

## **“Horns of a Dilemma”**

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The northern subspecies of the African white rhino is one of the most endangered species on earth. The southern subspecies has been recovering well from near-extinction, but its population, mostly in South Africa, has suffered more and more from poaching. Poachers sell the rhinos' distinctive horns into a black market, mostly in Asia, where the horns are ground up for various medicinal uses. The horns have also been used traditionally for carving high-status ornamentation.

The horns sell for up to \$65,000 a kilo, making them more valuable than gold by weight. In 2015, poaching of white rhinos in southern Africa reached an all-time high of just over 1,300, mostly in the nation of South Africa, where most of them live.

The rhino horn trade is currently illegal because the animals are listed as endangered, but one South African millionaire believes that raising rhinos on ranches and harvesting their horns every couple of years in a way that allows them to regrow could address the problem if sales of rhino horn from such sources were legalized. Opponents argue that it would be impossible to distinguish between horns poached from wild rhinos and those harvested from farmed ones.

Meanwhile, some African countries have been dehorning wild rhinos to save them from poachers. The procedure is expensive, as the rhinos must be darted with a sedative before the procedure begins; for instance, it is estimated that it would cost \$5.8 to \$8.8 million to dehorn every rhino in south Africa's Kruger National Park once. But to effectively deter poachers, the dehorning must be repeated every year or two. Coupled with horns recovered from poachers, dehorning programs have left some national parks and reserves with stockpiles of horn that they currently cannot sell.

### **Questions:**

1. What do you think would probably be some effects of lifting the international ban on the sale of rhino horns?
2. Is it wrong to keep such a majestic and threatened species as the African white rhino in captivity in order to harvest its horns for sale? Why or why not?

**Information for Instructors Using  
“Horns of a Dilemma”**

**Resources used preparing the case (both accessed April 4, 2016):**

“Farming rhinos and legalising sale of their horns worth more than gold ‘will save them from extinction’, claims farmer.” *Daily Mail* August 30, 2012:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2195803/Farming-rhinos-legalising-sale-horns-worth-gold-save-extinction-claims-farmer.html>

An article on the pros and cons of dehorning by the group Save the Rhino:

[https://www.savetherhino.org/rhino\\_info/issues\\_for\\_debate/de-horning](https://www.savetherhino.org/rhino_info/issues_for_debate/de-horning)