**WOMEN, GIRLS AND THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT**

**WWF’s response to call for inputs by UN Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment**

13th October 2022

1. *How are the climate, pollution, and biodiversity crises adversely impacting women and girls? What are the principal barriers facing these rightsholders’ realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, a right that includes: clean air; a safe climate; access to safe water and adequate sanitation; healthy and sustainably produced food; non-toxic environments in which to live, work, study and play; healthy biodiversity and ecosystems; access to environmental and climate information; participation in environmental and climate decision-making processes; access to justice and an affective remedy when the aforementioned rights are violated.*

In 2021, WWF International released a report called *“Gender and Illegal Wildlife Trade: Overlooked and Underestimated”*, available online [here](https://cdn.genderandiwt.org/Gender_IWT_WWF_Report_FINAL_with_lang_options_bb2c8d37d8.pdf), which provides the first synthesis and assessment of the gendered dynamics of the global illegal wildlife trade. Illegal wildlife trade, which is a major transnational organized crime, is a major threat to biodiversity, development, and human rights. The report highlights that Illegal Wildlife Trade can further exacerbate existing gender inequalities, and disproportionately affect women and girls. Sexual exploitation, prostitution of women and sex trafficking facilitate personal and commercial IWT transactions on local to global scales.

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| **Case study 1: rape, prostitution and STDs: Illegal logging in Madagascar**  Illegal logging of rare timber in Madagascar accelerated catastrophically after 2009. Commercial-scale illegal logging, unlike animal poaching, is usually characterized by an influx of large numbers of temporary male workers, who establish medium-to-long-term encampments in the forests or swell the population of previously small, isolated villages and towns.  A TRAFFIC investigation revealed the staggering gendered social costs of the incursions of large numbers of mostly young men: rape, prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases and, no doubt, unwanted pregnancies. (Abortion is illegal in Madagascar, and harshly punished.) Between October 2013 and January 2014, the illegal harvest in the Masoala Park and a section of the Makira Park was accompanied by the arrival of thousands of migrants arriving from all over Madagascar into the municipalities of Ambohitralanana and Ampanavoana in particular. The same scenario recurred between June and September 2014. These temporary migrations [of men] increased the level of insecurity and criminal activity directed against the local populations, e.g. increased drug and/or alcohol consumption among boys, rape of girls or increase in prostitution. For example, between 40% and 50% of girls over 12 years of age dropped out of school to engage in prostitution …. In the commune of Ambohitralanana, about one third (3 out of 10) of the girls aged over 14 engaged in prostitution during the periods of heightened timber exploitation (Ratsimbazafy et al. 2016).[[1]](#footnote-1) This TRAFFIC study is one of the only IWT-sector reports to directly document the sexual political economy of IWT. Reports of sexual exploitation of women and minors associated with illegal logging come additionally from Peru and South Sudan (Castañeda Camey et al. 2020).[[2]](#footnote-2) The convergence of (typically) limited governance, a male labourer influx setting up durable if impermanent camps and gender inequality set the stage for sex trafficking, labour trafficking and sexual exploitation and violence integral to the IWT activities. |

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| **Case study 2: Seasonal transactional sex in the poaching economy of Kafue National Park**  A seasonal poaching pattern around the Kafue National Park in Zambia is predicated on a complex sexual political economy. Single female heads of households, including widows, amongst the most economically precarious, tend to live on the outskirts of villages, near the park but in somewhat remote settings. The male poachers, some subsistence, some commercialized, strike up agreements to rent rooms from these women during their temporary poaching visits. Providing housing is one of the only sources of income for marginalized women in the region. The men pay rent in money or meat; in return, they get housing and expect to have sex with their host. Women are incentivized to keep this arrangement secret because of the fear and shame of being labelled as prostitutes – and, no doubt, also the fear of losing the income should it become publicly known. The collusion in secrecy between male poachers and female hosts protects the male poacher. It also prevents scrutiny of the levels of coercion and violence that might attend some of the ‘plus-sex’ housing expectations. Game Rangers International staff who have informal knowledge of this system report that the poaching regions have high rates of HIV/AIDS, STDs and unwanted pregnancies; data is not available. |

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| **Case study 3: Sex for fish**  In most places, gender norms prohibit women from fishing in boats. This prohibition dovetails with the greater resource and economic clout of men, the narrowing of livelihood options for women with climate change and poaching-driven ecosystem instability, and sexploitation\* to produce ‘fish for sex’ schemes now common in East Africa in both inland and marine fishing systems (UNEP 2016). One observer described this convergence in Lake Victoria: Fishermen have the power to pick which woman will unload their catch, and in return for this work, they pay the women with a portion of the fish – how much fish is fair payment is at the fisher’s discretion. Women use the payment of fish for their own processing businesses, where they dry for resale as a final product. To get work unloading fish and receive a portion of the catch for their processing businesses, women must pay the fishermen (equivalent of US$4) for the right to work for them in addition to having sex with them. This exploitative process is a daily transaction; many women I spoke to confided that this relationship only guarantees them work for the day – they must establish a new relationship with a different fisher each day. This practice has led to high rates of sexually transmitted infections as well as gender-based violence along the shores of Lake Victoria. One study of fish workers in Zambia (Béné et al. 2007) recorded that 31% of the women fish traders had an institutionalized fish-for-sex relationship. Women’s efforts to organize their own fishing schemes to short-circuit fish-for-sex exploitation have been met with success, scepticism, and in some instances, new bribery demands, this time from male authorities. |

The costs and benefits of poaching, trafficking and consuming wildlife are different for men and women, as are the costs and benefits of curbing or ending IWT. While women and girls are at risk of being disproportionately impacted by wildlife trade, not paying sufficient attention to their specific situations and needs in counter-IWT responses can also further disproportionately impact them. Recent research has shown for instance that women may disproportionately suffer from efforts to tackle IWT when they are criminalised and sentenced to prison sentences for having in their possession poached meat or goods that their male relatives gave them.

Another example is the hyper-masculinized enforcement actors (law enforcement, rangers, transnational crime-fighting entities), which being predominantly men, can pose a risk to women and girls’ safety, as it heightens the risk of enforcement through violent means, potentially extending to criminal acts involving sexual abuse. On global average, women comprise 3-11% of the ranger workforce (Seager et al. 2021; Belecky et al. 2019). Parallel general analyses of staffing of protected areas point to similar gender dynamics (Hill Rojas et al. 2001; Aguilar et al. 2004; Gonzales 2007; Badola et al. 2014;[[3]](#footnote-3) CPAM 2020)

Highly armed enforcement:

* Draws on, privileges, and reinforces a macho stereotype of being a ranger (which in itself is an unhealthy stereotype for men) that excludes women at the same time as it puts men in considerable danger.
* Reinforces cultural attitudes about women – that they are unsuited for work that involves heavy arms, which is almost everywhere seen to contravene gender norms of femininity.
* Escalates the potential for violence between different ranger teams (e.g., community patrol teams and ranger patrol teams) as well as between rangers and communities.
* Can lead to less effective conservation, alienating communities from ranger teams (which then makes it even harder to recruit women) (Duffy 2014, 2019). Male-dominant enforcement actors, particularly at the ranger-community level, are less likely to have the full confidence of female community members (Belecky et al. 2019, Seager et al. 2021).
* Is likely to lead to escalation in the lethality of ‘domestic’ violence as more guns circulate in communities and are kept in households (Braga et al. 2021;[[4]](#footnote-4) Zeoli 2018[[5]](#footnote-5)). Most of the evidence of the correlation of gun availability with escalated violence against women comes from the US, where this relationship is unmistakable – as one study concludes, “readily available firearms place women at particularly high risk of homicide at the hands of a spouse” (Bailey et al. 1997).

Furthermore, highly masculinized enforcement can sour relationships with community members who might otherwise be allies, and reduce the effectiveness of environmental protection projects. Excluding women from enforcement opportunities excludes them from gaining access to often rare income and prestige opportunities.

To date, IWT knowledge has been either gender-blind or heavily gender-skewed, without that skew being much recognized. And yet, it is crucial to better understand and take into account gender dynamics that infuse IWT and efforts to curb it. Men and women interact with their environment, biodiversity and natural resources differently. Women and men typically have different environmental knowledge and experience; this shapes knowledge about scarcity, pressures and best management practices for resources, including wildlife. Gathering information only about men or men’s activities, or only women’s, produces unhelpfully skewed knowledge.

1. If your State is one of the 156 UN Member States that recognizes the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment in law, has this right been recognized and/or interpreted in a way that clarifies the state's obligations or businesses' responsibilities with respect to the realization of rights with no discrimination based on sex and gender and other grounds?

The constitution of Madagascar recognizes this right. There are also regulations and guidelines to support the implementation of this right.

1. *What steps has your State, business, and/or organization taken to employ a gender-responsive, rights-based approach to addressing the impacts of the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises and to accelerate gender equality related to environmental decision-making processes, benefit-sharing processes, and outcomes? Please identify specific challenges that your Government, business, or organization has faced in these endeavors.*

One key challenge has been the lack of information and data available to understand the role that gender dynamics play across the IWT chain, and in responses to IWT, which means that there remains to date too little known about the disproportionate consequences, both of IWT and of counter-IWT efforts, on women and girls, including intersectional identities of race, ethnicity, class or religion.

WWF Madagascar has observed that gender-responsive, rights based approaches are mainly donor-driven as opposed being championed by the government and the private sector. There appears to be little understanding and appreciation of these approaches by business and government in addressing the climate and biodiversity crises.

1. *Please identify specific ways in which the rights of particularly marginalized or vulnerable women and/or LGBTI persons are (or should be) recognized and protected to enable the realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment without discrimination based on sex or gender. "Marginalized women" include girls; women and girls in Indigenous local community, Afro-descendant and peasant communities, older women, women and girls with disabilities, LGBTI women and girls, migrant, displaced, and refuge women and girls, unmarried, informally married and widowed women and women and girls living in protracted armed conflict. How can these populations be empowered to increase their impact as agents of positive environmental transformation?*

Member states should aim to achieve gender parity within their teams working on environmental issues, including on tackling IWT.

IWT-related NGOs have generally been slow to develop gender-informed responses to the impacts of poaching, but various initiatives highlight the possibilities: Game Rangers International provides several livelihoods programmes around Kafue National Park in Zambia to help protect women from IWT-related exploitation. They report that within four months of establishing their baking programme, women who participated doubled their household income. They are also working with men in the region to reduce human-wildlife conflict by introducing new crops that wild animals find less appealing, and have introduced veterinary care for livestock.

WWF-Madagascar has supported several communities in the northwest to allow women to join mangrove planting teams – previously not considered appropriate women’s work. Community leaders (male) report several successful outcomes of this programme: involving women in mangrove planting is easing conservation work (“double the hands makes work lighter”); involving women in mangrove management broadened the base of support for and engagement with conservation across the community; mangrove protection and planting rates have concomitantly improved, with reports of a 95% improvement in mangrove restoration since women’s involvement began. Women report that a pathway to greater gender equity goes through the mangroves: they take pride in their mangrove planting and say that now that they are doing what was previously ‘men’s work’ they get more respect (Seager 2020).

**Protecting land rights**

Several transnational projects are addressing the foundational issue of women’s land rights. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has established a “Gender and Land Rights Database” to set baseline indicators and assess the scope of the problem. Project-specific activities include a Uganda land-rights project funded by the RISE Challenge (Resilient, Inclusive, and Sustainable Environments) – an IUCN-USAID collaboration. In eastern Uganda, approximately 80 percent of women report experiencing physical and psychological violence when claiming their land rights, and only eight percent of men believe it is wrong to commit violence against women. With RISE funding, the partners are integrating SASA!, a proven methodology that addresses power imbalances between men and women to prevent and respond to Gender Based Violence (GBV), while improving land tenure and property rights in Uganda. They are training faith-based leaders and partner staff to promote positive social norms that support women’s rights to access and control land and to live free from GBV. The partners are also helping women better document their land rights by developing and training traditional leaders to use an alternative dispute resolution mechanism that takes into consideration the rights of women.

**Engaging youth**

CONNECT (Conserving Natural Capital and Enhancing Collaborative Management of Transboundary Resources) is a new programme developed collaboratively among a network of IWT-related NGOs in East Africa. It aims to increase engagement with conservation and commitment to wildlife across diverse constituencies, specifically including a focus on women and youth. A concerted effort to understand and engage young Kenyans in conservation has been particularly sophisticated in its approach to deconstructing the multifaceted demographic of ‘youth’ – making the point that ‘not all youth are the same’ and that diverse approaches will be needed to engage them with conservation. Unfortunately the sophisticated understanding that ‘not all youth are the same’ doesn’t yet appear in this programme to extend to gender differentiation.

**Media**

IWT NGOs are exploring the power of radio programming – especially to reach women – in low-media rural settings. Game Rangers International’s ‘behavioural change’ communications in Zambia identified radio as the most effective technology to reach wide audiences (GRI/IFAW 2017). In Madagascar, WWF supports organized women’s ‘radio listeners groups’; members listen to regularly scheduled conservation programmes and then hold small meetings or neighbourhood gatherings to talk with other women about what they have learned.

**Women’s self-organizing**

Increasingly, women and diverse minorities are joining together to create solidarity in wildlife conservation, and to support women and minorities to succeed in the education pipeline in fields related to conservation. These initiatives jump-start and contribute to conversations in scientific communities about increasing diversity and recognizing intersectionality (Seager 2020). Many of these groups focus on topics and issues that relate to IWT, but explicit linkages have yet to be developed. Some of these networks are now well established; some are under the aegis of an NGO; most are independent scholar and practitioner networks. Many are fledgling and under-resourced, such as the ad hoc Women for Conservation network in Namibia, a 2018 initiative of women, mostly single mothers, from six conservancies; their vision is to become a national force for conservation in Namibia (Seager 2020).

1. *What kinds of socioeconomic, cultural, legal, and/or institutional transformations would be required within your States’ national context to achieve gender parity that most directly impact environmental decision-making processes, benefit-sharing processes, and outcomes?*

Currently, men dominate in most of the major organizations that play key roles in international IWT policy: governments, NGOs, research institutions and academic sectors. The dominance of men and exclusion of women is a self-reinforcing system; but it can also be reversed, and the inclusion of women at ‘critical mass’ levels can create a virtuous cycle of further inclusion. The effect of the absence of women in decision-making about IWT and anti-IWT efforts is hard to measure, although there are assertions that “women raise issues that others overlook, support ideas that others oppose, and seek an end to abuses that others accept” (Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State).

Gender equality agendas are increasingly prominent in global high-level policy commitments, including robust commitments embedded across the SDGs. The UN and all its constituent bodies are operating under gender equality mandates. The secretariats of most of the multilateral environmental agreements have robust gender equality goals and policies. The primary entities in the lead of IWT work are substantially out of this loop. Few conservation organizations are integrating gender into their work. There is no international policy output in the IWT arena – from CITES to the state-led processes such as the London, Kasane or Hanoi Declarations – that calls for or brings in a gender lens.

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| **Input from WWF Madagascar**  At the national level, Madagascar’s Ministry of Environment makes a slight mention of gender equity in its biodiversity conservation strategy. However, the ministry has no specific resource or budget line allocated to promote this. |

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| **Example from Kenya – women’s participation in decision-making**  Women in the Maa Community have always undertaken many of the homestead responsibilities, and thus are much more heavily affected by challenges to community livelihoods as well as to human-human and human-wildlife conflicts. These women have, however, traditionally not been substantively involved in communal decision-making around the control and management of natural resources. This is slowly changing as WWF Kenya witnessed during a visit in Loita, where we were able to have a separate discussion with women representatives about their inclusion in decision-making and the specific livelihood challenges that they face in the context of changing ecological conditions.  The exclusion of women in decision-making occurs not only at the local community level, but also in relation to the public participation forums of the County Government in the Planning and Budgeting Processes. Of the women that were part of the FGD, none had participated in any public deliberation for planning and budgeting for the socio-economic development of their community. Several reasons were given for this, including the lack of access to such forums of participation as they were not held at the local level, heavy domestic burden that leaves little time for participation in such forums, limited literacy and the failure of County Government to translate critical documents into local dialects, lack of civic education to enable the women participate effectively in these forums, among other challenges. It is critical that these challenges are addressed to enable women to substantively participate in community decision-making at all levels of governance and resource management. |

1. *How can businesses best contribute to the realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, based on sex and gender? What policies or practices are already in place to ensure that business activities identify, assess, prevent, cease, mitigate, and effectively remedy adverse impacts to women’s and girls’ rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as articulated in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.*

Business actors should fulfill their duty of care obligations by assessing, preventing and mitigating gender differentiated environmental harm and human rights risks across value chains. This entails an increased responsibility to fulfil their procedural obligations, such as providing public access to information about environmental matters and enabling the participa­tion of local communities – including women, girls and other marginalised groups - affected by business operations. Businesses should keep in mind that because of intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination, different women and girls may be affected differently by business activities in view of their age, colour, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, language, literacy, access to economic resources, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, residence in a rural location, and migration, indigenous or minority status.

1. *Please share any good practices for: i) protecting women's and girl's rights to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; ii) empowering women and girls to act as positive agents of environmental justice; and iii) encouraging men and boys to act as allies in these endeavors. In addition, please highlight the work of any women or girl environmental defenders? Good practices may occur at the international, regional, national, sub-national or local levels, and may include: the implementation of measures to ensure women's participation in environmental decision-making processes; efforts to support women environmental defenders; measures to facilitate women's access to climate or biodiversity finance; gender-responsive legislation, regulations, standards, jurisprudence, plans and policies; and initiatives to increase women's access to and control over productive resources including land, forest resources, freshwater, credit, loans, and extension services. Examples that treat girls distinctly from adult women would be particularly appreciated.*

In Madagascar, UN agencies and local CSOs are implementing girls' empowerment campaigns on environmental justice. Several national contests and symposiums have also been organized in this regard. Further, awareness-raising campaigns on climate change impacts on women and girls are ongoing. However, these are limited to a small part of the country, usually where the UN agencies and CSOs are implementing projects. There are also several TV broadcasts on girls and women initiatives on climate change mitigation.

1. *What are the potential benefits of respecting, protecting and fulfilling women’s and girl’s rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment? Examples that treat girls distinctly from adult women would be particularly appreciated.*

Engaging women in conservation is a win-win for gender equality and environmental sustainability. This is not due to essentialist tropes about women being ‘nurturers’ or closer to nature, or men being essentially destructive. Rather, the social and economic structures that promote gender equality – inclusive decision-making and participation, acknowledgement of the positive effects of diversity, engaged and empowered citizenry, acknowledgement of universal human rights – are also prerequisites for environmental sustainability. Gender-integrated conservation amplifies effectiveness.

Conservation organisations should invest in the development of a gender analysis, accompanied by gender-responsive project planning and implementation, so as to not further entrench gender differences and inequalities through their actions and programmes.

1. Ratsimbazafy, C., Newton, D.J. and Ringuet, S. 2016. Timber island: The Rosewood and Ebony Trade of Madagascar. TRAFFIC [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Castañeda Camey, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. and Boyer, A.E. 2020. Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality. Wen, J. (ed.). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Badola, R., Ogra, M. and Barthwal, S. 2014. Ecodevelopment, gender, and empowerment: Perspectives from India’s protected area communities. In: Oberhauser, A.M. and Johnston-Anumonwo, I. (eds). Global Perspectives on Gender and Space: Engaging Feminism and Development. New York: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Braga, A., Griffiths, E., Sheppard, K. and Douglas, S. 2021. Firearm Instrumentality: Do Guns Make Violent Situations More Lethal? Annual Review of Criminology 4(1): 147-164. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Zeoli, A. 2018. Children, domestic violence and guns. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms. www.preventdvgunviolence.org/childrendomestic-violence-and-guns-022118.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)