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OUT OF GARAMBA, INTO UGANDA.

Poaching and trade of ivory in Garamba National Park and LRA-affected areas in Congo.

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Ivory poaching and trading in central and eastern Africa has recently received a lot of attention. On the one hand, there have been a number of [analyses](#) highlighted how '[tusks fund terror](#)' for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). On the other hand, there have been a wide range of news reports on the confiscation of large consignments of ivory, in [Entebbe airport](#), but [particularly](#) in [Mombasa](#), all of which highlighting the intensified trade in ivory and the important (transit) role of Uganda. This analysis wants to better document both of these points, by linking them together: it wants to explain the poaching dynamics in Garamba National Park (GNP) in the DRC, where the LRA is active. It particularly wants to show how the LRA is a relatively minor actor in poaching – it can by far not explain the strong intensification of elephant poaching in the park: whereas from 2007 to 2012, 7 to 8 elephants were killed in the park, in the first 10 months of 2012 alone, a staggering 50 elephants were killed.¹ Related with this, the analysis wants to show how much of the ivory passing through Uganda, or confiscated in Mombasa, comes from GNP. Therefore, while [calls from the UN Security Council](#) to investigate the role of the LRA in ivory poaching are useful in bringing attention to the poaching problem, the strict attention to the LRA is not particularly helpful, and will only have a limited impact.

1. Poaching of ivory

Crucial in analyzing poaching dynamics in GNP is an understanding of the key actors active in poaching, including the killing of elephants for ivory:

Traditional poachers. Poaching is a traditional source of livelihood in the area, in which local communities engage in small-scale poaching activities, often with handmade guns ('calibre 12') or conventional weaponry and ammunition, which is relatively easily purchased in border markets with South Sudan (such as Nabiapay). This form of poaching is primarily a subsistence activity, which is only to a limited extent embedded in broader trading networks.

South Sudanese armed groups are also engaged in poaching, and operate in a very similar manner to LRA groups: they work in small groups, and often attack communities when threatened or in need of food. In these attacks, people have been killed, or abducted, in order to carry food. They also have small bases (similar to the LRA). In certain cases, these South Sudanese poachers are ex-SPLA soldiers. A notorious armed group is led by an ex-SPLA soldier called 'Tabani' operating with a group of between 10 to 25 men, and attacking communities in and around Garamba Park while poaching. This group also attacks people working in gold mines, or attacks villages to loot. There are also reports of Ugandan armed groups, operating in a similar manner.

Individual Congolese soldiers are important actors in the poaching business. They are stationed in various zones in GNP and make use of this [opportunity](#) to poach. Ammunition is accounted for by claiming encounters with the LRA. The degree in which individual soldiers engage in this activity to a large degree depends on the attitude of their respective commander towards this activity.

Professional poachers. The area has historically attracted more professional poachers from as far as Chad and Libya, which continue to be present. In the late 70s to early 80s,

Congolese armed forces unsuccessfully tried to expel Libyan poachers from the park.

The **Lord's Resistance Army**. While stationed in GNP, the LRA has been engaged in poaching, including the killing of elephants. Ivory tusks have been transported to LRA groups in Central African Republic or further, where they have been exchanged with arms, ammunition and food. It is important to emphasise that the quantity of (poached and traded) ivory is less than other actors.

Often, it is hard to determine the origin of the poachers.

- Different forms of collaboration are possible between these actors, but particularly between civilian poachers and Congolese soldiers. The latter give ammunition and (sometimes) weapons to the former, who know the terrain much better, and get a (smaller) share of the profit.
- In several incidents, poachers were involved wearing unknown military uniforms. Pictures 1 shows the Garamba Park Rangers with ivory seized from such actors.
- The most notorious incident of elephant poaching in GNP happened in March 2012, when 22 elephants were shot from a helicopter. Picture 2 shows a group of 5 elephants shot during this incident. Days after this incident, low-flying Ugandan helicopters were seen in the area where the elephants were killed, leading to strong [suspicions](#) and accusations that the Ugandan army was involved.

The increased number of armed actors involved has led to an increased number of confrontations between poachers and the Park Rangers. Moreover, the increased poaching and military activity in the park has had an important effect on both the park's ecosystem and the livelihoods of the population, as it has pushed the wildlife towards the periphery of the park – destroying the fields of the local communities. Lastly, in their operations, poachers make use of the nearby borders (particularly of South Sudan) and of the fact that it is impossible for the park rangers to control the whole park. Interviews with

LRA returnees for example show how it regards the park, and the broader area, as an 'easy' environment, with limited military threat.

The presence of the LRA has led to a strong increase in elephant poaching. It is important to note that this is not primarily because of LRA poaching, but rather due to the general militarization of the area, in which different local and international armed actors became involved, and linked up with traditional forms of poaching. In other words, the complex emergency around the LRA has led to the presence of a wide range of armed actors, which has had the effect of increasing the demand of ivory and expanding the scope of ivory trading networks: with these actors also came their regional (and even global) trading networks.

2. Trade of ivory

There are two possible trading routes for ivory from Garamba: the first is from Garamba to South Sudan into Uganda. The other, more common route is to the border town of Ariwara in DRC, or its counterpart on the Ugandan side of the border, Arua – both of which have become important trading points for ivory. This was much less the case before the intervention against the LRA, and is the result of the engagement of local actors with more regional trading networks, and investments in road infrastructure by the MONUSCO peacekeeping forces, linking the Garamba area with Arua/Ariwara. [Historically](#), both Arua and Ariwara have played a central role for illegal trade in the wider region, facilitating the integration of ivory originating from Garamba Park in regional and global trading networks: from these towns, ivory goes to Kampala, where it is sold to bigger traders. Ivory is transported in trucks to Kampala, and the tusks are either cut into small pieces or left as a whole – depending on the preferences of the buyer. Part of the ivory goes to Mombasa in Kenya; while another part leaves the country via Entebbe. It is particularly since 2012 that traders in the Congolese-Ugandan border area 'discovered' ivory from GNP and that the trade strongly intensified - mirroring poaching dynamics in GNP, and particularly the number of elephants being killed (as mentioned above).

Two events had a major impact on these trading dynamics.

1. The first event was the confiscation of a major consignment of [ivory coming from Uganda](#) in Mombasa in July 2013. This in turn influenced the price for ivory: the demand reduced in both Mombasa and Kampala, as traders were increasingly fearing confiscation, particularly in transporting ivory. Whereas before this event, traders were selling ivory in Arua/Ariwara for around 150 US\$ per kilogram, this reduced to between 80 and 120 US\$ afterwards. In Kampala, prices were originally between 150 and 200 US\$ per kilogram, and then reduced to around 150 US\$ per kilogram.

2. A second major event was confiscation of a large consignment of ivory ([832 pieces](#)) in [Kampala](#) in [October 2013](#), and [continued confiscation](#) of large consignments in Mombasa. Particularly the Kampala confiscation had a major effect, as traders currently find the transport to Kampala too risky, leading to a further reduction in demand. This led to a further reduction of ivory prices, which are now sold for around 40 to 60 US\$ in Arua/Ariwara.

3. Recommendations

In order to effectively address ivory poaching, it is therefore necessary to:

- ✓ Take measures to address all actors involved in poaching, not only the LRA – also for advocacy efforts around this issue.
- ✓ As demonstrated above, a further militarization of the area will not solve the poaching problem – on the contrary.
- ✓ A deeper understanding of the whole ivory commodity chain is necessary in order to better address the ivory trade. The available evidence shows that the transit role of Uganda is crucial, and needs to be addressed.



Picture 1: Garamba Park Rangers with ivory confiscated by unidentified actors in military uniforms, May 2012 (Source: Garamba National Park Officials correspondence May 2012)

Picture 2: Five elephants killed in Garamba National Park by helicopters in March 2012 (Source: Garamba National Park Officials correspondence May 2012).



A NOTE ON FIELDWORK, METHOD AND DATA

Kristof Titeca is a senior research fellow from the Research Fund – Flanders (FWO), based at the Institute of Development Policy and Management (University of Antwerp) and the Conflict Research Group (University of Gent). This analysis is based on field research in and around Garamba National Park in 2012 and 2013, and long-term research on the Uganda-Congolese border.