



Chapter 1: The EPI's Theory of Change

The Problem

From its inception, EPI member states recognised that the threats faced by Africa's elephants are a manifestation of a much broader process of biodiversity loss. We are destroying the ecosystems which underpin human well-being and sustainable development. Since at least the early 1970s, the biodiversity and ecosystems that sustain all life have been in decline.

The main direct drivers of biodiversity loss according to the IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES, 2019) include:

1. **Changing use of sea and land** : The biggest driver of biodiversity loss is the way in which people use the land and sea.
2. **Direct exploitation of organisms** : Direct exploitation of organisms refers to how we exploit animals and plants for food and materials.
3. **Climate change** : Climate change is having a dramatic impact on our natural environment. Some species are dying out while others are having to move, due to changes in air and ocean water temperatures, weather patterns, and sea levels.

The main indirect drivers of biodiversity loss are people's disconnect with nature and the lack of value and importance of nature (IPBES, 2019).

The underlying causes include:

- a. **Market failures**, in which the price of goods and ecosystem services do not reflect the full costs of production.
- b. **Policy failures**, in which government and private policies, plans and practices do not adequately safeguard biodiversity, and where short-term economic gain is prioritised over long-term benefits, compounded by an inequitable distribution of tenure and rights.
- c. **Governance failures**, in which rules and laws are unevenly or inadequately applied and corruption prevails, resulting in an erosion of public goods.
- d. **Capacity failures** at the individual, community, institutional and systemic levels, where the ability to identify and implement approaches to biodiversity and ecosystem conservation are limited by insufficient access to knowledge, technologies and financing needed to sustain and strengthen livelihoods.



All of these drivers and underlying causes impact Africa's elephants, but it is the illegal killing of elephants for the international ivory trade that led to a dramatic overexploitation of the species, and which still threatens their long-term survival. However, during the past decade, the loss of habitat has arguably eclipsed poaching as the most important threat to elephants. Due to a rapidly growing human population and economic growth, settlements and related infrastructure are expanding, and wildlife habitat is being converted to agricultural land or grazing pastures for livestock. Elephant migration routes are being cut, dispersal areas fragmented, and connectivity lost. As people and elephants compete for land and dwindling natural resources, human-elephant conflict (HEC) has escalated, sometimes resulting in the death or injury of people and in retaliatory killing of elephants.



◀ KWS Ivory stockpile, Kenya, Martin Middlebrook

The Solution

The London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade in 2014 recognised that the illegal trade in wildlife, and associated poaching, had reached unprecedented levels. The London Conference aimed to reverse the growth of the illegal trade, including through measures to eradicate illicit markets, by ensuring effective legal frameworks and deterrents, and by strengthening enforcement and support for sustainable livelihoods and economic development. The London Conference recognised that illegal trade could only be effectively tackled if both the demand and supply sides were addressed.

As explained in the Introduction, the EPI was founded during this conference, with four objectives:

- ◇ Maintain the 1989 international moratorium on ivory trade for at least 10 years and thereafter until elephant populations were no longer threatened
- ◇ Close domestic ivory markets
- ◇ Place ivory stockpiles beyond commercial use
- ◇ Implement the 2010 African Elephant Action Plan



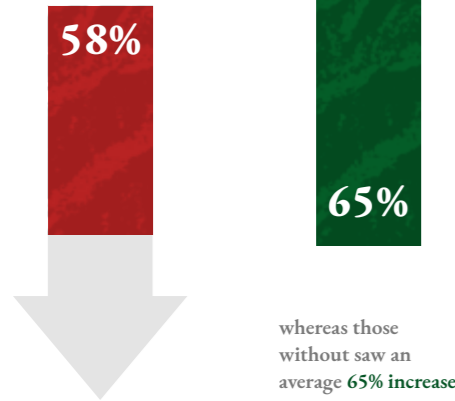
The EPI's Theory of Change for Ivory Trafficking

The Theory of Change outlined here is a holistic approach to address ivory trafficking, encompassing strategies such as the maintenance of the international moratorium on commercial ivory trade, the closure of domestic ivory markets, and prevention of the economic use of ivory stockpiles. The goal is to disrupt the entire supply chain, and to strengthen enforcement measures, which, combined with raised awareness and cultural changes, will ultimately lead to a significant decline in demand, resulting in the collapse of global ivory prices and, consequently, a reduction in poaching.

The international ban on commercial ivory trade provides the foundation for the closure of domestic markets, and helps strengthen legal frameworks and penalty systems, while improving collaborative enforcement between countries along the entire ivory value chain. In other words, it strengthens deterrence on the supply side of the trade. Moreover, the international ban sends a strong message to the public - maintaining and increasing awareness and creating social pressure - thereby also affecting the demand side of the trade. The ban can be difficult to enforce, but evidence that it has worked to reduce the demand for ivory has been well documented, with the decline of the ivory market in Japan as one of the best examples (Thomas-Walters *et al.*, 2023).

Domestic ivory markets, regardless of their legality, provide poachers and other actors in the value chain with opportunities to buy and sell ivory without oversight. Between 1989 and 2007, elephant range states with domestic ivory markets experienced a 58% decline in elephant populations on average, whereas those without saw an average 65% increase (Lemieux & Clarke, 2009). Even the presence

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of a single domestic ivory market within a given region tends to stimulate poaching and trafficking of ivory in nearby countries. Thus, the **closing of domestic ivory markets** is an important step in reducing the poaching of elephants and trafficking of ivory, but it must be accompanied by the strengthening of wildlife laws and penalties. Without sufficient deterrence, trade in ivory moves under the radar.

Placing ivory stockpiles beyond economic use is part of a broader strategy to address the root causes of elephant poaching and ivory trafficking. Sales from stockpiles perpetuate the demand for ivory and thus contribute to the decline of elephant populations. If we can keep ivory from stockpiles off the market, we also encourage the development of ethical, legal, and sustainable practices, and alternative sources of income for communities hitherto involved in the ivory trade.

The destruction of ivory stockpiles aligns with international laws and agreements, most particularly CITES, which prohibits the international commercial trade of ivory (Scanlon *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, destruction of confiscated ivory (CITES Resolution Conf. 17.8) sends a strong message that the international community condemns poaching and the trade of ivory. Although this is unlikely to discourage poachers and traffickers, it raises public awareness, thereby affecting the demand side of the trade. It informs the public about the plight

of elephants and the consequences of illegal trade, while stimulating discussions on the importance of conservation and the need to protect endangered species.¹

The purpose of the **National Elephant Action Plans (NEAPs)** is to help EPI member states identify and prioritise actions to protect, manage, and monitor their elephants in line with the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP). NEAPs are intended to present a cohesive and comprehensive body of work necessary to conserve a range state's elephants. This includes the reduction in poaching and illicit trade in ivory (Objective 3 of the 2023 revised AEAP) and strengthened international collaboration to improve law enforcement along the entire ivory value chain (Objective 6 of the AEAP), improved cooperation and collaboration with communities (Objective 7) and minimising human-elephant conflict (Objective 1). Thus, a NEAP is an overarching tool to reduce both the supply and demand sides of the ivory trade.

Last but not least is the EPI's objective to **mitigate and reduce human-elephant conflict (HEC)** in our member states, to facilitate coexistence between people and elephants, prevent death or injury to people, and reduce the retaliatory killing of elephants and poaching, as well as affecting a positive change in attitudes towards elephant conservation.

This comprehensive theory of change aims to address ivory trafficking through a multi-faceted approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of supply and demand, the importance of international cooperation and national action, and the need for sustained efforts across sectors to protect elephants and their habitats.

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CITES Secretary-General's remarks on the destruction of confiscated elephant ivory at Colombo, Sri Lanka

