

The sustained trafficking of wildlife is partly a result of the effective networking by traffickers, collaboration and real-time exchange of information, using innovative technology. It is therefore generally recognized that more effective and real-time information sharing and cross-border collaboration between wildlife law enforcement officials is critical to deter and/or reduce this threat and the associated criminal activities. An online information sharing and collaboration system has been developed by TRAFFIC in partnership with the Central Africa Forest Commission (COMIFAC)¹, the AFRICA-TWIX (Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange) system aimed at promoting

on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Customs Organization (WCO), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), INTERPOL, the Observatory for Central African Forests (OFAC), WWF and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). Since its launch, the four countries have designated a total of 95 agents for inclusion in the mailing list; 68 of them are registered and 45 are actively communicating and sharing information. Types of information being shared include seizure details, such as the countries involved along an illegal shipment route and the *modus operandi* of the traffickers. A total of about 200 messages have been exchanged between users and four investigations triggered and/or supported thanks

THE AFRICA TRADE IN WILDLIFE INFORMATION EXCHANGE SYSTEM: Promoting regional collaboration in the fight against illegal wildlife trade in Central Africa.

the sharing of information, in real-time, and working together with law enforcement agents in Central Africa to combat illegal wildlife trade. The initiative was inspired by the success of the European Union Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange (EU-TWIX) system established by TRAFFIC and government partners in Europe in 2005 (TRAFFIC, 2016). EU-TWIX has a total of 847 users in 36 European countries and the database holds over 47 000 seizure records. Information from the EU-TWIX triggered 13 investigations in Europe in 2014 (TRAFFIC, 2015).

Like EU-TWIX, AFRICA-TWIX has two components—a digital mailing list and a database. The mailing list brings together all relevant law enforcement agencies responsible for combating wildlife trade and associated crime, Customs, police, border forces, forestry officers, environmental inspectorates and prosecutors, as well as international institutions, connecting them on a daily basis, allowing the exchange of information in real time. The database will contain information on seizures, violations and prosecutions that can be used to analyse the scale of trade and trends at sub-regional level. It is anticipated that national law enforcement authorities will carry out their own analyses of seizure information held in the AFRICA-TWIX database to assist their targeting and risk profiling. The system is being piloted in four Central African countries (Cameroon, Congo, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo) and will be gradually expanded into other countries over time. As in EU-TWIX, access to AFRICA-TWIX is only granted to law enforcement agencies mandated by the respective governments.

The AFRICA-TWIX system was formally endorsed by representatives from law enforcement agents from the four pilot countries at a workshop in Douala, Cameroon, in February 2016 (Mahonghol *et al.*, in prep.). Support for AFRICA-TWIX was voiced by international and regional organizations including the United Nations Office

to the information shared on the AFRICA-TWIX system. Users are also sharing news from open sources and thus the mailing list also serves as a central source of information on illegal wildlife trade, thereby saving considerable effort and time otherwise needed to keep officers up to date on the latest developments and news in the region.

Funding for the systems was provided by the German Polifund project, implemented by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB); WWF France; and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

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¹COMIFAC is the principal political and technical forum for guidance, co-ordination, harmonization and decision-making in the conservation and sustainable management of forest and savannah ecosystems in Central Africa. Created in 1999 by the Yaoundé Declaration, COMIFAC is composed of the Forestry Ministers of its 10 member countries and has an Executive Secretariat based in Yaoundé, Cameroon.