

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	IWT101
Project title	Disrupting international wildlife trafficking networks in West and Central Africa
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nigeria and other West and Central African countries
Lead partner	Environmental Investigation Agency UK
Partner(s)	Africa Nature Investors Foundation
Project leader	Mary Rice
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2: 01/04/2022 – 30/09/2022
Project website/blog/social media	N/A

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Activity 1: Nigerian and international law enforcement agencies have the information required to conduct operations targeting criminal networks and the corrupt actors facilitating transnational wildlife trafficking, and civil society hold key stakeholders accountable

EIA continues to regularly collect, analyse and disseminate valuable and actionable intelligence in the form of briefings and documents to key law enforcement authorities, including the EFCC, NFIU, Customs Service and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, as well as civil society organisations, such as Focused Conservation Solutions (FCS) and the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC) in Nigeria, EAGLE in Cameroon, and STR Africa in Gabon. The strong relationships cemented by our investigators during the February 2022 field investigation are now yielding benefits, as our investigators have cultivated covert engagements with several high-level POIs within these trafficking networks. We have been able to gather high-quality privileged intelligence, despite the traffickers reducing their operations due to increased law enforcement action. We are now in a unique position, as currently most POIs are refusing to confide in anyone they do not fully trust. This is especially useful in the ongoing tracking of two key POIs who are wanted for arrest and remain at large.

In the past 6 months, a total of 85 intelligence reports were generated on wildlife trafficking in Nigeria (not including intelligence reports generated on wildlife trafficking in other West and Central Africa countries). A total of 54 of the 85 intelligence reports generated concern networks of interest, hereby referring to networks we are actively investigating. Most of these 54 reports are high-quality intelligence, generated through direct engagements with members of networks of interest during the February-March 2022 field investigation. Furthermore, 54 of the 85 intelligence reports generated contain information on the methodology of wildlife traffickers (e.g. methods of payments used by traffickers, preferred means of concealment for maritime shipments, etc.). EIA is aware of at least four intermediate- to high-level wildlife traders who are currently being investigated by law enforcement agencies in Nigeria as a result of intelligence shared by EIA. EIA continues to identify POIs and share information that will support their investigations.

EIA has developed terms of reference for remote investigations, which includes guidelines for commissioning trusted local consultants to, for example, verify information on the ground or work closely with partners to corroborate intelligence. This continues to be a dynamic framework which is updated regularly.

The field investigation in February 2022 was planned in a manner to gather relevant intelligence on corruption within Nigerian agencies. EIA produced the report “*Corruption Linked to the Wildlife Trade in Nigeria*” and recently disseminated it to EFCC. The report is an assessment using all intelligence relating to IWT in Nigeria over the last

two years. It contains highly sensitive intelligence and therefore unfortunately cannot be shared. The report provides names and descriptions of corrupt officials, describes their corrupt practices and which IWT POIs they are associated with. Based on these details, the report contains an extensive and comprehensive list of recommendations for the EFCC to investigate a large number of cases of corruption.

EIA investigations continue to generate intelligence on operations of wildlife trafficking networks in key source and transit countries linked to Nigeria, including key trafficking areas such as the border regions between Nigeria and Cameroon and between Cameroon and Gabon. EIA have shared a total of six intelligence documents with Gabonese law enforcement agencies to date, and continue to exchange intelligence with EAGLE in Cameroon approximately twice monthly. EIA investigators undertook an investigation in Libreville, Gabon in August 2022 (independently funded), in which they met with four POIs who are actively involved in the illegal wildlife trade in the country. They also visited art and bushmeat markets and engaged with people working in the timber sector to explore the potential convergence between the illegal wildlife and illegal timber trade in the country.

Finally, EIA has produced additional communications products on pangolin scale and elephant ivory trafficking in Nigeria and West/Central Africa including:

- 1) Blog post: *Africa's hot and dusty courtrooms – a frontline in the global fight against illegal wildlife trade*¹
- 2) Podcast: *Will a new strategy on environmental crime tame Nigeria's Wild West?*²
- 3) Blog post: *Another day in court: wildlife crimes grinding too slowly through the wheels of justice in Nigeria*³

Activity 2: Enhanced government capacity and public-private sector collaboration in Nigeria to conduct financial investigations for serious and organised wildlife trafficking

EIA commissioned a financial crime expert consultant, with significant experience in the planning and implementation of financial investigations internationally, to conduct a scoping visit to Nigeria in June 2022 to meet with key officials from nine government agencies and private financial institutions. Over this week, they gained a deep insight into the needs and challenges of investigators and prosecutors in Nigerian law enforcement and found that the use or understanding of financial investigation techniques ranged from low to non-existent in the agencies consulted. This finding presents significant scope to develop the investigative skills within these agencies. By increasing the awareness of the benefits of financial investigations, this activity should increase the overall effectiveness of how these agencies prosecute wildlife trafficking offenders.

The first Financial Investigations Training Course successfully took place in Abuja from the 1st to 5th of August 2022 (funded under a complementary grant). A total of 17 participants (including 41% women) participated in the course, including investigators and prosecutors from the EFCC, NFIU, NCS, National Postal Service, NESREA and the DPP. The bespoke course took place over five full days and was based on recent real-life examples of wildlife crime cases in Nigeria and around the globe. Speakers included the EFCC Head of Legal and Prosecutions, the Head of Financial Crime from Standard Chartered Bank and a Federal High Court Judge.

Participants worked in multi-agency groups to encourage inter-agency communication and cooperation. Participants were very engaged, and EIA/ANI received glowing feedback in a post-course survey, including that they all felt they made great strides in their understanding and knowledge of financial investigations into wildlife trafficking networks. The course permitted EIA/ANI to continue to forge and cement strong connections with a number of key law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. Based on interactions with agency officials afterwards, the success of the course has greatly boosted the reputation of EIA and this project within those agencies, including at a very high levels of senior management. The full course report is included in **Annex 1**.

Activity 3: Enhanced West/Central Africa regional law enforcement cooperation and sharing of intelligence on wildlife trafficking and associated financial crime

EIA continues to gather intelligence not only about wildlife trafficking within Nigeria but also about sourcing, transportation and methods of operations of wildlife trafficking operations in neighbouring countries in West and Central Africa.

EIA will organise an inter-agency international roundtable meeting to strengthen cooperation and information sharing in the region with participants from Nigerian, Cameroon and Gabon, including from FATF-style bodies. The meeting will be used to produce an assessment on challenges for law enforcement cooperation in the region, describe existing tools for cooperation, identify case-studies for best practice as well as challenges for cooperation, and provide recommendations. Although this roundtable and the field trip to Cameroon/Gabon were originally planned for Year 2, they will be delayed to Year 3 of the project (see below for more information).

EIA and ANI staff will be attending CITES CoP19 in November 2022 in Panama. This key international conference will provide an opportunity to foster working relationships with relevant officials from West and Central African countries and identify participants for the regional roundtable meeting. During the meeting, EIA will co-host a side-event with the Nigeria CITES MA, on 'Addressing Wildlife Crime in Nigeria – Opportunities and Challenges' and EIA will also attend the 4th Global Meeting of Wildlife Enforcement Networks which will include a presentation from the West Africa Network to Combat Wildlife Crime and provide opportunities for regional cooperation and to learn from global best practice.

¹ <https://eia-international.org/blog/africas-hot-and-dusty-courtrooms-a-frontline-in-the-global-fight-against-illegal-wildlife-trade/>

² <https://eia-international.org/news/eia-podcast-will-a-new-strategy-on-environmental-crime-tame-nigerias-wild-west/>

³ <https://eia-international.org/blog/a-day-in-court-wildlife-crimes-grinding-too-slowly-through-the-wheels-of-justice-in-nigeria/>

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

EIA had originally planned two trips to West and Central Africa in the next 6 months before the end of Year 2 of the project, as set out in our budget. First, an outreach trip to Cameroon and Gabon to initiate relationships with relevant government agencies there and identify participants for the planned roundtable meeting on regional cooperation and intelligence exchange for wildlife trafficking investigations. Second, a trip to Nigeria to host the regional workshop. However, it would benefit the project to delay this outreach trip and workshop to Year 3 of the project for several reasons:

- The global COVID-19 pandemic has delayed all travel. For example, EIA were only able to visit Nigeria for the first time under this project in February 2022, and other travel under this grant and our other complementary grant from the U.S. State Department has been delayed.
- Although EIA have had difficulty in identifying suitable individuals within relevant Cameroonian and Gabonese law enforcement agencies to invite to the regional roundtable, EIA is sending a delegation to the CITES CoP19 in Panama in November 2022. This will provide a great opportunity to foster and cement working relationships with relevant officials from multiple West and Central African countries, to identify ideal participants for the regional meeting and identify suitable law enforcement participants to engage with their Nigerian counterparts.
- Nigeria, particularly Abuja, has been experiencing significant security threats, and both the U.S. and UK governments have advised against all travel to the region in the short-term.⁴ This may be connected to national elections to take place in February-March 2023.
- The Nigerian general elections will be held in early 2023 (late Year 2 of the project), and these are expected to pose a significant disruption to normal life in Nigeria. EIA have been advised by multiple Nigerian officials to avoid hosting any events in the weeks before and after the elections (25 February and 11 March 2023).

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: **Yes/ Not yet**

Formal Change Request submitted: **Yes/ Not yet, but working on it now**

Received confirmation of change acceptance **Yes/No N/A**

4a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: ██████████

4b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

N/A

⁴ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/562104-more-foreign-missions-in-nigeria-raise-security-alarm.html>