

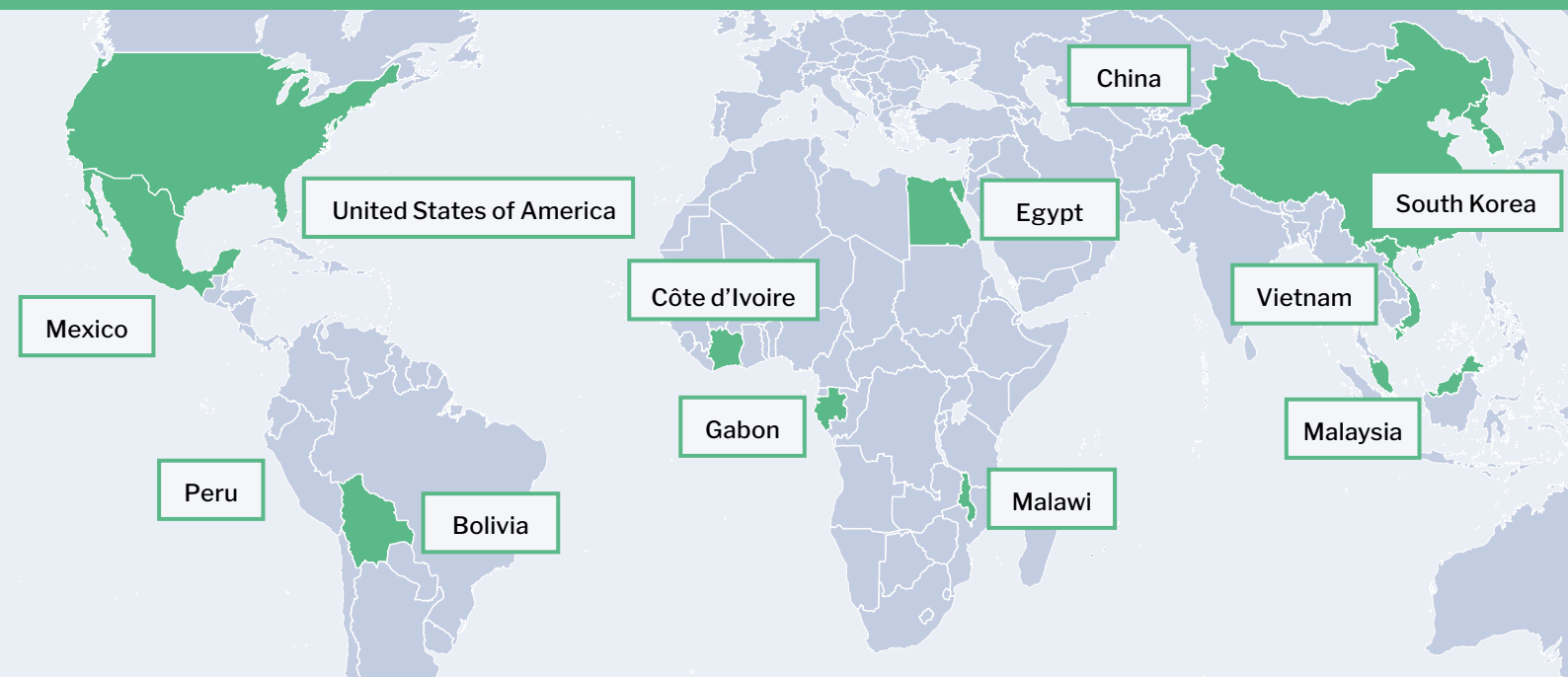
Looking Beyond Bans

Policy responses to COVID-19 and wildlife trade

Context

Early reports in 2020 linked the COVID-19 pandemic to wildlife trade. This motivated governments to formulate stricter regulations on wildlife trade, including bans.

Governments with new or amended policies on wildlife trade in response to COVID-19



Other government measures relating to COVID-19 and wildlife trade have included:



Strengthening enforcement and legislation



Adopting behavioural change campaigns to reduce demand for 'risky' animal products



Implementing new surveillance systems to monitor emerging zoonotic diseases



Yet, more information is needed on the effectiveness of these policy responses to prevent zoonotic outbreaks and what other interventions might be required.

Our approach

To investigate the effectiveness of these policy responses, our team collected and analysed content from the following sources:

22 policy or legislative documents

A survey of **21** experts

57 documents produced by government and non-governmental actors

Participation in **17** virtual events

108 academic articles

Why are bans ineffective at preventing zoonotic outbreaks?

Our analysis shows that policies banning the trade and consumption of wildlife may prove ineffective at lowering the risk of zoonotic disease emergence and transmission. Here are three reasons why this might be the case:

Although bans may be effective at controlling the formal trade in wildlife, **bushmeat trade often occurs informally** and through institutions and networks that are difficult to regulate.

New restrictions can cause **socio-economic shocks and food insecurity**. This can lead people to grow more, not less, dependent on wild meat or to push wildlife trade underground with greater risk to human health and biodiversity conservation.

Preventing wildlife trade alone **does not protect against future zoonotic outbreaks**. Other equally significant drivers of disease emergence and transmission need to be considered, such as industrial meat production, environmental and land use change, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable resource use

Eg: Bonwitt, J., Dawson, M., Kandeh, M., Ansumana, R., Sahr, F., Brown, H., & Kelly, A. H. (2018). Unintended consequences of the 'bushmeat ban' in West Africa during the 2013–2016 Ebola virus disease epidemic. *Social Science & Medicine*, 200, 166–173

Eg: Booth, H., Arias, M., Brittain, S., Challender, D. W., Khanyari, M., Kuiper, T., & Milner-Gulland, E. J. (2021). "Saving lives, protecting livelihoods, and safeguarding nature": risk-based wildlife trade policy for sustainable development outcomes post-COVID-19. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, 9, 99.

Eg: Roe, D., Dickman, A., Kock, R., Milner-Gulland, E. J., & Rihoy, E. (2020). Beyond banning wildlife trade: COVID-19, conservation and development. *World Development*, 136, 105121.

Recommendations for policymakers

Looking beyond bans, interventions are needed that lessen dependence on risky and unsustainable wild animal products while also addressing other causes of zoonotic disease spillover.

Policymakers working on designing, implementing, and enforcing policies related to wildlife trade should consider:



Building capacity for local governance - Building local capacity to govern wildlife trade, including hunting licenses and quotas, can enhance benefit-sharing and compliance while preventing practices that contribute to zoonotic spillover, such as over-exploitation and unsafe trade practices.



Strengthening local food systems - Strong local food systems can improve access to desirable and sustainable food alternatives in places where few alternatives exist. This may reduce consumption of higher risk species.



Providing compensatory funds - Where people are engaged in wildlife trade supply chains of greater risk, compensation for transitioning away from the sector may help mitigate food security and economic shocks while also improving compliance.



Securing land rights - Land tenure regimes that promote control over land by Indigenous Peoples and local communities guard against degradation, land conversion and habitat fragmentation, all root causes of zoonotic spillover.

This policy brief is based on research conducted by Wildlife Trade Futures. Read the full report titled 'COVID-19 and Wildlife Trade: Understanding the Current Policy Landscape and Identifying Alternative Policy Interventions' available at wildlifetradefutures.com.

Please get in touch with us at wildlifetradefutures.com/contact to discuss how these findings can be implemented in policy.