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A Global Model for the Fight on Wildlife Crime

The success of the ASEAN-WEN and its national taskforces is catalyzing replication in Asia and beyond.



Through intelligence-sharing and cross-border cooperation, Thai authorities captured smuggled tigers from neighboring country. / Photo: Royal Thai Police

Through USAID assistance, the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network has established the conditions for a dramatic strengthening of the global response to illegal wildlife trade.

The illegal wildlife trade is an immediate threat to Southeast Asia's biodiversity, natural resources, and environment. It threatens species including tigers, rhinos, and elephants. The multi-billion dollar illegal market in wildlife has spawned criminal syndicates with global reach and negative implications for national security and economic wellbeing. These networks also spread disease by illegally importing animal products.

Rich in biodiversity and with rapidly developing populations and infrastructure, Southeast Asia has become a hotspot for these illegal market activities. With the region's biological diversity declining at an alarming rate, there is a pressing need for concerted regional efforts against wildlife crime.

USAID and the U.S. Department of State funded a program to help the Southeast Asian governments design and launch the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) to coordinate regional responses to wildlife crime. This USAID-supported program has since set the standard for national and regional responses to wildlife crime in ten ASEAN countries. In May 2010, several South Asian countries agreed to replicate ASEAN-WEN and form its own network, SA-WEN.

U.S. Government support has helped develop ASEAN-WEN through a three-pronged strategic approach: building capacity of governments to combat wildlife crime; strengthening the regional network; and raising awareness and increasing civil society participation.

Substantive intergovernmental and cross-border efforts to control wildlife crime did not exist before ASEAN-WEN. Now, wildlife law enforcement is increasing throughout the region. The capacity building effort is yielding results: actions by ASEAN authorities increased by 60% during 2010, including 160 related arrests and 28 convictions. It has also resulted in the recovery of illegal wildlife worth over \$15.3 million and the dismantling of four wildlife trafficking syndicates by program-trained task forces in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Along with South Asia, Central America has also initiated steps to replicate the WEN model.