

Revitalizing the Global Tiger Forum: a WWF/TRAFFIC Discussion Document

Established in 1994, the Global Tiger Forum(GTF) remains the world's only inter-governmental organisation dedicated to tiger conservation. The GTF membership includes seven tiger range countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal and Vietnam. With regard to non-tiger-range countries, the UK Government has formally joined the GTF, and the Government of Canada may follow suit. International NGO members consist of WWF, IFAW, and TRAFFIC. Several national NGOs from India and Nepal are also members.

The GTF clearly has the potential to become an effective umbrella organization to coordinate the efforts of governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, donors, and foundations, as well as scientists and global tiger experts to recover wild tigers across the range. In the past, the GTF has contributed greatly in a number of areas, such as providing capacity building and professional training that is valued by range state wildlife officials, and by compiling the various tiger national action plans of its membership. The GTF is still recognized by range states and other governments and intergovernmental fora (e.g., CITES and CBD) as a UN-mandated official forum dedicated solely to tiger conservation.

The purpose of this document, put together by the WWF Network and by TRAFFIC International, is to suggest ways to achieve the revitalisation of this important body in order to help catalyse a range-wide recovery of wild tiger populations. The initial step is to analyse the problems of the current arrangement. Our feeling is that there is little encouragement provided to tiger range states and other GTF Parties to view the GTF as the main leading intergovernmental clearing-house body that fosters principal tiger conservation methods and mechanisms. The GTF's current activities do not address the key threats facing tiger populations and the Forum lacks strategic direction and communication direction, dynamism, and the sense of urgency essential to stem the tiger's decline. In particular, the GTF has failed to enlist the high-level support of decision-makers in all the tiger range states to foster the strong political commitment to unite around solving joint problems. Thus, the GTF has basically not achieved its mission to convince global decision-makers of range and non-range states, and external international organisations, that it serves as a global mechanism for facilitating funding directed at priority actions to promote tiger conservation.

Nevertheless, a chance remains to plot a new course for the GTF. A meeting of the GTF Executive Committee took place on the sidelines of the Global Tiger Workshop taking place in Kathmandu from October 23-30, 2009. The workshop presents an excellent opportunity for change in what can potentially be the organization that will be the main driver for saving wild tigers in years to come.

Opportunities for change

Strategic action plan: The GTF should develop a strategic action plan that commits the organization to goals, objectives and activities that address the full range of issues and challenges facing tiger conservation. This plan must have specific, time-bound targets, outputs, and indicators by which progress can be measured and evaluated. The National Output Documents and Global Output Document from the Kathmandu Global Tiger Workshop can serve as input for the development of this strategic action plan.

Structural and operational review: Amendments to the existing Statutes and Regulations of the GTF need to be made to create an operating environment that is conducive for other range state governments to join and participate effectively in the management and operations of the organisation. A structural and operational review of the organisation is needed to ensure that its priorities and activities fully reflect the needs of all its member States. Innovative solutions need to be considered to ensure effective progress, such as putting in place interim leadership within the next 3 months, or failing that, agreeing how to urgently achieve the desired leadership in another manner. Recruitment and salary rules related to the position of Secretary General must also be reviewed to ensure that it attracts the best candidates.

High-level support: More needs to be done to secure commitments from range state members to send high-ranking representatives (such as high-ranking ministers) with the authority to make decisions and sign onto resolutions. Innovative solutions must be considered that will raise the profile of the GTF as a relevant body that speaks out on behalf of tiger conservation with high level decision-makers, such as the appointment of a President or other well-known high-level figurehead and 'ambassador' for the organisation.

Visible lead on Tiger conservation: The GTF must become a visible clearing-house that fosters innovative tiger conservation methods and mechanisms. This new role will catalyse buy-in by both GTF members and non members, and create the basis for the GTF to act as a respected entity that facilitates funding into priority topics and areas of tiger conservation. To this extent, and as a first start, we suggest a total revamp of the public window (website) of the GTF.

Increased membership: Attempts to increase GTF general membership, particularly to include government representatives from China, Russia, Malaysia, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia



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and Bhutan, have been unsuccessful to date. The membership status of Cambodia and Myanmar is unclear. It is hoped that with a revitalised, strengthened and more inclusive GTF, more tiger range state governments and donor organisations will be interested to join/support the GTF.

Increased Partnerships: No single country or conservation organisation can tackle the problems of tiger conservation alone. The GTF therefore needs to more actively engage in new partnerships with other international and inter-governmental organisations involved in tiger conservation. This is particularly important in the area of law enforcement co-operation, where stronger linkages can be made with organisations such as the CITES Secretariat, Interpol, WCO and UNODC. The GTF will also need to engage more closely with and actively support bilateral efforts (such as the India-China Protocol on tiger conservation) and with regional enforcement initiatives such as ASEAN-WEN and the South Asia wildlife enforcement network. GTF needs to take a more visible role in highlighting the importance of these regional and bilateral efforts in addressing trans-boundary protected areas and cross-border trade of tiger parts, as well as creating greater synergy between its activities and relevant inter-governmental bodies such as CITES, SAARC and ASEAN.

WWF and TRAFFIC are committed to assisting the GTF and tiger range states with any technical assistance necessary to help the GTF fulfill its full potential as a significant global force for tiger conservation.