



**FORESTRY**

**MAPPING THE IMPACT OF ILLICIT TRADE  
ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

## ABOUT THE REPORT

On 18 July 2019, the Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade (TRACIT) in collaboration with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) organized a forum to discuss the role of illicit trade in inhibiting positive development outcomes and in particular, the implications for the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The event featured the launch of TRACIT's report, *Mapping the Impact of Illicit Trade on the UN Sustainable Development Goals*.

The TRACIT report investigates illicit trade in 12 key sectors that participate significantly in international trade and are most vulnerable to illicit trade. For each sector, the negative impacts of illicit trade are mapped against the 17 UN SDGs. The sectors include: agri-foods, agro-chemicals and pesticides, alcohol, counterfeit and pirated goods, forestry, IUU fishing, petroleum, pharmaceuticals, precious metals and gemstones, tobacco products, trafficking in persons and illicit trade in wildlife.

This document excerpts the chapter on "SDGs and illicit trade in forestry products"

## ABOUT TRACIT

The Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade (TRACIT) is an independent, private sector initiative to drive change to mitigate the economic and social damages of illicit trade by strengthening government enforcement mechanisms and mobilizing businesses across industry sectors most impacted by illicit trade.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

The full report, Executive Summary and the sector specific chapter excerpts can be found at: [www.tracit.org/publications\\_illicit-trade-and-the-unsdgs](http://www.tracit.org/publications_illicit-trade-and-the-unsdgs)

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# SDGs AND ILLICIT TRADE IN FORESTRY PRODUCTS



# INTRODUCTION

## Illicit trade and the UN SDGs

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lay out an ambitious set of 17 goals to address the world's most acute economic, social and environmental challenges. They cover everything from poverty eradication and zero hunger to clean water, decent jobs and peace. Since coming into effect in January 2016, governments, private sector and civil society have rallied around the SDGs to guide policy, implement investment strategies and allocate funding.

Among the portfolio of tools available to achieve the SDGs is the expansion of international trade.<sup>1</sup> This is because trade has historically proven to be an engine for development, boosting income generating capacity and contributing to unprecedented reductions in poverty levels.<sup>2</sup> Over the last few decades cross-border trade has expanded significantly, supporting rising living standards across the globe.

At the same time, the expansion in *legal* trade has been accompanied by the alarming emergence of *illicit* trade, with estimates quantifying it and associated transnational criminal activities at between 8 and 15 percent of global GDP.<sup>3</sup>

From smuggling, counterfeiting and tax evasion, to the illegal sale or possession of goods, services, humans and wildlife, illicit trade is compromising the attainment of the SDGs in significant ways, crowding out legitimate economic activity, depriving governments of revenues for investment in vital public services, dislocating millions of legitimate jobs and causing irreversible damage to ecosystems and human lives.

## Mapping illicit trade against the SDGs

Despite the recognition of international trade as an important means to achieve the SDGs, insufficient attention has been given to the substantial impact that illicit trade has on holding back progress.

In order to help governments and business better understand how their efforts to achieve sustainable development must account for the negative forces of illicit trade, this study maps the 17 UN SDGs against the following sectors: agri-foods, alcohol, fisheries, forestry, petroleum, pharmaceuticals, precious metals and gemstones, pesticides, tobacco, wildlife and all forms of counterfeiting and piracy. These sectors were chosen because they participate significantly in international trade and they are particularly vulnerable to illicit trade. Trafficking in persons is also examined as a particularly abhorrent phenomenon affecting supply chains and basic human rights as well as contributing to illicit trade practices.

To the extent that an SDG—or one of the 169 targets established to track progress on the goals—is impacted by illicit trade, this study examines where and how illicit activity undermines progress to achieve it. In some cases, illicit activity is mapped against an overall goal, such as SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). In other cases, a specific target has been examined, such as SDG Target 8.7 (Eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking).

## Key findings from the report

The socio-economic impacts of illicit present significant deterrence to all 17 of the SDGs—holding back progress, increasing costs and pushing achievement of the goals further away.

There are notable “macro” impacts where illicit trade cuts deeply across many of the SDGs, undermining achievement of the economic goals for poverty reduction, decent jobs and economic growth (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4 & 8), and robbing governments of taxable income that can be invested in public services (SDGs 9 & 17). When it generates revenue for organized criminal and terrorist groups, illicit trade undermines goals for peace and stability (SDG 16). Most forms of illicit trade plunder natural resources (SDGs 6, 14 & 15), abuse supply chains and ultimately expose consumers to fake and potentially harmful products (SDG 12).

While findings show that illicit trade poses a threat to all 17 SDGs, nowhere is the nexus as evident than in SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).



Illicit trade—in all its forms—stands in direct juxtaposition to SDG 16, by feeding violence and breeding corruption, undermining trust in institutions and the rule of law, and generating enormous illicit financial flows.

Moreover, the links between illicit trade and organized crime are well established, from human trafficking networks and tobacco smuggling, to fuel theft by drug cartels and the involvement of the mafia and organized criminal groups in the trade of counterfeit products. Perhaps most frightening are links to terrorist financing that heighten threats to national and global security.



All types of illicit trade threaten inclusive economic growth and significantly hinder achievement of SDG 8. Lost taxes rob governments of revenues intended for schools, infrastructure and other public services. Illegal and unfair competition reduces sales and dampens the ability of companies to create lasting and dignified job opportunities. Taken together, economic leakages across the sectors susceptible to illicit trade create an annual drain on the economy of US\$2.2 trillion and present a triple threat to financing the necessary “billions to trillions” dollar gap needed to reach the SDGs.

## Business is a partner for achieving the SDGs

As illicit trade weakens the viability and sustainability of industries, it simultaneously dilutes private sector contributions to achieving the SDGs. For example, illicit trade is a form of unfair competition that undermines private sector contributions to economic growth and employment. It chokes off market growth, sabotages global supply chains, squanders natural resources and endangers market security. Fake products and inferior materials in supply chains harm consumers and tarnish consumer perception of a corporation's social responsibility (CSR) performance. In some cases, it poses significant threats to the safety and security of personnel and facilities, all adding to the increasing costs of doing business. Where proliferating illicit trade creates socio-economic instability, it dampens private sector investment, holds back research and development (R&D) and discourages technology transfer.

For these reasons, the private sector has a vital interest in defending against illicit trade, helping itself across industry sectors and playing an active role in promoting the SDGs.



The Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade (TRACIT) provides a platform for business and governments to collaborate holistically to mitigate the incumbrance of illicit trade on the SDGs. Mapping the impacts of illicit trade on the UN Sustainable Development Goals is part of TRACIT's contribution to the partnership approach embodied in SDG 17 and a means by which business, the public sector and civil society—working in partnership—can more effectively achieve the SDGs.

# SDGs AND ILLICIT TRADE IN FORESTRY PRODUCTS

The estimated annual retail value of illegal logging is US\$52 to 157 billion, making it the world's most profitable natural resource crime, with knock-on effects of reducing government tax revenue on sales and exports.<sup>1</sup> Illegal logging and illicit trade in timber undermines sustainable economic growth, economic development and environmental conservation. It not only puts the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities at risk, but also undermines legitimate commerce within the forestry sector by distorting timber markets and reducing profitability.

The forest industry needs a stable business environment to make the long-term investments necessary to ensure the supply of raw material. Illegal logging and trade in illicit timber undermine incentives for the private sector to invest in sustainable forest management, as the presence of illegal timber distorts global markets and affects the competitiveness of legitimate producers who operate in compliance with national and international environmental and trade rules.

Notably, it is only in the past decade that illegal logging and trade in illegal timber has been recognized as a global criminal problem by international organizations and law enforcement agencies.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, forestry crime has not generated nearly as much official scrutiny or media coverage as trafficking in drugs, humans and weapons.

Slowly consumer awareness is growing and the public is becoming increasingly aware of environmental and sustainability risks and is demonstrating greater concern in the origins of the products they buy and the processes that go into making them. This trend is increasingly being reflected in business operations, where companies seek to ensure that the wood and paper-based products they sell are legal, responsibly-sourced, and sustainable – thereby demonstrating corporate social responsibility and commitment to addressing negative impacts on climate change and biodiversity arising from deforestation.

Combatting illegal logging and illicit trade in timber is consequently a business imperative and an environmental imperative for responsible corporations operating in the forest sector.

## What is illegal logging and illicit timber trade?

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) broadly defines illegal logging and related timber trade as including “all practices related to the harvesting, processing and trading of timber inconsistent with national and sub-national law.”<sup>3</sup> This definition also may be extended to include violations of ratified international treaties and conventions.

Such practices include, for instance, operating under a license that has been obtained illegally (e.g., involving corruption or collusion), logging in protected areas, exceeding permitted harvest quotas, processing logs without the necessary licenses, tax evasion and exporting products without paying export duties.” The definition also encompasses “related trade” when timber-based products are exported or imported in contravention to import or export laws.

## Impact of illicit trade in forestry products on achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Illicit trade in the forestry sector directly impacts several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Forests cover 30 percent of the Earth's surface. In addition to providing food security and shelter, forests are essential to combating climate change, protecting biodiversity, supporting economic development, future employment opportunities, and the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people—many of whom live in developing countries.<sup>4,5</sup>

The illegal forestry industry impacts achievement of seven SDGs:

- SDG 1 (no poverty);
- SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth);
- SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities);
- SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production);
- SDG 13 (climate action);
- SDG 15 (life on land); and
- SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

## Social and economic development



A well-functioning and sustainably managed forest sector plays an important part in the surrounding local economy, providing an anchor for economic development, employment opportunities and public sector tax revenues, thereby contributing to SDG 1 (end poverty) and SDG 8 (productive employment and decent work for all). Forest products also supply more than 20 percent of the household income for local families in developing countries, thereby supporting rural livelihoods and poverty reduction.<sup>6</sup>

These benefits are, however, threatened by serious and increasingly sophisticated illegal logging and illicit timber trade. According to UNEP and INTERPOL, forestry crimes such as illegal logging generate an estimated US\$51 to 152 billion in illicit revenues



that are unaccounted for and untaxed in the legitimate economy. This compares to the total annual global official development assistance (ODA) commitments of about US\$135 billion,<sup>7</sup> and highlights the magnitude of financial losses that could be ascribed more beneficially. Moreover, lost government tax revenues of between US\$9 to 26 billion per year<sup>8</sup> deprives developing economies of billions in public resources and squandered development opportunities, while yielding a massive windfall of profits to criminals and corrupt government officials.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the fleeting, unsustainable nature of illegal logging, good and reliable employment opportunities are precluded, undermining SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) in four ways:

- The forestry sector employs some 13.7 million formal workers,<sup>10</sup> but according to the World Bank, an additional 41 million people work *informally* in the timber sector.<sup>11</sup> In the EU alone, forest-based industries provide nearly 3.5 million jobs. Small- and medium- forest enterprises (SMFEs) are the primary source of forest sector employment in most developing countries, accounting for 80 to 90 percent of formal and informal employment in all forest enterprises.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, legalizing the sizeable illicit portion of the logging business has the potential to create millions of legitimate employment opportunities.
- Unsustainable forest practices leave large areas deforested, barren and unable to renew harvests for decades. Consequently, local employment opportunities are lost forever.
- Forest work is one of the most hazardous industrial sectors globally. While the companies engaged in sustainable and legal timber trade regularly implement sustainability requirements on human and labor rights, occupational health and safety, environmental commitments, and responsible business practices,<sup>13</sup> illicit actors show little regard for secure and safe employment opportunities, undermining SDG Target 8.8 (protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environment for all workers).
- Illegal logging and illicit timber trade also threaten jobs within the tourism industry, valued at 5 to 10 percent of national economies, when protected forests and animal habitats are damaged.<sup>14</sup>

## Environmental impact



Deforestation and forest degradation – often driven by illegal logging and the clandestine profits from illicit timber trade – disrupt and undermine nations’ efforts to address climate change and sustainable forest governance.

Deforestation and forest degradation contribute more than 17 percent of all man-made greenhouse gas emissions, more than the emissions from the world's entire transport sector.<sup>15</sup> The impact of illegal logging on carbon emissions is particularly profound in tropical regions, where deforestation accounts for 10 to 20 percent of global carbon emissions.<sup>16</sup> Illegal logging accounts for 50 to 90 percent of all forestry activities in key producer tropical forests, such as those of the Amazon Basin, Central Africa and Southeast Asia, making illicit trade in forestry a primary malefactor in the fight against climate change.<sup>17</sup>

Forests also play an important role as "carbon sinks" in climate systems through carbon dioxide absorption. Forests absorb 2.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide each year, which by comparison is equal to about one-third of the carbon dioxide released from the burning of fossil fuels.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, forests are crucial in achieving SDG 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts). In a testament to the importance of forests to mitigating climate change, many countries have included them in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) submitted under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, with several of these INDCs specifying sustainable forest management practices.<sup>19</sup>

Illegal logging also represents a significant threat to SDG Target 11.4 (protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage). For example, only three years after being listed as a World Heritage site, Madagascar's Rainforests of the Atsinanana acquired UNESCO "in danger" status in 2010, due to illegal logging of ebony and rosewood.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of sustainable forest management practices is also identified by SDG Target 12.2 (sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources) and SDG Target 15.2 in particular, which calls for promoting the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halting deforestation and restoring degraded forests.

Forests supply vital services, such as buffering effects of extreme weather such as floods, drought and landslides. Forests also protect the environment by preserving the soil, minimizing erosion, purifying water, protecting aquifers, improving air quality, absorbing carbon, mitigating climate change, and preserving biodiversity. However, forests can only play those roles if they are managed well and fairly.

## Sustainability and consumer awareness on sustainable choices



The infiltration of illegally sourced timber into the legal wood trade also impedes the achievement of SDG Target 12.6 (encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability) and SDG Target 12.8 (ensure the public have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development in harmony with nature). However, industry efforts to achieve these goals—through education, public awareness and programs to control illegal timber—are undercut by sophisticated criminals who shift goods between the illegal and the legal worlds to give the timber the appearance of legality and legitimacy. This allows illegally sourced timber to enter the legitimate supply chain as “clean” wood, circumventing national legislation aimed at prohibiting both the import and processing of illegally logged timber, and maximizing the criminals’ profits. This process, facilitated by large-scale corruption and criminal networks, ensures that both companies and consumers—despite conscious efforts to purchase sustainably—are largely unaware of the illegal origins of the goods.

## Peace, justice and strong institutions

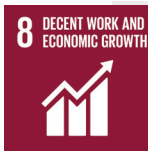


Illegal logging and organized forest crime generate billions in illicit profits for criminals, who are also involved in money laundering, tax fraud and tax evasion, and other forms of trafficking.<sup>21 22 23</sup> Corruption is entrenched in illegal logging operations, with a wide range of people involved at all stages of the supply chain, from field officers to high-level representatives (e.g. to obtain logging permits, to avoid controls, and to export and import illegal timber).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, some non-state armed groups, terrorist groups and criminal networks finance their criminal activities by exploiting forestry resources in conflict areas. A 2016 study by INTERPOL and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) found links between forestry crime and drug trafficking, especially in Latin America, as well as links between the illegal charcoal trade in Africa and non-state armed groups and terrorist organizations.<sup>25</sup> As noted by the study, “the involvement of terrorist organizations and armed groups in illegal logging and associated crimes also suggests human rights abuses, which are inherent in the methods used by these groups.”<sup>26</sup>

# CONCLUSIONS



Robs the surrounding local economy of its anchor for economic development, employment and tax revenues that could be used for public investment.



Displaces legal employment opportunities, up to 80 percent in small- and medium- forest enterprises (SMFEs) in developing countries; threatens tourism jobs by damaging protected forests and animal habitats.



Endangers precious rainforests and other World Heritage sites; threatens tourism jobs by damaging protected forests and animal habitats.



Denies consumers of the relevant information to make choices, based on awareness for sustainable development in harmony with nature, including consumption of rare woods and woods sourced unsustainably.



Exacerbates deforestation and forest degradation, accelerates contributions to CO2 emissions and precludes massive CO2 absorption critical to fighting climate change.



Undermines sustainable management of forests to preserve soil, minimize erosion, purify water, protect aquifers, improve air quality, preserve biodiversity and protect wildlife habitats.



Poses a serious threat to peace and security and damages public trust and institutional structures.

## IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The sweeping, negative impacts of illicit trade on the SDGs point to a wide range of challenges for both governments and business. Hence, it will be expedient to:

**Attend to developing and least developed countries.** The alarming consequences of illicit trade are especially evident in developing countries hard-pressed to monetize resources, commercialize innovation, attract investment, establish lasting job opportunities and create genuine, long-term economic growth. As such, it will be critical to support the capabilities of developing countries to better defend against illicit trade by *inter alia* taking stock of national government experiences, challenges, priorities and requests for assistance while also identifying where “in-country” efforts would be most valuable and most effective.

**Account for the interconnected nature of the challenge.** As noted by the UN, the SDGs are integrated and indivisible in nature with significant inter-linkages across the goals and targets. Ending poverty, for example, must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, job opportunities and environmental stewardship. By the same token, a holistic approach is needed to address the significant number of interdependencies and overlapping problems relating to multiple forms of illicit trade. The impacts of illicit trade cannot be examined effectively in isolation of other sectors, nor can they be addressed in isolation of the SDGs.

**Promote shared responsibility.** Improving public-private dialogue and promoting partnerships will be needed to address the global nature of illicit trade. Public and private actors can play an important role in determining a responsive, evidence-based work program for addressing illicit trade, including delineation of best practices, and, where applicable, development of regulatory standards.

**Prioritize the policy response.** The findings from this study demonstrate that illicit trade is a significant deterrent to achieving the SDGs. As governments go about formulating policies and implementing programs to achieve the SDGs, a first order consideration should be to reduce the deterrent forces of illicit trade and plug the fiscal leakages associated with it. This approach has the immediate effect of adding resources and revenues back into the global economy, putting more policy tools back on the table, and reducing timelines, costs and other hurdles to achieving the goals. Consequently, a more level playing field, without the economic drags of illicit trade, can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policies and programs governments are taking to stimulate growth, employment and investment to achieve the SDGs.

**Foster political will and leadership.** Addressing the threat of illicit trade on the SDGs will require political will of government officials at all levels to prioritize the problem, actively pursue solutions and invest in enforcement measures. This study provides a first step in raising awareness on the threat of illicit trade on achieving the SDGs. The work also serves as a roadmap to help policy makers identify areas that merit greater attention and to formulate effective strategies to address the serious threats posed by illicit trade.

## NOTES

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<b>AGRI-FOODS</b>											
<b>AGROCHEMICALS AND PESTICIDES</b>											
<b>ALCOHOL</b>											
<b>COUNTERFEIT AND PIRACY</b>											
<b>FORESTRY</b>											
<b>IUU FISHING</b>											
<b>PETROLEUM</b>											
<b>PHARMACEUTICALS</b>											
<b>PRECIOUS METALS AND GEMSTONES</b>											
<b>TOBACCO</b>											
<b>TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS</b>											
<b>TRAFFICKING IN WILDLIFE</b>											