii) establishing an information base to support the making of decisions on appropriate management, protection and enforcement needs; and*
*iv) building capacity in range States.*

The MIKE system has gathered information in sites in 29 of 37 elephant range States in Africa, contributing to analyses in 2008 (for the first African elephant meeting) and 2010 (for the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties). MIKE is designed to be a sample-based system, where the sites in the sample are representative of the entire population. While there

may have been some flaws in the site selection process, MIKE sites cover approximately 40% of all known African elephant populations, and thus its relevance to the overall elephant population is clear.

*Additional MIKE sites and expansion of the MIKE standardized methodology*

While the MIKE programme is not designed to collect information on poaching events that occur outside the MIKE sites, there could be scope to enhance the size of the MIKE sample by expanding it to other sites where there is continuous monitoring presence on the ground to collect data on and reports on elephant carcasses (whether or not illegally killed).

Additionally, at the 8th meeting of the MIKE TAG (http://www.cites.org/common/prog/mike/tag/TAG8_minutes.pdf), it was recognized that range States had shown great interest in learning more about elephant poaching levels, not only across the range, but also within their own States, and had broadly agreed to ranger-based monitoring approaches as favoured by MIKE. While each country might want to collect data in its own way, MIKE could establish and encourage data exchange and quality standards for reporting levels of illegal killing of elephants. The programme could then compile and analyze the collected data and assist the range States in interpreting their information.

While this may require an increase in the capacity of the MIKE programme to deliver such services, the meeting participants are invited to comment on the usefulness of such standards to their individual monitoring and enforcement activities.

*Additional information from unofficial sources*

In addition to the data collected by government agencies for their own monitoring and enforcement purposes, and in contribution to the MIKE programme, there is a great deal of further information available on the illegal killing of elephants through expert networks, media reports (newspaper articles, blogs, web reports), non-governmental organizations, field researchers, and others. Some of this is valuable and some not, but there has not, to date, been any attempt to capture reports of varying quality in a central system, to determine their veracity, and to use these data for better management of African elephants.

What role could this information play, noting the wide variety in its reliability and its inherent bias? A few examples of the types of information are outlined in the table below.

| **Source** | **Example** |
|---|---|
| Media reports | 2 elephants killed in Semliki National Park, Uganda |
| Expert network | 3 elephants killed in Outamba-Kilimi National Park, Sierra Leone |
| NGO | 10 elephants illegally killed in Hwange National Park |

The main problems with integrating these data into the current MIKE system are their inherent bias and the fact that they are not corrected for levels of searching and law enforcement efforts. For all three of these types of sources, as identified in the table above, there may also be reporting bias between countries. Different countries have different levels of press coverage and NGO presences, as well as different numbers of experts which actively report on illegal killing. A lack of published reports in a particular site or country does not mean that illegal killing is not occurring there. Equally, a place with more reports of

poaching incidents may not necessarily experience more poaching than another area with fewer reports. Additionally, the media and NGOs do not report legally killed or naturally dead elephants in the same areas, so there is no possibility to calculate an effort-less measure, such as PIKE (the Proportion of Illegally Killed Elephants, the measure used by the MIKE programme to correct for enforcement and monitoring effort).

However, rather than discount these potentially important pieces of information, the meeting participants are invited to consider ways in which this information, collated and categorized by source and reliability, could contribute to a better understanding of illegal killing in their countries, or throughout the range, in harmony with the MIKE data and analyses. It is also worth considering whether the collation of such information might prompt better reporting by range States into the MIKE system. The proposals provided here would be evaluated by the MIKE Technical Advisory Group to ensure they would provide an unbiased and scientifically robust picture of the status of elephant poaching.

*Early warning system*

Some range States and African elephant specialists have expressed a hope that MIKE would serve as an early warning system to flag any increase in systematic poaching in a particular country, or across a sub-region. MIKE data and analyses have been essential for understanding trends in illegal killing and the dynamics which influence them, but the programme was not designed to be an early warning system and thus, as currently implemented to meet its objectives, it cannot provide immediate information on site-specific increases in illegal killing.

Over the last two years, the MIKE Central Coordination Unit has engaged in a discussion with the MIKE TAG about this possible 'early warning' function for the MIKE programme (see summary minutes of the 7th and 8th TAG meetings at http://www.cites.org/eng/prog/MIKE/tag/tag.shtml). The TAG considers that the programme could potentially become a more pro-active tool to help countries to determine circumstances and situations that might encourage elephant poaching, but that this may require a fundamental re-design of the programme as well as additional resources. In particular, a rather more rapid data flow mechanism, probably based on technological solutions, would have to be deployed, transmitting data directly from the sites to wildlife authority head quarters and the MIKE programme simultaneously. Additionally, there may be scope to develop tools to quickly assess the seriousness of illegal killing or the impact of remedial measures. The MIKE-ETIS Research Network has been tasked with examining the extent to which MIKE could be speedily reactive or predictive, and the conditions under which it could operate as such. To date, that research has not been completed.

The meeting participants are invited to provide ideas on the types of information or analyses that would be most useful in enhancing the information available to law enforcement agencies to tackle potential or real upsurges in poaching.

*Conclusion*

The meeting participants are invited to consider the above issues, provide feedback on them, and to consider whether they are useful in the light of revising Resolution Conf 10.10 (Rev. CoP15).