

August 2021

SITUATION ANALYSIS

COVID-19, WILDLIFE TRADE,
AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT



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CONTENTS

page 4

INTRODUCTION

page 6

PART 1

Variations in concern over zoonotic risk and its effect on wildlife consumers' behaviour

page 8

PART 2

Different strategies to reduce zoonotic risk in wildlife trade

page 10

PART 3

SBC campaigns and lessons for zoonotic risk communication

page 14

NEXT STEPS

page 16

Endnotes
Image credits



INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, WILDLIFE TRADE AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

On 7th February 2020, a research team in Guangzhou, Southern China, identified pangolins as a potential intermediate host for the SARS-CoV-2 virus at the root of the COVID-19 pandemic¹.

Despite evidence still being unclear^{2,3} as to the origins of the virus⁴, people's relationship with and consumption of wild animals such as pangolins has been irreversibly cast into sharp relief. Even if COVID-19 proves not to have originated from wild animals in trade, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought global attention to the growing number of wildlife-linked diseases emerging as major human health concerns - ranging from HIV to SARS, MERS, H1N1 (swine flu), H5N1 (avian flu) and Ebola. For many of these, there are strong indications of disease transmission links to wild animal trade.

The fundamental principle is that the overall risks of zoonotic transfer are significantly exacerbated by human behaviour.

Within this context, TRAFFIC is working in partnership with IUCN through the USAID Wildlife TRAPS Project to explore how social and behavioural change could play a part in motivating people towards choosing safer and more sustainable patterns of wildlife trade and product consumption. The first step in this work has been to prepare a Situation Analysis, which aims to:

1 capture what consumer engagement

in wildlife product purchasing is happening worldwide, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and perceived zoonotic disease origins;



2 explore social and behavioural change

pilot project ideas according to where the greatest areas of need and opportunity are;



3 share learning and mapping

for SBC Community members to support and inform efforts to persuade consumers towards a safe, traceable, sustainable, and legal wildlife supply.



The Situation Analysis focused on trade and use of wild mammals and wild birds as high-risk taxa for potential transmission of zoonotic diseases, and considered three primary use types: 1) Wild animal meat, 2) Wild animal-based medicines, and 3) Live wild animals kept as pets or used for scientific research

or display. The first and third use types are likely to be more important for this project, as wild animal ingredients prescribed in formal traditional medicine systems tend to be processed and/or diluted, and thus carry lower risks of disease transmission compared with meat and live animals.

CONCERNS OVER ZOOONOTIC RISK

EFFECT ON WILDLIFE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In March 2020⁵ and 2021, GlobeScan and WWF conducted an online survey with participants in Viet Nam, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, Hong Kong SAR, China, and the US to assess beliefs and behaviours around wildlife markets in light of COVID-19's suspected wildlife origin.

future zoonotic disease outbreaks. Of specific interest was that 7% of overall respondents claimed either they or someone they knew had purchased wildlife products in the past 12 months, whilst 9% said they would be either 'very likely or likely' to do so again in the future⁶. This suggests that despite respondents' purported concerns about the role of markets selling wildlife products in driving pandemic threat, peoples' actual behaviour and purchase intention might ultimately benefit from behaviour change interventions.

85% supported government action to eliminate high-risk wildlife markets in 2021

85% of survey respondents in 2021 claimed to support government action to eliminate high-risk markets selling animals sourced from the wild, and 81% perceived closing these markets as an effective measure in preventing

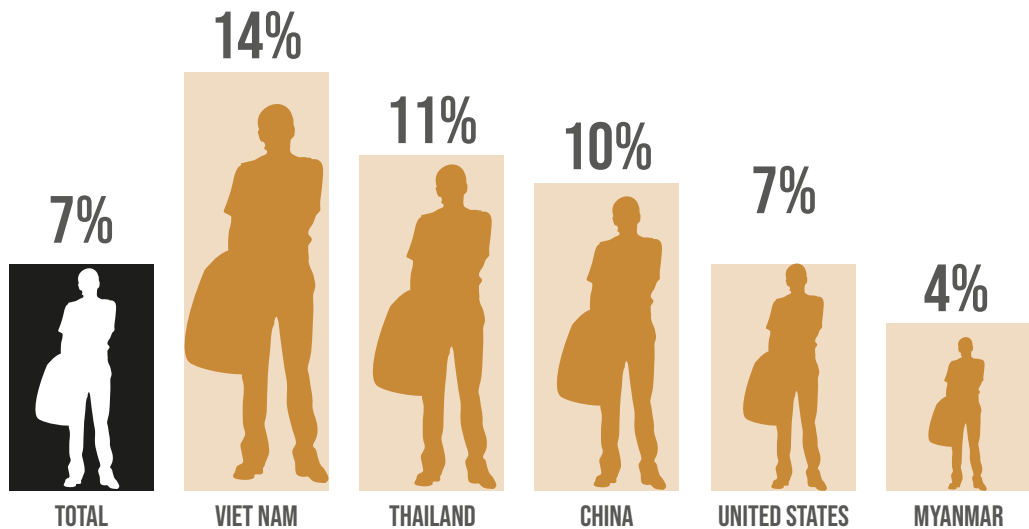


FIGURE 1A: Past 12-month purchase of wildlife in an open market

Source: https://globescan.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/WWF-GlobeScan-COVID19_One_Year_Later-Highlights_Report-May2021.pdf

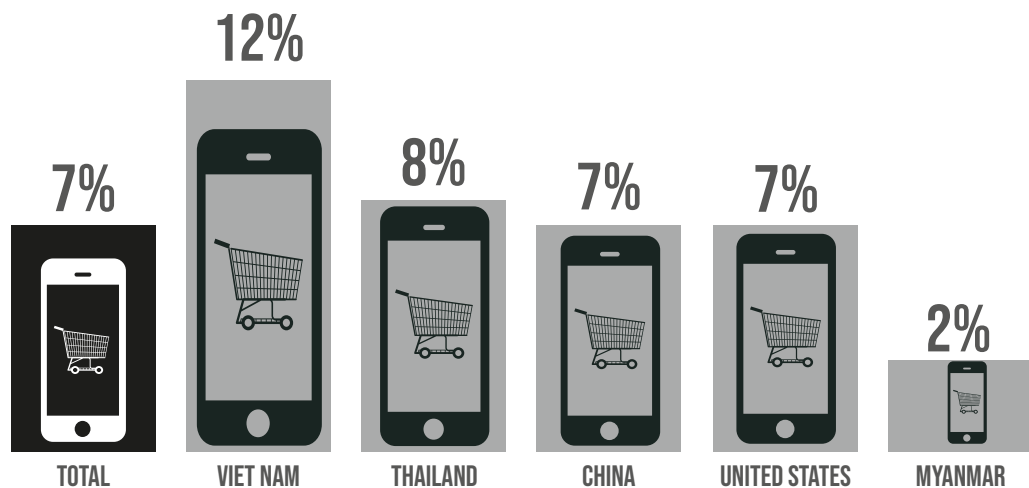


FIGURE 1B: Past 12-month purchase of wildlife online

Source: https://globescan.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/WWF-GlobeScan-COVID19_One_Year_Later-Highlights_Report-May2021.pdf

In October 2020 in Nigeria, WildAid and GlobeScan conducted research on urban wild meat consumption to assess how this had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. 71% of survey respondents had consumed wild meat at some point in their lives, and 45%

in the last year. Despite COVID-19's potential zoonotic origin, 75% of wild meat consumers surveyed planned to eat wild meat again in the future. Only 27% of consumers who had stopped buying wild meat cited COVID-19 as their reason⁷.



9%*
are likely or very likely to buy wildlife products in the future



very likely likely neither likely, nor unlikely unlikely very unlikely

VERY LIKELY OR LIKELY TO BUY WILDLIFE IN THE FUTURE

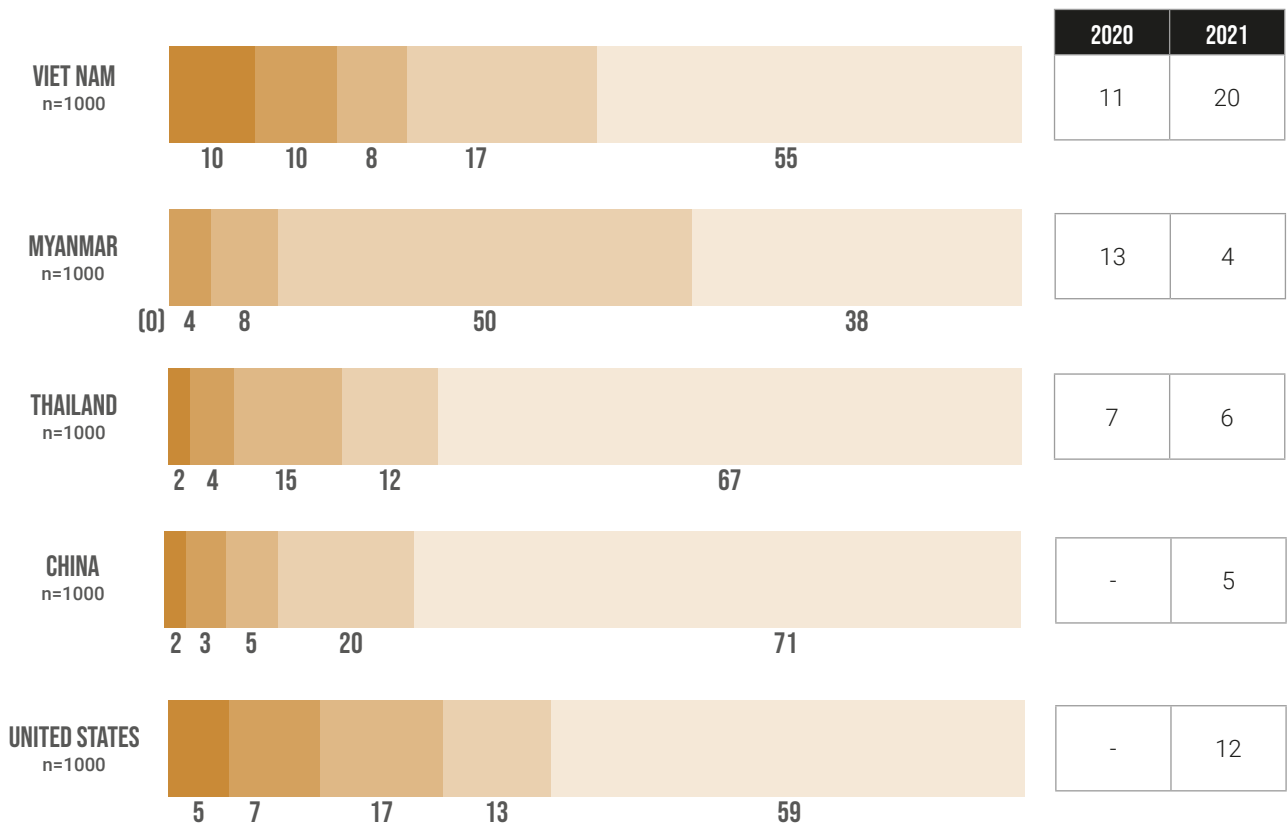


FIGURE 2: Future intention to buy wildlife products in wildlife markets
https://globescan.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/WWF-GlobeScan-COVID19_One_Year_Later-Highlights_Report-May2021.pdf
 * This figure is a result of rounding from the individual categories of "very likely" and "likely".

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ZOOONOTIC RISK IN WILDLIFE TRADE

RESTRICTIONS

To reduce any immediate risks of zoonotic disease emergence within wildlife trade, one strategy has been to advocate for trade restrictions. In February 2020, China banned wild meat consumption of certain species of terrestrial wild animals⁸. In April 2020, more than 250 NGOs, led by Global Wildlife Conservation, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and WildAid, jointly called for a permanent end to commercial trade in terrestrial wild animals, especially birds and mammals⁹. In total, the Situation Analysis authors found four governments adopting wildlife trade restrictions since COVID-19's outbreak (China, Viet Nam¹⁰, Italy, and the Netherlands) and seven NGO and IGO-led initiatives advocating restrictions in this period.



250 NGOs
called for a
commercial end to
wildlife trade in 2020

**a hybrid
approach**
combining reforms
and restrictions was
advocated by the
WHO, OIE, and UNEP

Those advocating restrictions argue that the potential emergence of zoonotic diseases within commercial trade in wild mammals and birds poses too great a risk to public health and the economy, as quantified by COVID-19 losses, to justify the comparatively small economic benefits of continued trade. Some forms of wildlife trade exploit species whose populations have fallen too low to be sustainably harvested, so even low levels of trade pose a threat to these species' conservation.

REFORMS

To gradually reduce the potential risks of zoonotic disease emergence within wildlife trade, another strategy has been to reform key components of the trade chain. Proponents of this strategy emphasise the importance of wildlife trade for food security and income generation, particularly in rural areas, and the risk that bans would only drive wildlife trade

underground. Trade that allows people to benefit economically from wildlife is argued as being a key societal motivator to responsibly manage wildlife as a natural resource.

The authors found a total of seven initiatives promoting wildlife trade reform (some began before the outbreak of COVID-19), including new regulations to enable legal wild meat trade in Tanzania and six instances of guidance issued by NGOs and IGOs. The Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management argues that new blanket bans on wildlife trade would fail to target the underlying causes of zoonotic disease emergence, which include habitat destruction and loss and biodiversity loss. These underlying causes diminish the goods and services healthy ecosystems provide, such as disease resilience¹¹. WWF advocates the inclusion of these underlying threats to ecosystems among the global actions to prevent future pandemics¹².

COMBINATIONS

Some strategies proposed to reduce zoonotic disease risk in wildlife trade recommend a combination of restrictions and reforms. The authors found three IGO and NGO-led initiatives advocating this hybrid approach. Perhaps most prominent was the April 2021 interim guidance issued jointly by the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This interim guidance calls on national governments to temporarily restrict trade in live caught wild mammals when trade regulations and risk assessment are inadequate, to impose strict biosecurity standards for trade in farmed wild mammals, and to implement campaigns to raise awareness on food safety and zoonotic disease risks associated with wildlife trade¹³.



A woman walks through a market that sells wildlife in Calavi, Benin

SBC CAMPAIGNS

LESSONS FOR ZOO NOTIC RISK COMMUNICATION



FIGURE 3

Excerpt from a comic strip developed for CIFOR's #NyamaCongo campaign in DRC. Text translation: "Let's support our Congolese farmers! I say no to bushmeat in cities."

<https://www.cifor.org/yangambi/2390/la-viande-de-brousse-en-ville-moi-je-dis-non-chez-lavocat/>



zoonotic disease risk was not mentioned in almost half of the SBC campaigns studied

LESS MESSAGING TO CONSUMERS THAN EXPECTED

Despite the risks of zoonotic transfer within wildlife trade and connections made by the media and WHO mission to Wuhan in early 2021, nearly half of the SBC campaigns researched chose not to focus on zoonotic disease risk in their messaging. The authors found 12 examples of SBC messaging since early 2020 that considered zoonotic disease risks in their design, four with government sponsorship (in Viet Nam, China, Cameroon, and DRC) and eight led by NGOs and international development agencies. Of these 12 cases, however, only seven explicitly mentioned zoonotic risk in their messaging. Seven initiatives focused on consumers of wild meat, one on wildlife pet owners, and four on general wildlife trade.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN RESONANCE OF DISEASE-FOCUSED MESSAGING

Reasons for selecting other types of messaging varied, but each underscores the importance of adapting messaging to the audience and their local context. In Central Africa, consumers perceived COVID-19 to be a foreign issue due to its emergence in China, so connecting this issue with local wild meat consumption would not resonate with the audience; messaging on food safety and the poor hygiene of unregulated wild meat trade chains could prove more relatable. In Thailand, motivators such as stopping animal cruelty, preserving nature, or avoiding legal consequences of consuming illegally hunted wild meat proved more effective in reducing wild meat consumption than COVID-19.

UNCLEAR EVIDENCE ABOUT HOW BEST TO ENGAGE CONSUMERS

Wildlife pet purchasers responded more strongly to zoonotic disease risk messaging than wild meat consumers, but for those most intent on buying an exotic pet, knowledge of zoonotic risk still did little to reduce demand. Zoonotic risk awareness likewise had limited impact on the demand of the most frequent wild meat consumers^{15,16}. To reach the most 'committed' consumers, messaging could be less about wildlife product demand reduction, and more about shifting to better-regulated trade in captive-bred animals that would need to be both safe and sustainable.

LIMITED SBC WORK PLANNED MOVING FORWARD

Situation Analysis authors found three ongoing research efforts covering zoonotic risks in

wildlife trade with planned completion in the second half of 2021. One focuses on general wildlife trade, one on wild meat, and one on exotic pets. Beyond the three pilot SBC campaigns to be developed under the Wildlife TRAPS Project, eight SBC campaigns were found with planned implementation in the coming year. Four of these eight will target wild meat consumption, three on wildlife-based medicines, two on exotic pets, and one on general wildlife trade (note that two campaigns will cover both wild meat and medicine). These numbers represent a decrease in SBC messaging compared to the past year; the Situation Analysis research suggests that more instances of targeted SBC messaging are needed to reduce the risks of emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) within wildlife trade.



Wild songbirds caught to supply the pet trade in Hanoi, Viet Nam

SBC practitioners need to be engaged to provide expertise relevant to human and animal health

ARE CONSUMERS ALWAYS THE BEST TARGET AUDIENCE?:

In contexts where it is possible to ensure safe and sustainable wildlife trade systems, alternative products may still be wildlife products, but from traceable sources. The key to any alternative product, whether domesticated or wild, is its safety and sustainability, with a transparent trade chain to ensure these conditions are met. In order to guide consumers towards safe alternatives, these alternatives must be readily available. In contexts without accessible alternatives, SBC efforts should consider other target audiences within wildlife trade chains, such as policymakers for regulatory reform, law enforcement officers for more effective implementation of existing laws, and producers and traders for safer handling of wild animals and products.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SBC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Working at the intersection of wildlife health, human health, and human behaviour to reduce the risk of EIDs in wildlife trade requires the expertise and collaboration of multiple sectors. As such, this work will need to engage SBC practitioners with diverse experience from the fields of human health, food safety, and animal health (both wild and domestic). It will need to build relationships with government partners that go beyond the typical focus on engaging environmental agencies in wildlife-focused issues (e.g., natural resource management, forestry, fisheries, etc.), to also include ministries and agencies working in fields such as human health, animal health, agriculture, livestock, and traditional medicine.



FIGURE 3
 Image from “Talks for Change,” a series of online episodes produced by Thairath TV and WildAid in Thailand that brought together celebrities and health experts to discuss the zoonotic disease risks of wildlife trade and consumption. Text translation: “Talk for change: Keep some distance between humans and wildlife.”
<https://www.facebook.com/thairathtv/videos/2973591922736467/>



Night market selling wildlife products in Hong Kong SAR

NEXT STEPS FOR WILDLIFE TRAPS

RECRUIT NEW STAKEHOLDERS

TRAFFIC will engage new stakeholders in the SBC Community on the issues around zoonoses and wildlife trade, and consider developing a recruitment strategy

HUMAN AND ANIMAL HEALTH STAKEHOLDERS

Engage government stakeholders not normally involved in wildlife trade management, particularly in human and animal health, through contacts at IGOs, donor agencies, and embassies



01

CURRENT SBC COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Engage current stakeholders in the SBC Community who bring expertise in health-focused behaviour change initiatives, and encourage and enable them to share their experience with others

02



03

COLLABORATE WITH IGOs

Engage higher-level stakeholders in relevant Inter-governmental Organizations (IGOs), including through contacts at donor agencies and embassies



04



REVIEW OF EXISTING TRAPS MATERIALS

Invite a broad range of partners, especially health sector, to review SBC materials to be developed by Wildlife TRAPS

CRAFT A THEORY OF CHANGE

Map out what small steps are most urgently needed to create sustainable momentum for change, and craft a Theory of Change for how these steps can build towards a longer-term goal of zoonotic disease risk reduction

05

SPECIES/TRADE CHAINS REVIEW

To guide policy development and law enforcement efforts, establish a) which species/trade chains and trade practices are too high risk to continue; b) which ones require reform; and c) which ones are low risk and thus safe to continue

06

07

CHANGE RISKY BEHAVIOUR

Test approaches to change risky behaviours of actors along wildlife value chains, not only at end-use consumer level

08

ENDNOTES

- ¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00364-2>
- ² <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00548-w>
- ³ <https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/12764/covid-19-briefing-vfinal.pdf>
- ⁴ <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus/origins-of-the-virus>
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- ⁷ <https://wildaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Nigeria-Bushmeat-Consumption-Survey-Report.pdf>
- ⁸ <http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202002/74a850a51661458390c9ae89e35b3807.shtml>
- ⁹ <https://endthetrade.com/>
- ¹⁰ Viet Nam's Prime Minister issued Directive 29 in July 2020 to call for stricter enforcement of existing wildlife trade restrictions.
- ¹¹ https://cites.org/eng/CPW_Statement_covi19_wildlife_16102020
- ¹² <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/covid-19-and-wildlife-trade-perspectives-and-proposed-actions>
- ¹³ https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/food-safety/ig-121-1-food-safety-and-covid-19-guidance-for-traditional-food-markets-2021-04-12-en.pdf?sfvrsn=921ec66d_1&download=true
- ¹⁴ https://www.wwf.or.jp/activities/data/20200303_wildlife02.pdf
- ¹⁵ <https://library.wcs.org/Scientific-Research/Research-Publications/Publications-Library/ctl/view/mid/40093/pubid/DMX3743300000.aspx>
- ¹⁶ <https://wildaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Nigeria-Bushmeat-Consumption-Survey-Report.pdf>

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