



COUNTER WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING STUDY BRIEF

Purpose

This brief summarizes the 2020 Counter Wildlife Trafficking (CWT) study which explored the illegal wildlife trade and consumption of wildlife products in Vietnam, with the goal of re-examining USAID's theories of change and informing future programming designs. Under the new 2020 - 2025 USAID/Vietnam Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), USAID aims to help Vietnam strengthen its leadership in CWT.



Tiger in Binh Duong province. Photo Credit: James Morrison.

Method

The study's findings were derived from key informant interviews, a desk review, and a data validation workshop with a diverse sample of stakeholders across the public and private sector. The majority of respondents belonged to organizations working on wildlife conservation and wildlife trade issues.

Background

Despite concerted efforts to combat wildlife trafficking and consumption since the early 2000s, Vietnam remains a global illegal wildlife trade hub. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how potential massive consequences for human health and wellbeing can emerge from the illegal wildlife trade. The conditions that led to the zoonotic spillover event which may have enabled the transmission of COVID-19 from animals to humans, are also present in Vietnam's illegal wildlife trade and hidden markets.

Current Context

In addition to continuing to be a global hub for rhino horn and big cat products, Vietnam is emerging as a potential new global center of the ivory and pangolin scale trade. COVID-19 has created a dichotomy, shutting the illegal wildlife trade down in some areas and intensifying it in others, while having a significant, although probably temporary, effect on consumption habits. Illegal wildlife products were not marketed as a cure for COVID-19 in Vietnam at the time of the study as they were by traders and brokers in other Asian countries.

Research suggested that confiscated illegal wildlife products were not always properly handled, preserved, or destroyed. Throughout 2019, Vietnam did not appoint any legally required Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) Scientific Authority. Therefore, at the time of the study, Vietnam had limited capacity to undertake essential forensic analysis on the high number of seizures confiscated throughout 2019 and early 2020.

The study found that Vietnam is a **source, consumer, and transit country** for illegal wildlife products.

Key Threats and Drivers

The threats underlying the illegal wildlife trade derive from Vietnam's history and its economic resurgence. The drivers are broad, centering predominately on governance factors and complex consumer demand dynamics.

Vietnam now has some of the strictest punishments for wildlife trafficking and the broadest wildlife protection laws in Asia, but these advances are undermined by loopholes and inconsistencies in written laws and decrees. Moreover, overlapping mandates between ministries on the protection of biodiversity limits the accountability of key ministries to address the illegal wildlife trade. Spurred on by gaps in the legal framework and a lack of political will to address wildlife crime at certain levels, the illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam has become a low-risk, high reward enterprise. While the Vietnamese authorities are cracking down on smaller cases, Vietnam has not uniformly punished high profile leaders of Vietnamese crime syndicates and large cases may go unreported.

Way Forward and Recommendations

New opportunities to address this illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam will contribute to the conservation of wildlife species in Vietnam and abroad. Priorities for counter wildlife trafficking center on beginning to frame the issue as a serious transnational criminal issue instead of a "victimless crime," addressing ministerial discord, closing legal loopholes, and continuing work in essential areas such as forensic analysis. The GVN could mobilize COVID-19 as a rare opportunity to establish champions at the highest levels of GVN leadership while biosecurity concerns are at the forefront and strengthen its international standing through addressing wildlife crime.

CWT programming can be strengthened over the coming years through exploring new approaches and strengthening already existing efforts:



Work closely with several GVN entities (such as GVN leaders, the National Assembly, Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the justice system, and scientific bodies) in new programming to support law enforcement and implementation, along with forensic capacity.



Facilitate a platform for collective action by partnering with large Vietnamese conglomerates and supporting existing international coalitions between the private sector, government, and civil society.



Review existing demand reduction approaches and the synergies that exist between Activities.



Consider a new general intergovernmental and interagency approach to CWT in the post-COVID landscape that strengthens collaboration with African and Chinese counterparts.

To read the full report, please visit [here](#).

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