

The Role of the Kenya Wildlife Service in Protecting Kenya's Wildlife

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KENYA'S UNIQUE LANDSCAPE SUPPORTS ABUNDANT AND VARIED WILDLIFE of scientific, intrinsic, and economic value and has a considerable extent of wildlife habitat (Government of Kenya 2008, 2009; KWS 2008; Western 2008). With a significant population of wildlife living outside protected areas on a seasonal or permanent basis, the country's wildlife resource has suffered from the effects of human economic activities, poaching, human-wildlife conflict, demand for wildlife products in the illegal market, and weak legislation, among other factors (Kamande 2008; KWS 2009). Poaching and other wildlife crimes have been on the increase in the recent past. These crimes have both direct and indirect negative impacts on local communities, including depletion of the resource base on which they depend for their livelihoods and altering of local environmental conditions. Environmental and wildlife crimes pose a great threat to national, regional, and international conservation efforts. Kyale (2006), Murimi (2007), ISS (2008), and Kamweti et al. (2009) point that in Africa the prevention and combating of crime involving natural resources such as water, forests, wildlife, and the environment in general should be of primary concern due to the human population's reliance on natural resources. Thus, according to ISS (2008) and KWS (2011), any crime committed involving natural resources not only degrades the environment, but also deprives the local population of their basic needs. Environmental and wildlife security issues are therefore also vital national security interests in Kenya because most citizens are engaged daily in a struggle to survive, and local people depend on the environment for their livelihoods.

Wildlife-related crimes in Kenya have been evolving over time and continue to present growing challenges to wildlife conservation. In the past, Kenya experienced high levels of elephant and rhino poaching that almost drove their populations to extinction (KWS 2012). Poaching was mainly conducted by armed bandits from Somalia and was prevalent in pastoral areas outside wildlife protected areas. This forced some animal species to abandon their rangeland and territories and seek refuge in parks. The period before the establishment of Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in 1989 was characterized by massive poaching, general insecurity in the parks, inefficiency, low staff morale, and inadequate equipping of the agency charged with the responsibility of conserving and managing Kenya's wildlife.

Since the establishment of KWS, there has been a marked improvement in wildlife and tourist security. However, as is the general trend globally, the region and the country are wit-

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nessing emergence of new challenges to wildlife security. The demand for wildlife products in the international market has escalated, and a resurgence of elephant and rhino poaching is causing great concern. There have also been shifts in poaching areas and means, with snaring and poisoning of animals as opposed to use of firearms in some areas that hitherto never experienced poaching. Shifts in trophy trafficking and concealment methods, and in smuggling routes, have occurred. Other emerging issues affecting wildlife security include climate change (which is causing changes in wildlife movement and dispersal patterns), increased human population, biopiracy, terrorism, and cybercrime.

Wildlife crimes in Kenya includes poaching, banditry, encroachment into protected areas, illegal trafficking and trade in live fauna and flora, and destruction of water catchment areas and wildlife habitats. Growing affluence in East and Southeast Asia has increased demand for natural resources, including an increased demand for wildlife and wildlife products. Kenya's wildlife (rhinos, elephants and members of the cat family) are among the contraband products in the illegal wildlife trade.

Some of the factors that contribute to wildlife crime in Kenya include the proliferation of small arms and light weapons from neighboring countries such as Somalia. The porous Kenya-Somalia border in particular has provided opportunity for armed Somalis to cross into Kenya on poaching missions. Well-organized and highly skilled gangs with superior firepower cross over into Kenya to take refuge in largely remote wildlife protected areas, which serve as safe havens. Often, Somalia militias flushed out from their territories of influence and control take refuge in these protected areas as they reorganize; they also become involved in wildlife poaching.

The ever-increasing demand for wildlife trophies and other products from consumer countries (primarily in Asia and the Middle East) stimulate wildlife poaching and the illicit trophy trade. This has also resulted to biopiracy, where East Africa sandalwood (*Osyris lanceolata*) is illegally extracted and shipped to Asian countries through a neighboring country. There is also a high demand for charcoal in Asia markets, which is shipped through Somalia. This demand has accelerated environmental degradation.

The illegal wildlife trade

Trafficking of wildlife is linked to other serious crimes such as drug trafficking, arms trafficking, human smuggling, and document counterfeiting. It is often cited as a means to finance the more violent and destructive activities of criminal and terrorist organizations because of the major financial benefits derived from a relatively minimal time investment, low risks of detection, and lack of serious punishment. The huge profits made from illicit wildlife trade act as incentives to organized crime networks. Some of the possible links of illegal wildlife trade and organized crime include:

- The use of legal shipments of wildlife or their products to conceal drugs. There is likelihood of illegal drug shipments being combined with wildlife.
- The parallel trafficking of drugs and wildlife along shared smuggling routes. Organized criminal gangs involved in wildlife trafficking are using existing smuggling routes for illegal commodities, such as small arms and drugs, to trade in wildlife. The drug cartels

could be using their covert distribution networks to profitably trade in wildlife species as well as drugs.

- The money from wildlife trafficking and drug dealing is also laundered through the setting up of legal enterprises.

Wildlife products are used as a currency to barter for small arms, light weapons, and drugs, and to launder drug trafficking money. For example, ivory and rhino horns have been exchanged for firearms and livestock in Somalia. Proceeds from illegal trade are also believed to support illegitimate activities of militias in Somalia, and this could have a possible link with terrorist organizations.

KWS role in wildlife and national security

Kenya is rich in biodiversity and is both a source and transit route for the illegal wildlife trade, which poses a major challenge to wildlife conservation. Since its inception in 1989, KWS has been working to enforce existing laws and treaties protecting wildlife and has made a tremendous contribution to enhancing wildlife conservation. KWS has the mandate of protecting wildlife and its habitats (Government of Kenya 1999). These functions are particularly important as they lead to enhancement of wildlife conservation, protection, and management in addition to consolidating and stabilizing wildlife and tourism sectors in the country. KWS also has the legal mandate to enforce wildlife laws and regulations. This mandate includes eliminating poaching, providing security to local and international visitors, safeguarding KWS property and assets, and training security personnel.

KWS has put in place specific security measures to address wildlife crime. KWS law enforcement units works with stakeholders such as ranchers, local communities, and other law enforcement agencies in drawing up and implementing area-specific security strategies to counter poaching threats and other wildlife crimes. These measures include holding regular security meetings with private conservancies and ranchers in the vulnerable areas, joint law enforcement efforts, and wildlife security review and operations covering the entire country. Cross-border operations and collaborations between Tanzania and Uganda are also in place to address crimes of a transboundary nature.

KWS has deliberately reached out to local communities to be partners in wildlife law enforcement. This is after our realizing that working with local communities is critical for effectiveness in law enforcement against wildlife crime and ensuring compliance with wildlife law. Specific measures have therefore been put in place to strengthen collaboration and cooperation with local, regional, and international wildlife law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders in order to win the fight against wildlife crime. These efforts have led to significant improvements in security of wildlife and its habitats, and the guaranteeing of visitor security within protected areas.

Wildlife crime threatens sustainable conservation of biodiversity, particularly the illegal wildlife trade, which is driving many species towards extinction. Much of this trade is from developing countries, which contain most of the world's biodiversity, to developed ones, which provide the demand. This illegal taking, trafficking, and trading in wild animals, plants, their parts, and derivatives is a global phenomenon that has serious implications for

biodiversity, ecosystems, and national economies. Illegal wildlife trade is one of the primary threats for the survival of plants and animals in Kenya and thus affects a large number of species.

To prevent and combat wildlife crime, and in particular poaching and trafficking in wildlife species and their products, KWS has established and strengthened specialized security units that are deployed throughout the country. These include the canine unit, which helps to sniff out wildlife products and track wildlife offenders; the horse unit, to ease movement in mountainous terrains; the prosecution unit for wildlife related offences; the security research and analysis unit, to study emerging trends and recommend appropriate solutions; the wildlife investigation, which responds to wildlife crime; the intelligence unit, which gathers information intended to preempt wildlife crime; the emergency management unit to deal with disaster situations; and the security data management unit for information management. As Kenya still remains an important link to international destinations for illicit consignments of wildlife and its products, the strengthening of these units and more collaboration with the Customs Department and other government agencies will be some of the strategies for winning the war against wildlife crime.

KWS also plays an important role in protecting the country's water catchment areas found within parks and reserves. These areas also constitute habitat for wild animals. Three of Kenya's five water towers—the Aberdare ranges, Mount Kenya, and Mount Elgon—are found within protected areas. It's through KWS's efforts to control illegal logging and destruction of these catchment areas that many of the towns in Kenya, including Nairobi and Mombasa, are guaranteed a water supply. The water catchment areas also support vital sectors of the country's economy, such as tourism, agriculture, and energy. In addition, KWS has taken the lead in a joint government effort to protect the Mau ecosystem from further destruction. This is a significant role as this ecosystem comprises the largest closed-canopy forest in the country, and was, until 2008, probably the most endangered habitat in Kenya. KWS has also been very instrumental in enforcing the 2007 presidential decree to protect East Africa sandalwood from exploitation through illegal trade, and has managed to eradicate the illegal harvesting of the plant within the protected areas.

Partnerships with stakeholders

KWS works very closely with other law enforcement agencies in all matters of wildlife security. Engagement with the provincial administration, police, local communities, Customs and Immigration departments, Kenya Airports Authority, private ranches, and other conservation stakeholders has been intensified to address matters of mutual interest. Regionally, cross-border collaborations have yielded results in tackling crime along shared borders. INTERPOL and the Lusaka Agreement Task Force are instrumental in facilitating support when crimes of an international nature occur. Collaboration with courts in many parts of the country has also been intensified.

Training of law enforcement personnel

KWS invests heavily in training and building the capacity of its law enforcement personnel. The Manyani Field Training School, located in Tsavo West National Park, offers paramili-

tary training and other specialized law enforcement courses to KWS law enforcement staff. The school also trains personnel from other stakeholders involved in wildlife conservation and law enforcement, including County Councils, private wildlife sanctuaries, and the Kenya Airport Authority. To meet the training demands of its staff, KWS is planning to upgrade Manyani to make it a center of excellence in wildlife law enforcement training. This will involve redesigning all the courses to address emerging wildlife security issues, as well as expansion of training facilities. KWS has also greatly benefited from training opportunities and other capacity-building programs offered to its law enforcement personnel by other partners both within and outside the country.

Contribution to national security

In addition to wildlife law enforcement, KWS plays an important role in enhancing national security by complimenting other security agencies. Some of these security functions include:

- Securing Kenya's coastline in our area of jurisdiction (marine parks and reserves);
- Monitoring of the flight path over Nairobi National Park;
- Participating in national security programs; e.g., maritime security;
- Undertaking surveillance and monitoring of bandits and gangs around wildlife protected areas and close to Kenya–Somalia border;
- Safeguarding key utility facilities such as railway lines, pipelines, electricity transmission lines, and meteorological stations located in or passing through the parks and which are susceptible to sabotage;
- Ensuring the security of vulnerable target visitors, key attraction sites, visitor facilities, and campsites;
- Securing airstrips within parks and KWS managed reserves;
- Capacity-building in law enforcement;
- Collaborating with local, regional, and international agencies to provide security and enforce relevant laws, including cross-border security operations with Tanzania and Uganda; and
- Exchanging information with other security agencies, including district security and intelligence committees, National Security Intelligence Service, National Counter Terrorism Centre and INTERPOL.

Stepping into the future

As is the trend globally and in the region, wildlife crime in Kenya is projected to increase unless stringent preventive measures are taken. Towards this end, KWS will implement some innovative solutions to strengthen law enforcement to address wildlife security challenges (UNDP 2000; Government of Kenya 2009). These will focus on devising new approaches that address the emerging trends in wildlife security and on the involvement of communities in preventing and combating wildlife crime. Given an environment of decreasing resources, there is a need to change from traditional enforcement practices, which are more reactionary and incident-driven, to a more proactive focus on prevention, problem-solving, and partnerships.

The sophistication of wildlife crime, increased wildlife security challenges, and the need to capitalize on modern law enforcement technology demand that wildlife law enforcement institutions enhance security operations to make them more effective. For its part, KWS is implementing a comprehensive force modernization program that will contribute to the fulfillment of the KWS vision. The focus is modernization of KWS security forces to the point where they are acknowledged as setting world standards for competence, effectiveness, and professionalism.

Force modernization calls for a change of strategy and operational tactics, utilization of post-operation intelligence, constant improvements that integrate “lessons learned” to operational effectiveness, and leveraging information and communication technology. KWS force modernization is based on three principles: force restructuring, changes to the force itself, and equipment acquisition that is aimed at finding an appropriate mixture of personnel, technology, and infrastructure to achieve improved efficiency and effectiveness. It is expected that the implementation of the program will enhance the capacity of our force to deal with ever-increasing wildlife crime and assist law enforcement in line with the KWS strategic plan.

As part of the force modernization program, KWS plans to establish a forensic laboratory to facilitate effective investigations and criminal prosecutions. The forensic laboratory will examine evidence that can be used to help tie criminals to their crimes, and victims to their assailants, and to exonerate innocent suspects. Currently, case evidence presented in courts is often not sufficiently identified due to lack of supporting evidence. The acquitted individuals then continue to engage in wildlife crime, being aware of the weaknesses in the system.

As we move forward, KWS will be involved with other partners and stakeholders in efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change on wildlife and its habitats. Wildlife crime has been exacerbated by the existing vagaries of weather, and it is projected that climate change will pose one of the gravest threats to wildlife and national security as it will cause drastic ecosystem shifts that could change the resource base, contribute to food and water scarcity, and accelerate conflict over resources.

Conclusion

Wildlife crime works against the objective of sustainable wildlife conservation globally. It has driven many species to extinction and continues to pose threats to others. It also works against the spirit of Vision 2030 by jeopardizing our wildlife-based tourism industry. One of the tools to enhance wildlife management is effective law enforcement. However, it is important not to lose sight of the ultimate objective of law enforcement from a resource management point of view: preventing resources from being degraded through illegal activities. Owing to the geographical positioning of the country and the proliferation of illegal firearms in the region, fighting wildlife crime is both a challenging and an expensive undertaking, and KWS law enforcement personnel have been exposed to dangerous encounters with armed and organized gangs that have resulted in loss of lives and injuries to our personnel.

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