



*“Working within CITES for the protection and conservation of species in international trade”*

## SHOULD CITES CONSIDER SOCIO-ECONOMICS?

A number of documents under consideration at CITES CoP14 propose that CITES should build the consideration of socio-economic factors into its decision-making and implementation processes. Though such considerations are important to the broader scheme of conservation and development, giving them a major role in CITES threatens to (1) undermine the basis of science-based decision-making, (2) change and weaken the core mission of the Convention, and (3) divert scarce resources to new priorities best handled by other instruments or national governments. These documents include the CITES Strategic Vision (CoP14 Doc. 11), CITES and Livelihoods (CoP14Doc. 14), National Wildlife Trade Policy Reviews (CoP14 Doc. 15), Incentives for Implementation of the Convention (CoP14 Doc. 32), and Relationship Between *Ex Situ* Production and *In Situ* Conservation (CoP14 Doc. 48).

### **Maintaining sound science as the standard**

The preamble to CITES clearly states its mission—“*the protection of certain species of wild fauna and flora against over-exploitation through international trade.*” In order to accomplish this mission, CITES requires that trade in listed species be non-detrimental. This requirement is CITES’ best way of ensuring the survival of wild species subject to trade, including species essential to the livelihoods of rural peoples. Sound science provides the basis for fulfilling this core requirement in the best way possible.

Introducing socio-economic factors into this and other CITES processes adds a layer of complexity and bureaucracy, places a burden on already-overstrained Scientific and Management Authorities, and risks politicizing decision-making and subordinating the long-term goals of conservation and sustainability to changing economic and political interests. Socio-economic factors lie far outside CITES’ core mission and the scope of its work. The making of science-based non-detriment findings should remain central to managing trade in CITES-listed species. The Secretariat and the Parties should allocate resources to support robust scientific decision-making, rather than complicating and weakening this process by adding factors best considered elsewhere.

### **Preserving the core mission of CITES**

Numerous multilateral conventions and international bodies already focus on improving human well-being, trade and development (CBD and FAO to name just two). CITES, in contrast, is the only treaty addressing over-exploitation of wildlife from international trade. Any attempt to deflect CITES from its central task of monitoring and controlling the international trade of wildlife and plants—especially attempts to subsume international conservation needs with localized economic interests—risks undermining the core mission of CITES, causing irreparable damage to both the resources the treaty is meant to conserve and the human livelihoods that depend on them.

Given the well-established linkages between effective conservation and opportunities to enhance human well-being, the best way for CITES to effectively address the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to guarantee the long-term viability of the threatened resources on which human livelihoods depend. This means ensuring that CITES is fully implemented and enforced, so that any trade in CITES-listed specimens remains non-detrimental.

CITES, with its limited budget and resources, should not attempt to compete with more appropriate organizations already tasked to deal with poverty alleviation and development. Neither should it attempt, on its own, to interfere with broad issues of socio-economic development, wildlife management and mitigation best dealt with as part of overall planning at the national level.

### **Economic considerations will divert funding and attention from CITES implementation**

While some may view the proposed emphasis on economic considerations and development as a way to gain greater financial and political support for the Convention, increased funding for the study of socio-economic issues does not translate into increased implementation and enforcement of the treaty. On the contrary, as illustrated by the work currently undertaken by the CITES Secretariat on these issues, the rush to address socio-economic issues has created a significant drain on the CITES Secretariat's time and funding. Implementation of socio-economic considerations will impose an additional and substantial burden on CITES Parties. The Parties are far better-suited to assess their own national priorities and address their own socio-economic issues, relying on the available expertise and resources offered by many international organizations.

SSN strongly believes that the best way to advance the goals of the Convention would be to develop a more focused program of assistance to Parties directed at improving CITES implementation and, particularly, enforcement. For example, the Parties should work toward increasing resources available for national CITES authorities, the Review of Significant Trade, capacity building, field studies, and enhanced enforcement. Given CITES' clear mandate to support these functions and its scarce budgetary resources, the diversion of resources to new priorities lying outside its core mission would be both inappropriate and imprudent.