WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING IN BANGLADESH: LAW ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

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Abstract- Wildlife trafficking is a multibillion-dollar industry that affects many countries in the world and Bangladesh is one of them. The country is a popular source and transit point to the trafficker. Though the government of Bangladesh has passed strict rules to discourage wildlife trafficking, the incidents of wild life trafficking is increasing constantly. Corruption, poverty, unemployment problem and geo-strategic location are the key factors which promote wild life trafficking in the country. This crime touches not only the wild flora and fauna but extends its effects to the environments, citizens, and the general state of life. However, this paper aims to explore the nature and concern of the wildlife trafficking in Bangladesh by focusing on its major drivers, responses, and challenges encountered in trying to end it. Further, the study makes recommendations that Bangladesh can implement to reduce the incidents of this problem.

Kew words- Wildlife trafficking, Corruption, Illicit Trade, Bangladesh, Flora, Fauna and Animals.

I. INTRODUCTION

Wild life trafficking is a concerning phenomenon in the present world. Globalization and technological development added new dimension to the problem. Bangladesh is one of the most affected countries in the world, which was named by the United States as a leading wildlife trafficking hub in the world (Staff Correspondent, 2017). The territory of the country is identified as a major source and transit point. The most common types of wild life trafficking are the exchange and trade of tiger skins, reptile skins, live bird, pet and different kinds of ornamental plants. The consequence of the trafficking is dire. It poses serious threats to the environment, undermine the security and law in the society. Though national and international actors are taking various initiatives to combat the issue, the trafficking is increasing alarmingly. Poverty, corruption, unemployment problem and globalization are the major factors which promotes wildlife trafficking in the country (Dey & Rabbi, 2015). Providing alternative sources of livelihood for the citizens, curbing corruption, enhancing training, and proper implementation of wild life conservation policies may reduce the problem in the country. However, The study will focus on the challenges and responses of law enforcement agencies to curb the wild life trafficking in the perspective of Bangladesh.

II. FACTORS BEHIND WILDLIFE TRAFFICIKING

There are many drivers which escalate wildlife trafficking in the country. This section aims to analyses leading factors behind wild life trafficking.

Poverty

Wildlife trafficking is a lucrative source of income to the poor people, particularly the people who live in the southern part of the country as the Soundarban, the biggest forest of the country is situated in this region. Accordingly, with widespread poverty and unemployment, people capitalize on poaching and wildlife trade as a source of their livelihood. Bangladesh is among the world's densely populated nations where a significant number of people are still living under poverty live (Islam et al., 2016). In the urban areas, the poverty level is 12.9% , while in the rural areas it is at 18.9% (Islam et al., 2016). With this large population, many people are jobless and live in poverty. Bangladesh's unemployment rate as of 2017 was 4.20% (Islam et al., 2016). Indeed, the poor and unemployed harvest wildlife for sale because wildlife trade is regarded as a lucrative and attractive livelihood option. This is because the business requires low technical and fiscal requirement for entry while offering quick rewards. The democratic gains are attributed to the freely accessible nature of the wildlife resources.

However, while this is the case, it is pivotal to note that the relationship between wealth, poverty, and wildlife trafficking is complex (Chen, 2016). The complication arises because not all wildlife harvesters are poor. Additionally, the poor who participate in this trade may not necessarily have poverty as their motivator in this trade. In many cases, the farmers are outsider wealthy trade merchants who use the poor to meet their desired economic ends.

Corruption

Additionally, corruption continues to facilitate wildlife trafficking as smugglers offer bribes to law enforcement officers to allow them to transport wildlife in and out of Bangladesh (Roy, 2015). Focusing on how wildlife trafficking takes place reveals that corruption is a key facilitator of the illegal wildlife trade (Wyatt et al., 2017). Corruption plays a crucial role in the packing of ivory, reptile skins, horns, and live animals to markets in Asian countries (Wittig, 2016). Corrupted governance and structures allow room for wildlife trafficking to take place and reduce the execution of reduction measures. The term corruption has no clear definition but it

refers to acts, such as abuse of power, patronage, bribery, and abuse of diplomatic cover and permit. While bribery refers to giving out money for the recipient to ignore or allow an act to be undertaken, patronage involves turning a blind eye to actions of individuals who are connected through friendship or family (Wyatt et al., 2017). A clear example of how patronage works is a case where rhinoceros ranch owners collude with poachers and veterinarians and then share the profits generated by the sale of rhinoceros horns. Moreover, diplomatic immunity has also been abused to smuggle wildlife into and out of the country. The status of official diplomatic positions makes it almost impossible to stop trafficking since it is difficult to uncover wildlife smuggling by individuals with diplomatic immunity.

Available Diverse Markets

Wildlife trade involves many markets, each with its drivers and dynamics. The supply of wildlife products changes in response to the changing demands of wildlife products by the consumers (Phelps, Biggs, & Webb, 2016). A huge black market for wildlife products exists across the globe. Asia has some of the largest markets for elephant tusks and reptile skins in the world. (Wittig, 2016). Besides, there are new emerging markets for species that formally have never been very valuable. For example, in Bangladesh, the demand for tiger parts, elephant tusks and other wildlife products is increasing day by day. There are some markets in Cox's Bazar, a tourist city of the country, where wildlife products are sold openly. These products are used for home décor. The increased demand for these parts has led to increased trade on tigers and other animals (Phelps, Biggs & Webb, 2016).

III. IMPACT OF WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

Wildlife trafficking is the crime that involves not only the wild flora and fauna but extends its dire effects to the environments, human inhabitants, and the general state of life. There is extinction and endangering of some species which affect eco system negatively. Some animal species are reducing because of illegal poaching. For example, tigers have cut to barely 100 in Bangladesh, while leopards are also going to extinct (Islam, eta, 2016). Such extinction robs the country's prestige and tourist attractions. Moreover, it threatens the security of the country and undermines the rule of law. It opens up the country to both, external and internal criminals. There is the rampant proliferation of small arms and light weapons that people use in poaching the wild animals. This illegal use of arms put the country's security state in a fragile condition (Howlader & Chowdhury, 2017). The weapons not only heighten the cases of crime rates in the county but also increase the number of criminal gangs and other related elements that hamper social and economic growth.

Wildlife trafficking fuels corruption in a country, thus hampering economic and social progress. It is worth noting that wildlife is a single tourist attraction element leading to a nation earning foreign exchange (Baaniya, 2017). Therefore, extinction of wildlife species reduces the number of tourists and the foreign exchange income. Additionally, wildlife trade contributes to the spread of different diseases while robing the local communities of their natural resource bases.

IV. INITIATIVES/RESPONSES

With the above adverse implications of wildlife trade, several measures are essential to address the problem of wildlife trade. To begin with, the government of Bangladesh has launched a separate wildlife crime prevention wing (Baaniya, 2017). The wing has the mandate to handle all wildlife crime. Secondly, there is continual regional collaboration and interdepartmental coordination with law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh to combat illegal commerce on wildlife.

Workforce training has also empowered the wildlife law enforcement officers in the country. There was an ICCWC support workshop on CITES and a two-day training on world life law enforcement in 5-7th October 2015 (Islam et al., 2016). In these training, experts from CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, WCO, and the Bangladesh forest department offered training to 32 officers from the forest department (Islam et al., 2016). There are also efforts for fund drives. For example, the Bangladesh forest department in 2015 mobilized funds available for Regional Corporation for wildlife protection project. This is a project that receives funding from the World Bank. The project aims at amplifying its community law enforcement to eliminate wildlife crime and trade.

Additionally, the government of Bangladesh together with Nepal and Bhutan has partnered in SRCWP project that aims at conservation of wildlife and addressing the problem of poaching. Establishment of wildlife crime control unit (WCCU) in Bangladesh is another response (De Lima & Green, 2017). The unit has forensic laboratories, legal support, and wildlife crime control groups. The critical mission here is to execute the Bangladesh wildlife (conservation) act of 2012 (Islam et al., 2016). The unit has 24 hours hotline for reporting wildlife-related crimes.

It is also essential that the enactment of the Bangladesh wildlife Act of 2012 is a response to wildlife trafficking. The act illegalized wildlife trade and stipulated the penalties that accrue to this type of business. Besides, Bangladesh is the leading South Asian nation in the process of implementing and expecting the Wildlife Crime Analytical Toolkit (De Lima & Green, 2017). UNODC and ICCWC developed the above with the aim of promoting wildlife and environmental conservation and protection.

Moreover, there is the partnership between Bangladesh forestry department, four universities, and other non-governmental organizations to protect flagship species (Ibanga, 2017). The endangered species addressed in this partnership include tigers, elephants, marine turtles, saltwater crocodile, and water birds among others.

Additionally, there is a tiger census program. The program supports census of Bengal tigers that inhabit the sunder ban region of Bangladesh. The registration occurs through camera trapping. The cameras have thermal and motion detecting sensors (Ibanga, 2017). Also, there was the mapping of the routes of elephant corridors and two significant areas where human-elephant conflict was rampant. An intensive study is ongoing to establish pilot projects to address the conflict.

Moreover, there is a tiger action plan (2009-2017) in response to trafficking concerns (Ibanga, 2017). The National Tiger Recovery Program recorded a successful implementation in the country since 2010 (Ibanga, 2017). Also, a memorandum of understanding between Bangladesh and India on the conservation of the sunder band in 2011 promoted protection efforts (Ibanga, 2017). In the same year, the two countries signed a bilateral protocol on the protection of the royal Bengal tigers of the sunder buns (Ibanga, 2017).

Other responses include the draft laws, such as the biodiversity and community knowledge protection act, plant variety protection act, the medicinal plant protection act, and the pet and caged birth import and export guidelines (Ibanga, 2017). Besides, the initiation of the zoo act, the PA rule, and the Quarantine Act are part of Bangladesh's response to wildlife trafficking. Other policies include the compensation policy for wildlife victims (2010), the Elephant rearing policy of 2011, and the Co-management formation policy of 2011.

CHALLENGES

Despite the above initiatives, Bangladesh still faces some challenges in curbing wildlife trade. Combating wildlife trafficking is one of the most challenging tasks that the country faces. The transitional nature of the wildlife trade makes its control a complex task (Challender & MacMillan, 2014). No single country across the globe can curb illegal wildlife trade on its own. For example, tiger and elephant hunting happens in Bangladesh; hidden storage facilities exist in India; and then the trade occurs outside Asia (Challender & MacMillan, 2014). This situation makes the control and curbing of wildlife trade a challenging multicounty responsibility (Challender & MacMillan, 2014). In this case, even if Bangladesh passes laws and policies to control wildlife trade without the cooperation of other countries, wildlife trade will still thrive in the nation.

Another challenge is poor coordination among wildlife law enforcement agencies. There is generally poor comprehension of policy enforcement among the enforcement officers and personnel. It is worth noting that wildlife is an open treasury that is free and has limited access (Challender & MacMillan, 2014). Accordingly, lack of enough workforce and infrastructure within the agencies of enforcement and awareness complicates wildlife trade control. Also, the prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution processes of wildlife traders are long and lacking integrity.

Furthermore, there is no social stigma attached to poachers and wildlife traffickers. In fact, local communities glorify poachers and treat them as heroes. Accordingly, even communities living close to wildlife resources regard wildlife as a healthy alternative source of livelihood. Corruption is another challenge affecting wildlife tracking control in Bangladesh. Curbing illegal trade on wildlife products is an uphill task because of institutionalized corruption (Williams, DParry-Jones, & Roe, 2016). The corrupt institutions make it hard to protect wildlife as security officers partner with cross-border smugglers to transit the poached and captured animals to other markets (Fatima, J2017). Also, the jury is subject to bribery in exchange for a biased verdict in favor of the traders. There may also be delays in the court proceedings, rendering the traders their freedom to partake in the illegal trade.

RECOMMANDATIONS

Based on the above discussion, the following are the proposed actions that can help in the curbing of wildlife trafficking in Bangladesh.

There is the need for the government to provide alternative sources of livelihood to combat poverty. Given its large population, the government should come up with various means and ways to help the unemployed get a source of income. These can include promoting self-employment and small-scale business. Also, technical course and talent promotion should form part of the ways to improve economic gains. This will reduce unemployment and crime, therefore, decreasing poaching and trade on related products.

Also, the Bangladesh government should criminalize corruption and adequately implement the wildlife protection strategies and policies in the country (Williams, DParry-Jones, & Roe, 2016). Corruption curbing will also reduce the black market of wildlife products (Williams, DParry-Jones, & Roe, 2016). It is worth noting that Bangladesh is among the countries in the world with the best wildlife protection and conservation strategies and policies. However, it is among the leading wildlife transit nations globally. This implies that the plan and systems exist in documents, but their execution faces challenges. Factors, such as the corruption chain in the country

and poverty are the challenges that impact the implementation of the plans (Williams, DParry-Jones, & Roe, 2016). It is in this context that it is recommended that the nation should embark on effectively operationalizing its policies. An adequate workforce is important in the wildlife department. Besides, the addition of the number of security agencies and officers is necessary, especially along the borders to monitor and eliminate wildlife products smuggling in and out of the country. Alongside, there should be control of the piracy menace in Bangladesh. More training on wildlife law enforcement and amplified awareness on the significance of conserving wildlife require keen focus. Additionally, there is the need for bilateral, regional, and global cooperation and partnership in the fight against wildlife trafficking. The international collective efforts are important because the trade is transnational, and therefore, need arises of combined initiatives of all countries across the world to curb it.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, wildlife trafficking refers to the illegal trade of wildlife products both, fauna and flora. However, while the above is the case, in many instances, the animals are the primary victims of this trade. Wildlife trafficking is a crime both, locally and internationally. In Bangladesh, the major causes of wildlife trafficking include poverty and unemployment, increased demand for wildlife products across the markets in the world, the pirates in the country, and corruption. The significant animals for trade include the tigers and the elephants as well as the water birds among others. Wildlife trafficking' impacts include loss of lives, declining economic growth, extinction of some animal species such as the leopards and security fragility in the country. Also, it exposes the local communities to disease and robs them of their environmental glory.

There are several intervention strategies for curbing wildlife trade in the country. These include bilateral and regional partnerships, enactment of wildlife laws and policies, training of the native life enforcement agencies, and the census programs on wildlife animals such as the tigers. However, in spite of these measures, there are some challenges, such as the free nature of wildlife products and easy access to them, the chain of corruption in the county, the transitional nature of wildlife trade, and poor coordination among the wildlife agencies that hamper effective wildlife protection. It is recommended that the government of Bangladesh provides alternative sources of livelihood, curbs corruption, intensifies training, and adequately executes its wildlife conservation policies.

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