

Title

Illegal animal trade in a globalized world: Implications for sustainable development

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Abstract

The illegal trade of animals has persisted as a recurrent manifestation of transnational organized crime, fuelled by the movements of people, goods, and services propelled by the forces of globalization. This nefarious trade posed a significant threat to the global crime management system and jeopardized numerous animal species, impeding the sustainable development of nation-states worldwide. Drawing on the Green Belt Movement perspective, this study examined the impact of illicit animal trade on sustainable development in a globalized context. Utilizing the documentary method for data collection and analysis, this study examined the emergence of the illegal animal trade as a transnational organized crime arising from weak regulatory institutions and criminal systems in certain countries. The study offered a conceptual overview of illegal animal trading, its implications for sustainable development and global crime control, and recommended policy options to mitigate the phenomenon. The study findings revealed that illegal animal trading detrimentally affected sustainable development and necessitated stronger regulatory frameworks and law enforcement mechanisms to prevent and suppress it. The study concluded by recommending the significance of global collaboration and heightened awareness of the pernicious effects of illegal animal trading on sustainable development.

Key words

globalization, illegal animal trade, development, sustainable development, transnational organized crime

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Introduction

Animals constitute food for human consumption. This is because the consumption of meat tends to enrich and nourish our bodies with protein and other needed minerals. In the same vein, animals also serve as food security (Okiwelu, 2009). Flows entail the movement of people, things, and information due to the increasing porosity of the global barriers of our world systems. Since we are living in a globalized world, a global supply chain has emerged and it entails that manufacturing corporations around the world, will have to rely on other countries of the world to source the ingredients needed for food, drug, clothing, and other related materials that will necessitate the supply of animals to convert them into by-products (Marano et al. 2007). The inability of some states with weak regulatory institutions and criminal systems to enforce crime against animals in the form of illegal animal trade has brought about the transmogrification of illegal animal trade into a transnational cum organized crime on a global scale unlike before and this will have a serious implications for sustainable development (Aloufi & Eid 2014).

To this end, this study tends to study illegal animal trade, examine the factors fuelling it, cite cases of illegal animal trade, and offer policy options on how best to curb it. The first part deals with the conceptual review of illegal animal trade. This will be followed by an established nexus between illegal animal trade, its implications for sustainable development and global crime control, the theoretical framework, recommended policy options and conclusion.

Concept of illegal animal trade

The term "illegal animal trade" constitutes a major frontier debate among scholars. However, its definition is fraught with lots of inconsistencies, and as such, some variant terms have popped up in the academic literature. terms like "animal/wildlife trafficking," "illicit wildlife trade," "illegal/unlawful sales," and "import and export of animals for social/economic benefits."

Illegal animal trade has been used interchangeably with illegal wildlife trade (Wyler & Sheikh, 2008). Thus, illegal animal trade deals with the illicit trading, poaching, smuggling, capturing, or harvesting of engendered species or protected wildlife in exchange for economic gains. It also entails the unlawful buying, and selling of harvested wild animals, species, or derivatives (tSas-Rofis, Challenger, Hinsley, Verissimo & Milner-Gulland 2019).

It should be noted that the major actors involved in the illegal animal trade, consist of peasant farmers who hand in these animals to retailers, and these retailers gather them and move them to the mafia group that has various syndicates and clients across their national boundaries (Fevre & Bronsvoort 2006; Kilonzo, Stopka & Chomel 2013).

Again, illicit animal trading has remained a profitable business over the years because most countries around the world have weak institutions as regards the implementation of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), and likewise, most of the laws regulating illegal animal trading do not impose the death penalty on offenders, coupled with the porosity and geographical locations of some countries around the world (Broad, Mulliken & Roe 2014; Maher & Sollud 2016).

Several factors account for the continuous existence of illegal animal trade. One of the factor that contribute to illegal animal trade is the demand from laboratories and research centres. Some animal species are required for research to further the frontiers of knowledge for the advancement of science. However, this has led to the illegal trade of some endangered animal species, such as primates, which have been taken from their natural habitats, sold illegally, and subjected to inhumane conditions in laboratories. In the same vein, drug development is another factor that encourages the illegal trade of animals. The trial testing of drugs requires the use of some animal species, such as chimpanzees and monkeys, which are often taken from the wild or bred in captivity. This practice poses a significant threat to the survival of these animals, especially when they are not bred in sustainable conditions.

Food industries also contribute to the illegal animal trade, as they demand specific animals for consumption. Some of these animals, such as bush-meat, are hunted in the wild, leading to the depletion of wildlife populations, which could have severe environmental implications, such as habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity.

The demand for animals for horticulture purposes, such as the breeding of ornamental fish, also fuels illegal animal trade. The trade in some rare fish species can lead to their extinction, and the use of chemicals in the breeding process can have negative environmental consequences.

The clothing and ornamental industries also play a significant role in encouraging illegal animal trade. The demand for animal fur, ivory, and other animal products has led to the illegal hunting of animals, leading to habitat loss and threatening the survival of endangered species. The leisure, entertainment, tourist attraction, and pet-keeping industries also contribute to the illegal animal trade. The demand for exotic pets has led to the capture and trade of endangered animal species, resulting in the depletion of wildlife populations and the risk of zoonotic diseases.

Another factor that contributes to the illegal animal trade is the lack of diversified livelihoods among farmers and hunters. When people rely solely on hunting or farming for their livelihoods, they may resort to illegal animal trade to supplement their income. Internal security lapses in some countries also contribute to the illegal animal trade. Some countries lack effective regulatory measures to curb illegal animal trade, leading to the proliferation of black markets.

Finally, the profitability of the illegal animal trade has encouraged the growth of the industry since the laws regulating the business failed to specify a death sentence for such traders that are caught in the act (Odonkor, Gbogbo, Attuquayefio & Bimi 2007; Tessema, Wakjira, Paulos, Mekonnen, Mekonnen, & Asefa 2021; Malik, Richard, & Jerry, 2019; Okiwelu, Ewurum, & Noutcha 2009).

From the above, it is obvious that these demands for animals range from satisfying the interests of the general public to specific individual interests. For example, 200,000 out of the 600,000 illegally exported animals from Columbia each year consist of primates used for laboratory and research purposes (Sollud 2017; de Nascimento, Czaban & Alves, 2015).

Examining the nexus of illegal animal trade and its implications for sustainable development and global crime control efforts

Sustainable development is a concept that seeks to balance economic growth, social development, and environmental protection to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs in terms of development. In the context of illegal animal trading in a globalized world, sustainable development means creating a framework that can curb the illegal trade of animals while ensuring the preservation of endangered species and their habitats (Zafarullah & Huque 2017; Ritzer and Dean, 2019).

The impact of illegal animal trading in a globalized world on sustainable development is significant. Market forces have increasingly captured the regulatory powers of the state, aided by the internet, which links potential buyers, traffickers, and breeders together in order to carry out the illegal trading of animals without taking into cognizance the implications of their actions and inactions to sustainable development (Lavorgna 2014; Maher, 2021).

The criminal justice system stipulates how crimes are classified, interpreted, and controlled all over the world. The police remain the major law enforcement agency, and as such, they constitute the first port of call in the criminal justice system. The law courts and the prisons constitute the second and third ports of call in the criminal justice system (Mbah 2007).

At the international level, there exist one regulatory framework meant to control illegal animal trading and this is known as the CITES treaty. This treaty was ratified in 1973 by over 181 countries, yet it failed to capture a wide variety of species for protection and lacked specific sanctions for violators. The treaty's shortcomings have resulted in its failure to curb the sophisticated techniques employed by illegal animal traders. Some signatory states lack viable wildlife criminal legislation, weak institutions, and corruption, making it difficult to circumvent illegal animal trading (Anagnostou & Doberstein 2021; Van-Uhm & Wong 2019).

In Norway, many cases reported by the Norwegian Environment Agency, which implements the CITES treaty, end up as misdemeanour's, and fines are often imposed instead of legal action (Maher & Sollund 2016). For example, the USA has good wildlife legislation; however, the porous borders it shares with Mexico have fuelled and aided the sustainability of illegal animal trade along the US-Mexico borders (Stiglitz, 2017). He also noted that former President Donald Trump's closure of the Mexico-US border reduced the inflow of harmful imports and exports of goods and services from 1.7 million in 2005 to 170,000 in 2015.

Corroborating each other, Ritzer and Dean (2019) noted that globalization has created hidden structures that facilitate the flow of unauthorized goods and services, humans, and animals (dangerous exports and imports). This very loophole created by globalization has brought about the advent of the informal sector and black market arrangements that are beyond the controls of local, state, and international communities' crime control and criminal justice litigation mechanisms. Hence, judging from the US-Mexico border example above, when the crime of illegal animal sales occurs, the police, customs, and other sister agencies will find it difficult to detect, control, and prosecute the perpetrators of such when the borders are porous and unregulated.

From the discussion so far, the impact of illegal animal trading on sustainable development cannot be overstated. The rampant and uncontrolled trade of endangered species undermines global conservation efforts, threatening the biodiversity of ecosystems and resulting in the loss of natural habitats. The negative economic consequences of this illicit trade are equally concerning, with reduced tourism revenue, damage to natural resources, and increased healthcare costs due to potential global health crises, such as the emergence of zoonotic diseases (Ritzer and Dean, 2019).

The wildlife trade has been linked to the emergence of diseases such as the Ebola virus, SARS, and COVID-19. The close proximity between humans and animals in unregulated wildlife markets provides an ideal breeding ground for the transmission of diseases from animals to humans. This poses a significant threat to global health, especially in a world that is becoming increasingly connected through travel and trade (Marano, 2007; Fevre & Bronsvoort 2006; Bezerra-Santos, Mendoza-Roldan, Thompson, Dantas-Torres, & Otranto 2021).

Furthermore, the illegal animal trade perpetuates poverty and inequality, as it is often controlled by a small group of wealthy elites who reap the benefits of the trade while the livelihoods of local communities that rely on these animals for food and income are put at risk. The loss of these animals can lead to food insecurity and the loss of traditional knowledge that may have been passed down for generations.

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative research approach that involves collecting in-depth narrative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social phenomenon under scrutiny. Specifically, the documentary method of data collection and analysis was adopted. To gather the required data, secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, and other relevant internet resources were utilized (Asika, 1991; Ezrah 2004; Okeke, Orji & Aniche 2014).

Theoretical framework

The study adopts the Green Belt Movement perspective as its framework of analysis. Established in 1977 by Professor Wangari Maathai, the Green Belt Movement has accomplished a significant milestone by planting over 51 million trees in Kenya. GBM operates on multiple levels, including grassroots, national, and international, to advance environmental conservation, enhance climate resilience, empower communities, particularly women and girls, promote democratic space, and encourage sustainable livelihoods. It is one of the African perspectives that sheds light on how human activities affect the environment and the best ways to make reparations for such unregulated activities and their impact on the environment (Maathai 2003; Obi, 2005). The GBM's advocacy for human rights, democratization of access to public lands, and environmental justice issues can also be applied to addressing the root causes of illegal animal trade.

Illegal animal trade is a pervasive issue that poses a threat to the sustainability of wildlife and their habitats. Such illegal activities undermine efforts towards sustainable development. To address this issue, the Green Belt Movement's approach of empowering communities through environmental conservation and sustainable livelihoods can be applied. This would involve creating alternative livelihoods for communities that rely on the illegal animal trade while prioritizing the protection of wildlife and their habitats. By doing so, sustainable development efforts can help combat the illegal animal trade and its negative impacts since this perspective believes in the bottom-top approach to development.

Within this framework, illegal animal trading can be seen as a violation of the environmental/natural resources and ecosystems program. The movement believes in education, conservation, protection, and restoration activities such as tree planting and maximum use, e.g., water harvesting and eco-tourism, as instruments used in conserving the environment and its resources from impending extinction. Animals play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of ecosystems, and their illegal trade can cause significant harm to both the animals and the environment. Therefore, the Green Belt Movement emphasizes the importance of protecting and conserving natural resources, including animals, as part of sustainable development.

Furthermore, illegal animal trading can be analysed through the gender and development program of the Green Belt Movement, which focuses on improving livelihoods and advocacy. Illegal animal trading often disproportionately affects women and their children, who rely on animals for food and livelihoods. The Green Belt Movement's focus on improving livelihoods and advocating for gender equality aligns with efforts to combat illegal animal trading and promote sustainable development.

In conclusion, the Green Belt Movement (GBM) places significant emphasis on environmental conservation, sustainable alternative livelihoods, and gender equality, with a particular focus on safeguarding and conserving natural resources, including animals, as a fundamental component of sustainable development. Given the movement's long-standing dedication to these vital issues, it is likely possible that GBM has informed the originators of the Green School of Thought as well as prominent criminologists who champion the theory of green criminology in the redefinition of crime to reflect the profound social impact of such illicit activities.

Reported cases of illegal animal trade around the world

Illegal animal trade has transformed from regional to international organized crime against animals. Interestingly, this crime is far beyond the categorization of countries in the economic development lexicon (developed and developing countries of the world).

Columbia has a renowned history of over 70 years of illegal animal trading. This is because the country has a lax institutional control framework. German and French collectors pay \$65,000 for rare species of parrot, which would not cost more than \$30 in other Latin American countries (Esmail, Wintle, tSas-Rolfes, Anthena, Beale & Bending, 2020).

Lebanon is richly endowed with faunal diversity, which accounts for a total of 261 species of fish, 55 species of reptiles, 395 species of birds, and 61 species of mammals. Nevertheless, the capital of Lebanon which is Beirut makes it a strategic environment that promotes the illegal animal trade since it is located at a crossroads between three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Aside from this, the country experienced some delays in enforcing the CITES convention that it ratified in 2013 (Abi-Said, Outa, Makloul, Arm & Eid, 2018).

In Botswana and some other countries in Africa, elephants, rhinoceroses, lions, and tigers are hunted for their horns, tusks, and skins, which are sold and exported to Europe and some parts of Asia for exchange. For example, European collectors tend to pay \$65,000 for tiger skin, while an ounce of rhinoceros horn has more value when compared to the same quantity of gold (Little, Tiki & Debsu, 2015; Van-Uhm & Moreto, 2018).

The United States of America does not escape its fair share of the illegal animal trade. Unfortunately, monkeypox was introduced into the United States through the shipment of African Gambian giant rats.

Policy recommendations

A public-private partnership should be established to track down, apprehend, and prosecute illegal animal traders. This partnership should involve both national and international law enforcement agencies.

International regulations must be strengthened to track illegal animal trade on the internet. This will help enrich the global database of law enforcement agencies and improve their ability to prosecute offenders.

Poverty, inequality, and unemployment must be addressed at the global level to reduce the rate of global crimes such as illegal animal trade. Sustainable development goals that prioritize poverty reduction should be implemented using the bottom-top approach.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) should be reformed to include more sophisticated techniques that are used by illegal animal traders in order to bypass national and international penalties. The reform should also update some species that were not captured before now as endangered species.

Countries with porous borders should improve their security personnel or, if possible, adopt the US-Mexico border solution to curb illegal animal trade. This will help reduce the inflow and outflow of illegal animals across national borders.

Conclusion

Illegal animal trade is a complex global issue that continues to pose significant challenges to sustainable development efforts. Despite various international treaties and organizations in place to combat this crime, illegal animal trade remains prevalent in some countries and regions of the world. Factors such as corruption, weak institutions, porous borders, and the internet have made it difficult to enforce laws and regulations aimed at curbing the illegal trade of wildlife. As a result, animals are victimized, and their welfare is compromised to satisfy the demands of a few traffickers who prioritize profit over environmental and social sustainability.

This study acknowledges the fact that, high demand for animals by the market forces coupled with the non-diversified source of livelihood among farmers and hunters constitutes a major driving force for illegal animal trade, as individuals turn to this illegal activity as a means of survival. Moreover, the lack of a death penalty for animal traffickers

has not acted as a deterrent to this illegal trade, and the potential outbreak of diseases and pandemics caused by the spread of contaminated animals is a serious threat to public health in recipient countries.

To address this issue, sustainable development efforts must prioritize the protection of wildlife and their habitats, as well as the creation of alternative livelihoods for communities that rely on the illegal animal trade. Additionally, there is a need for international cooperation and public-private partnerships to track down and prosecute illegal animal traders, improve border security, and regulate the internet to enrich global databases that will aid in information sharing and tracking. Reform of international treaties such as CITES must also be pursued to address the sophisticated techniques used by traffickers to bypass penalties.

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