

*The Sophia* FOUNDATION

*Raising consciousness for the good of the whole*

A contribution to  
**Rhino Anti - Poaching Considerations**



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## **Rhino Anti-Poaching Considerations**

The Sophia Foundation supports and promotes a reverence and love for all living beings and the natural environment. The impulse to write this paper comes out of a deep concern for the rhino that are being killed for their horn.

We ask why it is that despite all the money and efforts being spent on anti-poaching the rhino death toll is escalating at a rate that threatens the survival of the species. What was the tipping point leading to the increased demand for rhino horn and how can this trend be reversed?

**The latest rhino poaching statistics** for South Africa released by the South African Government Department of Environmental Affairs show :

- 14 illegal killings in 2005
- 448 illegal killings in 2011
- 668 illegal killings in 2012 (of these 425 took place in the Kruger Park)
- 128 illegal killings this year as at 28<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2013

### **What is driving the demand?**

We understand demand for rhino horn is linked to the economic growth in Asia, Chinese enterprises moving into Africa and is fuelled by organised crime.

It has been widely reported that the demand is being driven by Traditional Chinese Medicine, yet in an interview for [China Dialogue](#) Peter Knights, Chief Executive of [WildAid](#) labels this a “miniscule” market and points out that China is no longer the main culprit. Roughly 1/3 of rhino horn trade goes to China, compared to the market in Vietnam which is responsible for around 2/3 of the trade. Other Asian countries including Thailand and Taiwan are involved on a smaller scale.

Whilst in Vietnam the original demand was largely driven by the mistaken belief that rhino horn was a cure for cancer, more recently it has become a social 'drug', as well as a “hangover cure” and an “aphrodisiac”. Perceived by the affluent growing middle class as a status symbol, rhino horn powder is added to wine as the ‘Millionaires Drink’, promoted at corporate events and is also trendy with young party goers.

Currently rhino horn is worth more than gold (per ounce) and is being stockpiled to await extinction of the rhino so that the price will soar even higher. According to [TRAFFIC](#) the wildlife trade monitoring network, the South East Asian market for illegal wildlife products is worth US\$7.8 – 10 billion per year.

### **Some important facts :**

Both the end-user and those working throughout the illegal wildlife supply chain need to be educated :

- Scientific studies confirm rhino horn has absolutely no medicinal or therapeutic value. It is composed largely of the protein keratin, also the chief compound in hair and fingernails.
- Illegal trade is threatening the endangered rhino species with extinction.
- Unspeakable suffering is inflicted on the victim rhino. Methods of poaching include inhumane and multiple shootings, poisoning of waterholes used by rhino, incapacitation by drugs, head mutilation with axes, machetes and chainsaws to remove the rhino horns and the nub beneath - mostly while the animal is still conscious.
- Communities whose livelihoods depend on wildlife tourism are being affected. The rhino with the lion, African elephant, Cape buffalo and leopard make up Africa's 'Big 5' animals.
- This illegal operation is run by murderous criminal gangs involved in illegal arms dealing, human trafficking and drug smuggling. Terror tactics used include booby-trapping the rhino carcass with hand grenades to kill anti-poaching response teams.

### **What is the legal situation?**

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species ([CITES](#)) has 176 member countries who commit to work together to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

It is the only official body regulating trade in rhino horn.

In 1977 CITES prohibited international trade in rhinos and their products. However CITES does allow commercial trade in rhino horn. CITES does not arrest people. Its member countries have their own laws to enforce a CITES ban on international trade in rhinos and their products but these laws are not effectively managed.

Commercial trade is limited to safe trade e.g. buying and selling as livestock to national parks in other countries and to legal rhino trophy hunting in South Africa and Swaziland. The loophole occurs with inadequate management of rhino

hunting, including the abuse of the permit system. Clearly these hunted rhino horns are reaching the black market despite secondary sales being illegal.

Sales of rhino horn on the black market have increasingly gone underground using the internet to develop a global wildlife trade network, making it harder to identify and prosecute those involved.

### **What anti-poaching measures have been undertaken?**

Millions of dollars are being pumped into 'save-the-rhino campaigns' and 'anti-poaching activities'. Yet, even with the growing use of drones and other surveillance technology in both private reserves and national parks, rhino deaths continue to rise. It is evident that the limited resources available to anti-poaching units cannot compete against the significant financial capability of crime syndicates which has enabled the purchase of military weapons including night vision equipment, AK47 firearms, as well as helicopters and payment to corrupt veterinarians.

What is encouraging is the development of projects like Game Reserve United which has been devised to implement greater and more focused anti-poaching interventions that can adapt to the current situations. This collaborative effort between the Kruger National Park, large private game reserves such as Sabi Sands Wildtuin, SAN Parks, NGOs, individuals with experience in counter-insurgency tactics, counter-intelligence and relevant law enforcement agencies, is well funded and supported by a number of different groups under the umbrella of WESSA ([Rhino Initiative Programme](#)).

In addition a program known as [RhODIS](#) (Rhino DNA Index System) was started in 2011 and currently has a database of 3,500 rhino. The DNA profiling can link those in possession of a horn to a particular crime and has been successful in helping prosecution in cases of both possession and smuggling of horn.

Alternative measures such as dehorning, introducing dye and even poison into rhino horns have been considered, but appear to be powerless as a crime-fighting weapon.

### **Could greater law enforcement and policy-making decisions be implemented?**

Some options include :

- Putting pressure on Governments through international bodies : International organisations such as the United Nations whose environmental programme collaborates with CITES on a number of issues, need to be lobbied to take more action and put pressure on governments to clamp down on the illegal wildlife trade and to enforce

regulations as set out by CITES (CITES meets again on March 3<sup>rd</sup> in Bangkok, Thailand). The petitioning group [AVAAZ](#) with its near 20 million members could be mobilised to enlist global support.

- Governments putting pressure on Governments of countries illegally trading rhino horn : A recent government agreement between South Africa and Vietnam to introduce measures to end illegal rhino transactions includes information sharing and raising public awareness on issues of bio-diversity and education on tackling false claims on the medicinal properties of rhino horn. More such agreements between governments need to be considered as well as measurable means of ensuring that such agreements are being enforced.
- Better control of CITES commercial trade : Greater controls need to be introduced to close the loopholes in the commercial trade of rhino horn to prevent the illegal secondary sales of trophy hunted rhino.
- Research on the effects of CITES regulations : More research and debate needs to take place regarding the commercial trade of rhino horn and its impact on the survival of the species. This applies to all national trophy hunting exports. The [LionAid](#) website highlights a warning by the CITES trade database which lists a total of 6,652 lion trophies exported between 2000 - 2009 (virtually all males) sending the Lion population plummeting.
- Placing restrictions on South Africa's natural resource concessions : The current practice of granting natural resource concessions needs to be challenged and re-shaped to ensure protection of Africa's wildlife. One of the side effects of foreign enterprises moving into Africa is increased poaching to supply the illegal trade of rhino horn, ivory and lion bone. This will be reinforced by the pending United Nations 5<sup>th</sup> Crime Against Peace, '[Ecocide](#)' as proposed by international barrister and award winning author Polly Higgins to the United Nations in March 2010. It is a law that will "halt dangerous industrial activity and empower governments and business to put people and planet first".
- Tackling criminal gangs beyond the rhino's natural habitat : Anti-poaching capabilities need to include specialised units engaged in the infiltration of criminal gangs behind the illegal wildlife trade which are operating throughout Asia and Europe. The cover story in [The Big Issue](#) (25 Feb – 25 March 2013) reports that just such a specialised unit known as the Endangered Species Protection Unit (ESPU), which had for years been highly successful in containing such illegal trade, was disbanded by the South African Commissioner of police in 2002 opening the way for crime

syndicates to move in and operate with impunity. Such a unit needs to be re-established.

### **Should more focus be placed on targeting the end user?**

Rhino horn has no addictive, medicinal or psychoactive properties and its consumption is based purely on ancient tradition, superstition, fashion and propaganda. Identifying the triggers that lead to the massive increase in demand and targeting the end user who is fuelling the demand has to in our view be one of the keys to reversing this trend.

We understand that the Chinese government is ambivalent about tackling the issue of illegal sale of rhino horn because of the power Traditional Chinese Medicine holds on its culture. Talks of legalising the supply for this “miniscule” market are being considered as a means of regulation whereby rhino horn would be made available for medicinal purposes through prescription only pharmacies at a very low cost.

Crucially the ethical accountability of sourcing rhino horn would need to be factored in e.g. harvesting rhino horn at regular intervals within their natural habitat as opposed to [rhino farming](#) in Asia with poor welfare standards as shown on the [WWF Wildlife Crime Scorecard](#). Another option to consider is laboratory grown rhino horn which is being investigated by scientists in the United Kingdom.

Reports by a number of sources including TRAFFIC, [The South Africa – Vietnam Rhino Horn Trade Nexus](#); EIA (Environmental Investigation Agency) [History Repeating: The Illegal trade in Rhino Horn](#) and Investigative journalist [Julian Rademeyer](#) in his book *Killing for Profit: Exposing the Illegal Rhino Horn Trade*, support the view that the tipping point leading to the excessive demand for rhino horn seems to have been triggered in Vietnam - originally by the mistaken belief that rhino horn was a cure for cancer and more recently its favoured use socially as a status symbol. This fad has been taken on by the internationalist, techno savvy, media-literate younger generation who want to be seen as ‘representing’ the new Asia. We believe that the effective targeting of this market could reverse the trend and contribute to reducing the demand for rhino horn.

Advertising and education need to be linked by experts in the field to communicate the critical message with well researched demand reduction campaigns. This would need to be culturally specific and focused on gaining insight into the behaviours and motivators of the growing trend of conspicuous consumption patterns of the end user, as successfully demonstrated in WildAid's

campaign '[When the buying stops the killing can too: Ending the demand for endangered species products](#)'.

### **Targeting the social use of rhino horn**

Some suggestions include :

- Collaborative campaigns by airline groups, airports and governments : Video clips could be shown on airlines travelling between South African and Asia and screened in the boarding waiting areas and business class passenger lounges to target the end-user population groups. These could be supported by features in In-flight magazines, on billboard posters, and with the use of smart code technology which could also be included in the design on the aircraft tail or wing.
- Linking with change agents : Employing high profile individuals (as has been successfully done by WildAid with Asian Professional Basketball player, Yao Ming. Refer [WildAid rhino](#) / [WildAid shark fin](#) campaigns), groups and respected corporate brands to help communicate the message that using rhino horn powder is not cool. This could include enlisting the support of opinion leaders like Vogue China, known for setting fashion trends or popular car brands in Asia. They could for example adopt a rhino or promote their customers bottle feeding an orphaned rhino.
- Using environmental 'Shockvertising' : Shock advertising as used by [Greenpeace](#) could be applied to penetrate rhino horn propaganda and raise levels of consciousness. The panda is closely connected to China's social and cultural identity and historically a death penalty would be incurred for killing a panda. Could WWF consider dropping the 'panda' in their logo to reinforce China's lack of responsibility for its impact on the animal populations of countries beyond its border?

### **What can we learn from this crisis?**

The rhino crisis can teach us more about where we are as human beings and offers us the possibility of redeeming nature and ourselves.

Mankind and the earth are interconnected and in losing touch with nature we are losing touch with a part of ourselves. We can no longer relinquish our responsibility for the impact of our actions on our planet.

When we look at any aspect of the natural world we see that every part of it contributes to maintain the balance, harmony and sustainability of the whole.

However, in the extremely short period of time in which mankind has been able to have an effect on this ordered organism of the earth, we have managed to wreak havoc on almost every part of it to the point where the sustainability of the whole is in question. The balance has been lost.

Vandana Shiva, winner of the [Sydney Peace Price 2010](#) has pioneered the [Navdanya Earth Democracy](#) movement which “provides an alternative worldview in which humans are embedded in the Earth Family, we are connected to each other through love, compassion, not hatred and violence and ecological responsibility and economic justice replaces greed, consumerism and competition as objectives of human life”.

Cormac Cullinan, 2012 SAB Environmentalist of the Year, is one of the leaders of the global [rights-of-nature](#) movement which protects the interest of the planet in the courts by “balancing what's good for humans against what's good for other species and the rest of the planet”.

Movements like these are opening the way to a world of new possibilities, new perspectives and new solutions that will restore balance and bring about meaningful change in the world.

We need to reflect on ourselves as human beings with free will, able to take responsibility for our actions and to respond with reverence for each other and our planet.

After all, this is the only world we have.

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