



The European Parliament welcomed high-level experts in the domain of wildlife conservation to discuss the role of local communities in wildlife management. The experts, primarily members of the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW), highlighted that legal and sustainable wildlife trade can support wildlife conservation and contribute to sustainable development. The importance of wildlife management, use and trade to local communities and community-led approaches to achieve sustainability and conservation benefits were highlighted through various analyses and case studies. A key message to policy-makers was that supporting communities and livelihoods, particularly through making wildlife and conservation socially and/or economically valuable to them, is an essential part of efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade and achieve broader conservation objectives.

Pavel Poc MEP and Chair of the European Parliament Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development*” gathered policy-makers, experts and stakeholders in the European Parliament, Brussels on 20 April at the conference “**Poachers or Protectors? Local Communities at the Frontline of Conservation – What really drives wildlife trade, hunting, and trafficking?**”

The **Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW)**<sup>1</sup> was established at the request of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2012. Its members include the major international conventions such as CBD and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) that provide the international legal framework for wildlife management, as well as relevant UN organisations research and knowledge organisations and others. David Cooper, Deputy Executive Secretary, CBD underlined that “*the partnership aims to protect wildlife and advance wildlife conservation also recognising the importance of local community involvement*”.

The role played in wildlife management by Indigenous People was reflected by Daniel Kobei, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity highlighting that “*indigenous communities are attached to their natural environment and possess traditional knowledge through their culture and customary use of biodiversity, which enables them to use natural resources sustainably*”.

Johannes Stahl of the CITES Secretariat said that the Convention recognises that well-regulated trade in wildlife can be an incentive for conservation and benefit local livelihoods. CITES regulates trade in more than 35000 species between 182 Parties, with various examples that show that monitored and well-regulated hunting can be a tool to support sustainable wildlife management.

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<sup>1</sup> CPW was established on 10 March 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand to serve as a voluntary association of international organizations with substantive mandates and programmes to promote the sustainable use and conservation of wildlife resources. Its mission is to increase cooperation and coordination among its members to promote the sustainable management of terrestrial vertebrate wildlife in all biomes and geographic areas, contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and to human food safety and security, livelihoods and well-being. It provides a platform for addressing wildlife management issues that require national and supra-national responses.



Rosie Cooney, Chair of the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group explained that *“law enforcement is a critical element in combating illegal wildlife trade, an exclusive focus on top-down enforcement-led approaches can create threats to communities, governance, and conservation”* and that with the right approaches and incentives *“communities can be powerful and positive agents of change”* in combating illegal wildlife trade. Further, when addressing illegal wildlife trade the need to provide incentives at local level for habitat conservation and protection against poaching is critical, particularly when communities bear costs from of living with wildlife. Jan Heino, Vice-Chair of the CPW and representing the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) highlighted positive examples hunters playing an important role in supporting anti-poaching efforts, motivated by the responsibility many hunters feel for conserving wildlife and their hunting heritage. It was stressed that even though most wildlife trade is legal and sustainable, illegal wildlife trade has reached crisis proportions.

The benefits provided to local people were reiterated by all CPW members but the presentation by Prof. John Fa, Senior Research Associate at The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and Dr. Jean-Claude Nguingui of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), highlighted in particular wild meat or bushmeat, the meat from a large variety of hunted animals in many parts of the world, which contributes significantly to food security and human nutrition. It was also underlined that a broader view of the nutritional contribution made by wild meat to humans is necessary.

The ecological importance of wildlife was emphasised by Ian Redmond, Chairman of the Ape Alliance. Highlighting the important role of gorillas and elephants, he presented the view that wildlife can be more valuable to ecosystems alive than dead, and that winning the trust of animals for tourism, as with mountain gorillas, is vastly more profitable and creates more jobs and community benefits than trophy hunting. Alexander Kasterine of the International Trade Centre (ITC) however described the sustainable trade opportunities provided by biodiversity and its livelihood benefits. Presenting a number of projects enabling conservation through legal trade, he highlighted that wildlife trade is a legitimate development strategy and explained that there are many ways to harness the market while at the same time supporting conservation and livelihoods.

The European Commission highlighted that it continues to support African National Parks in ensuring the sound management of ecosystems and species while at the same time enhancing socio-economic development as well as stability and security in these regions. It was said that sustainable hunting versus poaching is a complex issue that needs a pragmatic approach underlining that the ultimate goal is to ensure the development of both the local populations and biodiversity.

The debate further reiterated the complexity of the issue and the need to ensure coherency among all levels was stressed. It was also said that in order to improve policies more evidence can be gathered by conducting further studies and analyses to underscore the benefits of these approaches. It was concluded by welcoming further discussion on this important matter in order to achieve the overall objectives of conservation and enhancing human well-being.



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