



# LAGOS, NIGERIA:

## One of the Largest Retail Centres for Illegal Ivory Surveyed to Date

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**N**igerian craftsmen and traders have been dealing in elephant ivory for centuries. It was not until 1989, however, that the first detailed study of Nigeria's retail ivory market took place (Allaway, 1989). At that time, most tusks were smuggled in from Central Africa and the majority of ivory items for sale were carved in Onitsha and Lagos, mainly by foreigners from neighbouring countries. Lagos was the main centre in Nigeria for the sale of worked ivory. The 1989 survey found 1081 kg of ivory items on display in Lagos, making up 70% by weight of ivory items seen in the country. Ivory pieces were seen for retail sale during the course of that survey at four hotels, at Murtala Mohammed International Airport, and one large souvenir market featuring at least six stalls selling ivory on Lekki Peninsula.

A further study undertaken in 1994 (Dublin *et al.*, 1995), estimated that there were between 500 and 700 kg of ivory items openly for retail sale in Lagos, with over 100 kg of polished elephant tusks recorded at outlets at the country's international airport. The report stated that this trade 'continues without any noticeable regulation'.

A third more detailed survey of the Lagos ivory market was carried out in 1999 (Martin and Stiles, 2000). Much of the ivory seen was claimed by vendors to come from countries such as Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Côte d'Ivoire. Stiles also found five workshops on Lagos Island where 33 ivory craftsmen were employed, mostly from Guinea and Mali. Ivory items were still available at the same locations as ten years earlier, except for one less hotel shop. Stiles estimated a weight of 1742 kg of worked ivory for retail sale from a count of 5966 items in 40 outlets. The Lekki souvenir market had 16 outlets with 3681 ivory items in 1999.

A fourth survey in 2002 in Lagos (Courouble *et al.*, 2003) stated that most tusks were still coming into Lagos from Central Africa. Only one ivory workshop was found, with five craftsmen. The best quality carvings for sale were reportedly made by Guineans. There were 5107 ivory items counted (weighing 1910 kg) at the same locations as the 1999 survey, with 77% at the Lekki market and 4% (191 items (110 kg)) at three stalls at the airport.

The most recent survey, undertaken in September 2012, shows that Lagos remains the main centre for the sale of worked ivory in Nigeria. The findings, which are reported below, indicate that more ivory is available today than noted in any previous surveys in Lagos, or, moreover, in any other African location that has been studied hitherto.

### LEGISLATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Nigeria acceded to CITES in 1975, one of the first Parties to the Convention. From 1990, commercial imports and exports of both raw and worked ivory were prohibited, but Courouble *et al.* (2003) reported in 2002 that the legal situation concerning ivory in Nigeria was complex, with separate federal and State legislation. Although almost all domestic ivory trade in Lagos was illegal, regulations were rarely enforced and few ivory seizures were made in the country.

Owing to the lack of effective law enforcement, in July 2005, CITES imposed a trade ban on Nigeria (Milliken *et al.*, 2009) prohibiting international trade in all CITES-listed species. In January 2010, the Secretary-General of the CITES Secretariat led a mission to Nigeria. With guidance from the Secretariat, officials had begun to inspect wildlife markets and make seizures of ivory. In February/March 2011, the Secretariat returned to the country and 'conducted inspections of markets and other relevant locations in Kano and Lagos'. While some worked ivory was seen for sale in a market in Lagos, it was reported as being not of a quantity to give grounds for concern (CITES, 2011a,b).

On 9 May 2011, the Federal government introduced new legislation on endangered species, including elephants and elephant products. According to the *National Environmental Protection of Endangered Species in International Trade Regulations 2011*, it is unlawful to import or export any product listed in Appendices I, II or III of CITES, legislation that goes beyond the requirements of CITES. In addition, it is an offence for any person "...to have in his possession or under his control, or to offer or expose for sale or display to the public any specimen of the species listed in Appendices I, II and III of the [CITES] Convention...". Any person found guilty of these regulations is liable to a fine not exceeding N5 000 000 [USD31 646 in September 2012] and imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or both (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011).

Based on the 2011 CITES mission to Nigeria, the CITES Standing Committee rescinded the Nigerian trade ban in August 2011. Data from the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) show that the Nigerian Government had reported 19 seizures of ivory weighing just 218 kg between 1989 and September 2012 and yet, over this period, there were 805 seizures totalling 18 217 kg of ivory in other countries that implicate Nigeria as the source, export, re-export, transit or destination country (T. Milliken, TRAFFIC, pers. comm., 25 September 2012).

## METHODS

Fieldwork was carried out in Lagos from 7 to 15 September 2012. The authors visited the main souvenir market in Lagos, that on Lekki Peninsula, and made four inspections at retail outlets with ivory. They also visited other markets, hotels, arts and crafts shops and the international airport. Only ivory objects on display for retail sale were counted. Stored or hidden items were not recorded, even if some were seen, in keeping with the methodology used in previous surveys, and thus allowing comparison of the data sets. Types of items for sale were recorded along with the origins of the tusks, where they were carved, and prices. Recently made ivory items carved in the last decade were distinguished from old items carved before the CITES ban by their style and by their whiter, newer appearance. Vendors and some craftsmen at workshops were interviewed, as well as some Chinese businessmen.

## RESULTS

**Source and prices of elephant tusks in Nigeria:** According to a 2006 survey of Yankari Game Reserve, which holds the greatest number of elephants in the country, there were 348 savannah elephants, down from an estimated 600 in 1993 (Omondi *et al.*, 2006; Said *et al.*, 1995). There could also have been a 'possible 105' elephants elsewhere in the country (Blanc *et al.*, 2007). In 2011, 82 elephants were counted in an incomplete survey of Yankari as many were apparently hidden by forest canopy (Bergl *et al.*, 2011). One of the main threats to elephants in Nigeria has been poaching for their tusks. Bergl *et al.* (2011) believe that at least 50 elephants in Yankari were illegally killed between 2006 and early 2011. The most recent estimate of elephant poaching in Yankari is 20 animals a year, according to Andrew Dunn, field biologist in Nigeria (pers. comm., 27 September 2012), or perhaps 30 a year, according to Solomon Adefolu, Conservation Officer, Nigerian Conservation Foundation (pers. comm., 11 September 2012).

The average weight of the tusks from poached elephants in and around Yankari was about four kilogrammes. In 2012, an average pair of tusks in villages surrounding Yankari sold for around N70 000 (USD443), the equivalent of USD55 per kg for a four-kilogramme tusk. In the cities of Bauchi, Gombe and Jos, wholesale prices doubled to USD110 per kg in 2012, (A. Dunn, pers. comm., 27 September 2012), the same price



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## IVORY ITEMS ON

as for tusks from neighbouring countries. From these cities, tusks are transported to Kano and Lagos for carving and sale, but the majority are for illegal export.

Most tusks are smuggled into Nigeria from Cameroon, CAR, Congo Brazzaville, DRC and Gabon, according to vendors interviewed in Lagos. In 2009, almost one tonne of ivory destined for Nigeria was seized in Cameroon (Milliken *et al.*, 2012). Tusks are also smuggled in from East Africa: in Kenya, 1.3 t of ivory bound for Nigeria were seized in 2011 and a further 745 kg in June 2012 (Milliken *et al.*, 2012; Momanyi, 2012). Most was re-exported to Asia (Milliken *et al.*, 2012).

**Ivory workshops in Lagos:** The Sand Grouse market on Lagos Island had three small workshops close to one another; one was active, with two craftsmen from Burkina Faso working cow bone. They said it was illegal to use ivory and no traces of ivory could be seen. They were producing cow-bone bead necklaces priced at N1000 (USD6) and 'ebony'/cow-bone walking sticks for N10 000 (USD63) before bargaining.

Two other small workshops were visited in the Tinubu Square area on Lagos Island. The first had 11 craftsmen who were self-employed: eight from Guinea and three from Nigeria. They claimed they were former ivory craftsmen who had stopped using ivory five years earlier due



## SALE IN LAGOS

to the ban on possession and sale. Using electric tools, the artisans were crafting cow bone beads for necklaces and Muslim rosaries for N1500 (USD9), large rings for N500 (USD3) and cigarette holders (price not given). Although there was no sign of ivory in the workshop, one craftsman wore a newly made ivory beaded bracelet that he was seen to remove, presumably so as not to be photographed wearing it. The second workshop was closed but looking through the front iron grill a collection of cow bone figures and two larger ivory busts could be

seen on a shelf. A few hours later the shop was still locked, but the two ivory busts had been removed.

**Numbers of retail ivory outlets and ivory items surveyed:** There were only two locations where ivory items were seen, the market on Lekki Peninsula and within the grounds of the Eko Hotel and Suites on Victoria Island. Outlets near two other hotels which previously sold ivory had closed, some moving to the Lekki market. Further, shops at the international airport no longer sold ivory products.

The Lekki market offers souvenirs such as tribal art and carvings, as well as paintings and jewellery, with a section for fruit and vegetables and other foodstuffs, including three Chinese food shops. The market dates from the British colonial period. There are rows of single-storey outlets, similar to garages with lockable metal fronts, along a grid of alleyways with over 100 selling souvenirs. Generally, the souvenir shops were open from mid-morning until dusk.

During the survey, 33 retail souvenir outlets had 14 200 ivory items on display (Table 1), ranging in size from polished tusks to earrings; over 99% of the items appeared to be recently made. While there were some 30-cm items—amongst the largest worked piece on display—an estimated 91% measured less than 10 cm, with plastic tubs of pendants sometimes on the counter. Thousands of smaller items such as jewellery, name seals and chopsticks, were stored under the counter. A few of the tribal art outlets had old ivory objects, such as side-blown trumpets (tusks with blowing holes carved into the ivory), wide bangles, and dark ivory items, copies of antique carvings from Benin, where some of the finest ivory in tropical Africa was being carved between the 15th and 19th centuries (St Aubyn, 1987). Most ivory objects were placed in tall glass cabinets in outlets specializing in ivory. Numbers of items counted per outlet ranged from two to 1250, with an average of 430. About two-thirds of these items comprised earrings, pendants and necklaces, the remainder human and animal figurines, chopsticks, cigarette holders, Muslim rosaries and bangles (Table 2).

The second location selling ivory items was the Arts and Crafts Centre in the grounds of the Eko Hotel and Suites. This single-storey building comprising 22 curio stalls, targeted largely at foreign tourists and visitors, was offering for sale 149 ivory items, almost all apparently recently made, with the majority in a glass cabinet at one stall. Over half was jewellery, followed by animal and human figurines and cigarette holders (Table 2).

Location	No. of outlets with ivory	No. of ivory items
Lekki market	33	14 200
Arts and Crafts Centre, Eko Hotel and Suites	3	149
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>14 349</b>

Table 1. Number of retail outlets and ivory items on display for sale in Lagos, Nigeria, September 2012.

LEKKI MARKET		ARTS AND CRAFTS CENTRE	
Item	Percentage	Item	Percentage
Earrings, pair	30	Pendant	30
Pendant	26	Animal figurine	15
Necklace, beaded	9	Earrings, pair	13
Human figurine	9	Cigarette holder	13
Chopsticks, pair	8	Hair fastener	9
Animal figurine	6	Human figurine	7
Cigarette holder	4	Necklace, beaded	5
Rosary (Muslim)	3	Misc.	8
Bangle	2		
Misc.	3		

Table 2. Ivory items seen for retail sale in the Lekki market and the Arts and Crafts Centre, Lagos, September 2012.

**Prices and customers for ivory items:** Vendors quoted retail prices in Nigerian naira for nearly all items, which varied according to the amount of bargaining, the quantity of items being bought, the object's size, and the amount of time spent crafting the item. The objects were of a standard, mediocre quality and similar in all outlets. Prices for the handful of antiques available were normally higher. Prices could generally be reduced by 10% to 30% by bargaining. The least expensive item was a pair of earrings (USD3) and the most expensive was a six-kilogramme polished tusk (USD1899) (Table 3).

At the Lekki market, the only customers seen buying ivory were Chinese who were there on all four days of the survey, usually shopping in pairs or in groups, sometimes with an interpreter. They were seen buying in bulk, especially bangles, name seals, combs and chopsticks. Vendors told the authors that Muslim Nigerians sometimes purchased ivory walking sticks and rosaries. Although there were a few western visitors in the market, they did not purchase many souvenirs and took no interest in the ivory outlets. During the survey, it was evident that more ivory was being sold than any other souvenirs in the market. Some, clearly new ivory items, were taken from under the counter.

The Eko Hotel and Suites' customers were mostly guests at the hotel. The vendor at the main ivory stall said his customers were Europeans, Americans, Japanese and

Item	Size (cm)	Average price (USD)
<b>JEWELLERY</b>		
Bangle	2	57
Earrings, pair	4	3
Necklace, small, large		27/76
Pendant	4	57
Ring	0.3	16
<b>FIGURINE/FIGURE</b>		
Animal	<5	25
	5–10	190
	10–15	316
	15–20	517
Human	10	316
	15–30	506
	30–40	633
<b>TUSKS</b>		
Polished	1–6 kg	363–2178
Tip	5	380
<b>MISC.</b>		
Chopsticks, pair	20	63
Cigarette holder	10	32
Comb	12	38
Mask	10	201
Name seal		
Personal (round base)	2 x 7	108
Business (square base)	3 x 7	186
Paper knife	15	32
Rosary (Muslim)	medium	28

**Table 3. Retail prices for new ivory items seen in the Lekki market, Lagos, Nigeria, September 2012.**

NB. Prices are before bargaining  
Exchange rate used: free market rate of N158 to USD1.

Lebanese, in that order. It was apparent that the Chinese prefer the much larger Lekki market where there is a big choice of ivory outlets and where prices are considerably lower than at this luxury hotel.

**Ivory exports from Lagos:** Chinese buyers tend to prefer smaller objects, especially jewellery, name seals and chopsticks, that they can more easily transport to China in their personal luggage. Most succeed, but in March 2012 a Chinese national was arrested at the international airport attempting to smuggle out to China ivory items concealed in a stuffed toy (Oloruntobi, 2012; Megbolu, 2012). According to informants and ETIS seizures data, some of the raw ivory is sent to other carving centres in West Africa while other raw ivory consignments go to Asia. Of African ivory items on sale, the majority had been smuggled in from other African countries and a few carved in Nigeria; most of these items are also exported to Asia, either in personal luggage or in commercial consignments. More than a tonne of ivory coming from Nigeria was seized in Hong Kong in 2010 and over a tonne seized in Thailand in 2011 (Milliken *et al.*, 2012).

**Ivory substitutes:** Cow bone is used as an ivory substitute, especially for beads, rings, cigarette holders, and walking sticks, the latter made of bone and wood. These were seen at several outlets. Vendors sometimes pretended these items were ivory. At the Lekki market, some hawkers sold bone necklaces for N2500 (USD16) that they claimed were 'pink ivory' (from forest elephants), while at a nearby shop, the same size ivory necklace was N7500 (USD47). There were some items carved from Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius* tusks, especially figurines. A large Hippopotamus tusk with animals carved along it was offered for the equivalent of USD475 (USD886 for a pair), before bargaining. No other ivory substitute materials were seen.

**Vendors' views on the ivory trade:** Nearly all the vendors were suspicious and unco-operative in providing information or allowing photographs to be taken and data were collected with much difficulty. Some vendors closed their shops during the survey or covered their ivory items over with cloth or hid them to avoid their being seen or counted. It required four visits to the Lekki market to collect the data to complete the survey. As no ivory was purchased by the authors, the vendors queried the purpose of the 'mission', suspecting it was for a report.

It was clear the ivory trade flourishes in the Lekki market. Despite vendors finding the Chinese the hardest bargainers ('You're killing us', one vendor was heard to exclaim to a Chinese name seal buyer), there was optimism about the trade with the large number of Chinese buyers, and the government doing little to implement regulations. No vendors admitted the trade was illegal, and told the authors that they would write receipts to say whatever the customer wished, to make it easy to take ivory items abroad. Posters warning customers about the illegal trade in endangered animal products were absent at the Lekki market although two were present at the Eko Hotel and Suites' souvenir market. Only one poster was seen at Lagos international airport. No other notices



warning about the illegality of purchasing and exporting ivory were observed. The vendors have reason to be complacent with so little awareness and enforcement.

*Trends in the ivory trade in Lagos:* Over the last two decades, while tusks continue to move through Nigeria to other destinations, more ivory items are smuggled into the country for sale in Lagos and fewer are now carved in the city. Nearly all outlets selling ivory are now concentrated in the Lekki market. From 2002 to 2012, the number of retail outlets in Lagos increased from 30 to 36, with the total number of items rising from 5107 (an average of 170 per outlet) to 14 349 (an average of 399 per outlet). However, the number of larger items (tusks and items over 20 cm) has fallen compared with 2002. The average weight of an item for sale has thus declined during this period. By examining the percentage of item types and sizes and estimating their weights, the average weight of an item was at least half



Almost all the buyers of ivory carvings in Lagos are Chinese, who show a preference for small items such as ivory tips, name seals, chopsticks and bangles, which are easier to smuggle.

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 Photographs by Lucy Vigne

that of the earlier surveys. Thus, the total weight of ivory for sale in Lagos is only slightly higher than in 2002. This is a significant amount when one considers that elephant numbers have declined in West and Central Africa.

Lagos today has one of the largest illegal retail ivory markets studied in Africa and Asia in recent years. One of the principal reasons for this is the growing Chinese population: in 2001 there were 2000 resident Chinese in Nigeria, but by 2007 there were 100 000 (Sautman and Hairong, 2007). More items specifically targeted at the Chinese market are now for sale, including Chinese Buddha carvings that were not seen before, and there are fewer very large items compared with earlier surveys, likely owing to the preference of Chinese buyers for jewellery and utilitarian items which are easier to smuggle to China. These items are about an eighth of the price in Lagos compared with southern China (Martin and Vigne, 2011; Martin and Vigne, 2012; Table 3).

## CONCLUSIONS

There has been almost a three-fold increase in ivory items for retail sale in Lagos since 2002 to meet Chinese demand, almost all of which has been recently carved. The total weight of this ivory is estimated to be slightly higher than in 2002, because the average weight of an object has significantly decreased since then. The Nigerian Government has done very little over the years to reduce this illegal trade. Following the CITES Secretariat's investigations of key markets in the country in 2010 and 2011, and their findings that very little of concern had been noted (CITES, 2011a), the Secretariat believed that the ivory trade there was no longer a problem and urged the CITES Standing Committee to lift the 2005 CITES trade ban against Nigeria. This survey confirms that the lifting of the CITES trade ban in 2011 appears to have been premature. The Nigerian Government "took this as a sign that things had improved and that everything was well—which of course it isn't" (A. Dunn, pers. comm., 26 October 2012). This current survey has revealed a flourishing trade in illegal new ivory items in Lagos, perhaps more for sale than in any other city in Africa. The availability of both raw and worked ivory in Nigeria is contributing to the serious impact that such trade is having on the elephant populations of Central and West Africa.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Parties to CITES should consider reinstating the CITES trade ban on Nigeria until the government takes appropriate action to address the country's blatant ivory trade.

The Nigerian Government needs to implement its 2011 wildlife trade law which clearly bans all aspects of the ivory trade. Vendors know it is illegal to sell ivory, and the government needs to inspect retail markets regularly and seize ivory whenever it is found, emulating successful inspections and confiscations in certain other African countries. Surveys should continue to be conducted periodically. The government also needs to improve law

enforcement and increase the frequency of seizures of ivory at the country's airports, ports and land borders.

The Nigerian Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with help from the Chinese Embassy, need to devise a strong awareness campaign in several languages, including Chinese, that clearly informs the public that the carving, display and sale of ivory are illegal, and that transporting ivory in any form in and out of Nigeria is also banned. The general public, as well as ivory dealers, must urgently be made aware that if they break the law they will be prosecuted, with details of the heavy penalties clearly stated. This information must be made available widely, such as in the country's hotels, retail centres, diplomatic and travel advice documents, airline magazines and the media.

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