



DONKEY SLAUGHTER AND SKIN TRADE IN AFRICA

Post-moratorium trends across
some African Union member states

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FOREWORD

Across Africa, the donkey has long been an invisible helper behind rural resilience, an unsung hero powering households, farms, and local economies. Whether transporting water in arid villages, ferrying children to school, carrying harvests to market, or providing transport in remote communities, donkeys quietly sustain millions of lives directly or indirectly across Africa. Yet in recent years, these invisible workers have come under direct and existential threat as investors target their skins for traditional Chinese medicine.

This trade has decimated donkey populations across the continent, exposed rural communities especially women and children, to deeper hardship, and undermined their animal welfare and existence for posterity. In response, the African Union Heads of States on 18th February 2024 took a bold stance as they adopted the 5th Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment report effectively adopting a continent-wide moratorium on the slaughter and export of donkeys for their skins. This landmark decision underscored Africa's responsibility to protect her donkeys.

It is worth noting that the STC highlighted that breeding donkeys for commercial slaughter is biologically and economically unfeasible in the current modern science and technology and that the growing demand for donkey skins cannot be met through breeding. Further, the Committee **recognized the crucial socio-economic role** donkeys play, especially in rural Africa, urged Member States to include donkeys in national animal resource development strategies and to support the development of a **Pan-African Strategy for the Development of Donkey Species**, mobilize resources, and build a

coordinated program for the conservation, development, and protection of donkeys. We commend countries such as **Burkina Faso, Senegal, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Tanzania, Kenya and Zimbabwe**, for translating the AU moratorium into firm national bans. We also acknowledge encouraging international progress in the United States where the Congress has introduced **a legislation to ban the import of ejiao**, a significant step towards cutting off demand at its source and showing solidarity with African efforts of saving the donkey species and safeguarding community livelihoods.

This report, *Donkey Slaughter and Skin Trade in Africa: Post-Moratorium Trends Across Some African Union Member States*, offers a timely, evidence-based assessment of how the trade has adapted and persisted despite regulatory bans. It maps trafficking corridors, highlights enforcement gaps, and documents continued illegal bush slaughter, all of which put both animals and people at risk. Further, the report shows the ongoing efforts across member states to implement the AU decision and serve not only as a wake-up call for stronger legislation, coordinated cross-border enforcement, community empowerment, and investment in sustainable alternatives. Above all, it reminds us that African development is also built on and by invisible workers like the donkey, whose silent contributions uphold the visible world.

Donkeys remain **invisible helpers**. Their lives matter. Their work matters. And their existence and future are our responsibility.

Dr. Raphael Kinoti
Regional Director Brooke East Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 37th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly (Executive Decision EX.CL /Dec.1233 - 1264(XLIV)) "requested the Commission through the relevant technical office to lead, plan and coordinate an African common position and moratorium on the exploitation of the donkey through its slaughter in Africa for the exploitation of its skin to: anticipate and mitigate the negative impact of the donkey skin trade; ensure the preservation of the species with the ultimate goal of improving food and nutrition security; safeguard the livelihoods of donkey-dependent communities; and support sustainable economic growth." It further "requested the Commission through the relevant technical office to develop a Pan-African Strategy for the Development of Donkeys in Africa and an action plan for increased production and productivity."

February 2024 moratorium represented a pivotal moment for the continent's rural economies and animal-welfare advocates. From North Africa's Nile Delta to the Sahel and the Horn, and down to Southern Africa's savannas, donkeys have long been indispensable to smallholder farmers and pastoralists, powering irrigation pumps, ferrying water and firewood, and transporting goods to remote markets. Yet, between 2012 and 2020, surging Chinese demand for ejiao drove an unprecedented hide trade that is estimated to have removed up to four million donkey skins annually, putting pressure on donkey populations globally and mainly in Africa.

In response, several African countries introduced different policy actions. Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Botswana, Senegal and Zimbabwe took quick steps to establish full domestic bans. These measures halted all legal abattoir operations and made the export of donkey skins a punishable offence through formal laws or government orders. Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and Namibia relied on ministerial directives and circulars to suspend slaughter licences, even as formal legislation delayed. Egypt and South Africa adopted a controlled-export model,

maintaining benchmarks of 10,000 and 10,500 hides per year respectively, while attempting to stem illicit donkey trade. Meanwhile, Mozambique and Zambia became "swing states," neither outlawing slaughter outright nor fully regulating it, but instead serving as transit corridors for hides tracked from neighbouring producers.

Despite these national initiatives, enforcement gaps have allowed clandestine networks to persist. Investigators have documented three primary smuggling corridors: the Sahel-Atlantic route funnelling hides from Cameroon and Niger through northern Nigeria and Ghana to West African ports; the Horn-Coast corridor moving animals from Ethiopia and Uganda into Kenya before coastal shipment; and the Central-Southern axis conveying stock from Central Africa into South Africa and beyond. Across these routes, thousands of informal border crossings – such as the Caprivi / Zambezi Strip and the Chad / Cameroon / Nigeria tri-border – enable traffickers to falsely declare salted donkey skins as bovine leather, often alongside ivory and pangolin scales.

The direct impacts of welfare have been severe. In several Sahelian communities, donkey populations have shrunk by 40–60 percent since 2016, forcing women and children to walk farther for water and affecting school attendance as children tend to household chores. In East Africa's highlands and Southern Africa's rural districts, theft rings and night-drives have reduced herds by up to one third, while environmental contamination from bush-slaughter camps has been recorded in Burkina Faso and Botswana.

Although penalties for donkey trafficking typically range from US \$50 to US \$200, these sums are undermined by profits of US \$35–50 per hide, making enforcement an uphill struggle. On 10 June 2025, the Ministry of Animal Resources issued an inter-ministerial decree banning the slaughter and export of donkeys and all related products, offering significant hope for donkey conservation efforts. Brooke West Africa and

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

its partner Inades-Formation Togo publicly welcomed this crucial measure and pledged technical support for its implementation, urging other African Union member states to adopt similar proactive policies to protect donkey populations and rural livelihoods across the continent.

Since 2024, the industry has simply shifted underground rather than ending. Although Kenya and Tanzania closed their export abattoirs in 2020 and 2021, illicit slaughter sites quickly reappeared in remote areas – such as Ezamgbo in Nigeria, the Shinyanga hinterlands in Tanzania, and informal bush camps in Kenya. Despite Nigeria's stringent federal regulations, the country remains a major hub for collecting donkeys sourced from North, Central, and West Africa for the illegal skin trade. Bush slaughter operations continue unabated in Kaduna, Gombe, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Nasarawa States: in Fakai LGA (Kebbi) alone, informants report that around 5,000 donkeys are butchered each week in open slaughter fields in Nigeria. Animals are often thrown from vehicles, killed with axes, and every part – including foetuses – is processed and smuggled out.

These ongoing practices still supply south-eastern Nigerian meat markets and clandestine international hide channels. Dishonest practices are common in African meat markets, where many instances of donkey meat being sold under false labelling as beef have been found. Studies show that in many parts of Africa, there is widespread fraud in fresh meat markets.

Live-donkey prices have stabilized at levels two to four times higher than pre-2016 baselines, reflecting sustained demand and chronic scarcity. Some shipping lines have instituted voluntary bans on carrying donkey skins, but wider corporate compliance remains patchy.

Donkeys are at even greater risk from the inhumane transportation. Although the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) reports outbreaks of African Horse Sickness in Nigeria during 2023–2025, the first

case of Equine Encephalosis in Ethiopia was reported in 2023, highlighting that a unified approach to monitoring and safeguarding borders is necessary.

If the AU moratorium on commercial donkey skin exports is widely enforced and integrated into national legislation, the herd could be rebuilt back to supporting livelihoods, ecosystem functions, and rural economies. However, if current trade dynamics remain unchecked, the population may plummet to below effective reproductive numbers with loss of half of the continent's donkeys within the next 16 years.

Looking ahead, an effective continental response must transcend policy statements to forge a cohesive, multi-layered strategy.

First, all AU member states should domesticate the moratorium through formal legislation, embedding strict custodial and financial penalties for trafficking.

Second, customs authorities must adopt distinct Harmonised System (HS) codes for donkey skins and deploy rapid-test kits at major ports and border posts because currently, donkey skins are often lumped under general categories like "raw hides and skins" or "other animal skins (not elsewhere specified)". This makes it difficult to track donkey skins in international trade data.

Third, regional task forces – uniting police, veterinary services and customs – should patrol critical corridors, supported by community-based intelligence networks.

Fourth, investments in sustainable and welfare-friendly small scale community-led breeding and alternative livelihoods can restore herds and reduce economic incentives for illicit trade. Efforts must be made to integrate monitoring of equine diseases into national veterinary programmes, also promoting the sharing of data between countries to detect and control outbreaks more promptly.

INTRODUCTION

Donkeys (*Equus asinus*) have long played an important role in rural life in Africa, providing affordable traction, transport, and income for millions of households.

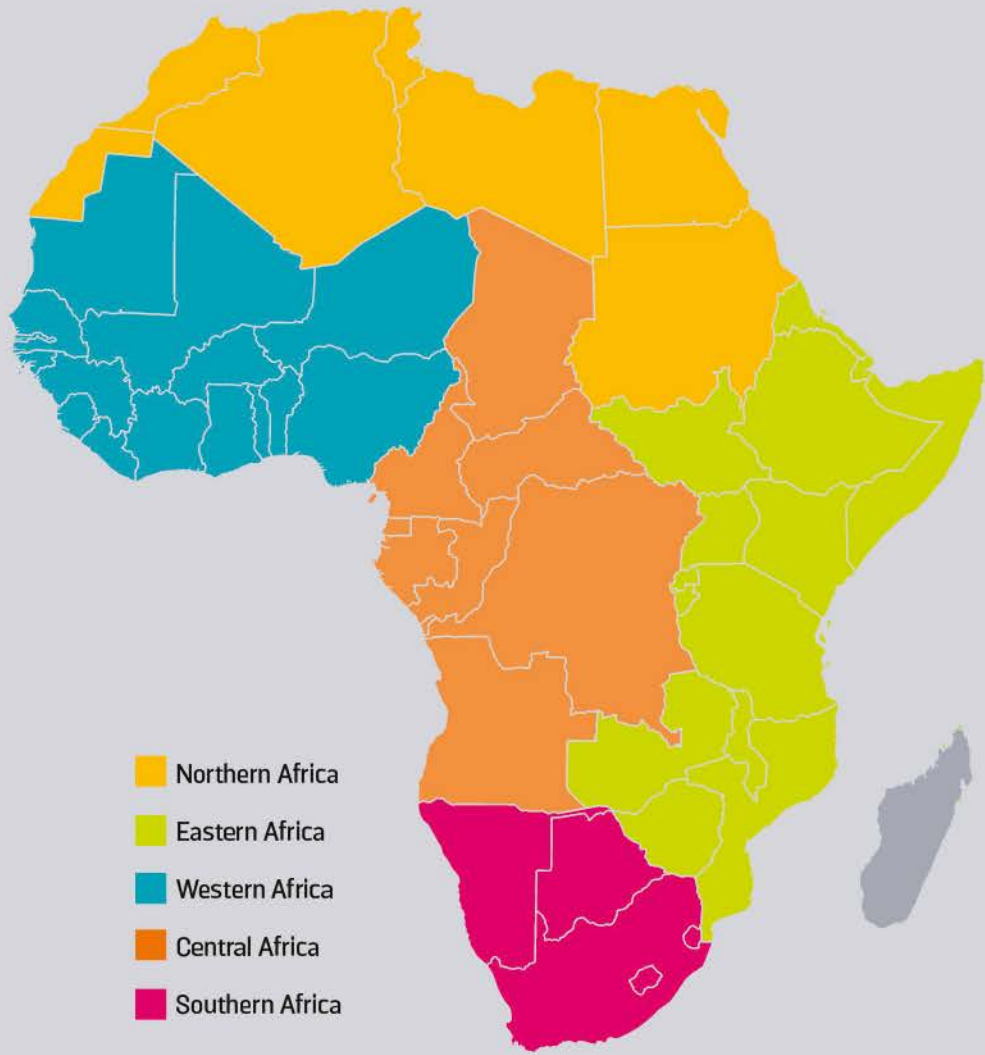
Today, that role is under threat. Global demand for ejiao—a gelatin extracted from donkey skin for traditional Chinese medicine has accelerated slaughter and export across the continent, placing unprecedented pressure on national herds.

When the African Union implemented a moratorium on the commercial donkey-skin trade (starting in 2024), there were closures or suspensions at many of the licensed abattoirs. Yet the trade continues through bush slaughter, covert trucking, and cross-border smuggling. Such illegal actions avoid animal inspection, reduce the effectiveness of disease surveillance and damage fragile donkey populations. Economic losses fall mostly on women and small farmers who depend on donkeys for getting water, farming and reaching markets.

This report examines how the trade has evolved after the moratorium, mapping new routes, actors, and slaughter hotspots in African Union Member States. Drawing on field observations, stakeholder interviews, veterinary records, and verified market-tracking data, it documents:

- current population declines and regional hotspots of overexploitation;
- emerging trafficking corridors that circumvent official checkpoints;
- the socio-economic and biosecurity impacts of unregulated slaughter; and
- early signs of policy success and gaps that still enable illicit trade.

This evidence is provided to help governments, regional bodies, and development partners craft stronger enforcement and develop sustainable, community-based solutions that protect both livelihoods and animal welfare.



Central Africa



CENTRAL AFRICA

Central Africa functions mainly as a conduit – rather than a formal producer – within the continental donkey–skin economy, yet its vast, lightly policed spaces and overlapping trade corridors make it indispensable to traffickers.

Chad hosts one of Africa's largest donkey herds and serves as the primary aggregation hub: animals trek south–west from Sudan and the Central African Republic and westward through Abéché, Mongo and Massakory to reach border markets at N'Djamena, Fotokol and Diffa.

Once there, drovers funnel livestock into Cameroon's Far–North divisions – Gazawa, Zamaï, Mada, Gobo – where clandestine slaughter camps strip hides for onward movement into Nigeria or through Douala's port. The same corridor feeds bush–slaughter operations in Nigeria's north–east, effectively bypassing national bans on export in both Cameroon and Chad.

Further south, the dense forests of Gabon, Congo–Brazzaville and Equatorial Guinea host no large donkey populations, but their Atlantic ports Libreville, Port–Gentil, Pointe–Noire and Bata – offer smugglers alternative exit points. Hides harvested in the Sahel travel by truck along logging roads, mis–declared as bovine leather.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's river network adds yet another layer of porous transit, linking northern Equateur Province with Cameroonian routes through Bangui and Garoua–Boulai.

The laws are only intermittently put into action. The 2017 halt on industrial slaughter in Chad led to donkey trading going underground, while the 2022 bill Cameroon hopes to adopt is not yet a law; and authorities in the region have neither the training nor tools required to know if donkey or cattle hides are being imported. Not only are working animals more expensive in Sahelo–Sudanian villages, but farmers say there has been a surge in stealing that threatens their farming operations. Though Central Africa now implements a shared policy during 2024, because of uncoordinated inspections, delayed tougher penalties and no new community alternatives for donkey workers, the region's transit routes will still export hides and sharply increase risks to working donkeys and their keepers.

CHAD

POST-AU MORATORIUM TRENDS, TRADE CORRIDORS AND WILD-DONKEY ECOLOGY IN CHAD

Introduction

Chad possesses the second-largest donkey herd in Africa – an estimated 3.2 million head in 2022.^{1,2} Over the last quarter-century the national population has multiplied almost ten-fold as Sahelian agro-pastoralists adopted donkeys for haulage and water transport.³ The 2024 African Union moratorium on commercial skin exports sought to curb unsustainable off-take, yet evidence suggests trade has merely shifted into clandestine channels. A clear grasp of current illegal trade routes and of the remaining wild or feral donkey groups is essential for sound policy and effective conservation.

Trade Networks, Market Dynamics & Policy Landscape

Expansion of Slaughter and Export Activity
Chinese demand for *ejiao* encouraged plans for a

200-head-per-day abattoir in N'Djamena in 2017; the project was halted within weeks after civil-society protests.⁴ Since the AU moratorium, field interviews indicate nocturnal trekking of donkeys to Cameroon (Gazawa, Mada) and Nigeria (Mai'adua, Maigatari, Mai'adua, Maiduguri and all other livestock markets in North) rather than any real decline in slaughter volumes.

Policy and Enforcement Gaps

A 2017 ministerial decree already prohibited industrial donkey slaughter, while the AU's 2024 decision obliges member states to suspend exports.⁵ Enforcement, however, relies on ad-hoc checkpoints: Chad's 1 350 km of borders with Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon include hundreds of informal crossings that traffickers exploit.⁶ Maximum fines stand at US \$300, trivial beside hide revenues of US \$40–60 per skin.⁷ No legislation mandates traceability or minimum-welfare standards for donkeys.

Principal Cross-Border Corridors

Direction	Collection points in Chad	Exit point & partner market	Movement details
Eastern Sahel → Lake Chad → Nigeria	Abéché → Mongo → Massakory → Bol	Diffa (NER) → Mai'adua (NGA)	Dry-season treks of thousand head per week
Central-West → Cameroon	Dourbali → N'Djamen hinte land	Fotokol/Kerawa → Gazawa	Mixed donkey/sheep trek; dusk crossings
South-West Savanna → Cameroon	K élo → Pala	Kousseri → Gazawa	Lower volumes, tied to wet-season cereal flows

Principal cross-border donkey corridors from Chad – including the main routes active in 2025 – documented through field surveys (2024–25).

Presence of Wild Donkeys in Chad

Location & Ecological Context – Wadi Fira

Two regions host verified feral or semi-feral groups: Wadi Fira in the east (14.9 °N, 20.6 °E) and Kélo in the south-west (9.3 °N, 15.8 °E). Wadi Fira lies within the Sahelian belt, whereas Kélo occupies the Sudanian savanna adjoining Cameroon.

Climate & Terrain – Wadi Fira

Wadi Fira endures a distinctly semi-arid climate, receiving barely 200–400 mm of rain between June and September and registering peak daytime temperatures above 38 °C as early as March.⁸ Vast, windswept plains are punctuated by low basaltic outcrops; permanent surface water is virtually absent, forcing both livestock and wildlife to rely on ephemeral ponds or wells sunk to depths greater than twenty metres. Vegetation is limited to drought-resistant grasses and *Acacia* scrub, producing a sparse forage matrix that shapes donkey foraging behaviour and body condition.

Field Observations & Ecological Findings – Wadi Fira

Direct transect counts and key-informant interviews in April 2025 recorded small bands of three to eight donkeys frequenting residual guelta pools at the desert's edge.^{9,10} Animals routinely excavate shallow troughs in dry wadi beds to access sub-surface moisture. Their frames are lean, reflecting a diet dominated by coarse shrub litter. Survival strategies include long-range nocturnal treks, loose cluster aggregation to deter predators and occasional visits to nomadic camps where animals are sometimes recaptured for draught work.

Human–Wildlife Interaction – Wadi Fira

Pastoralists describe the donkeys as a "walking savings account"; animals abandoned during droughts may be rounded up and re-domesticated in better years. Although occasional skin hunters operate, community sentiment is largely utilitarian rather than hostile.

Location & Ecological Context – Kélo

Kélo, near the Cameroon border, benefits from a humid Sudanian climate with roughly 1 100 mm of rainfall spread across a seven-month wet season.^{11,12} Rolling ferruginous plains, gallery forests and perennial streams create a markedly richer resource base.

Climate & Terrain – Kélo

Gentle undulating topography supports savanna grasslands inter-laced with riparian corridors, while deeper, lateritic soils sustain crop mosaics of sorghum, groundnut and cassava alongside grazing.

Field Observations & Ecological Findings – Kélo

Feral donkeys in Kélo roam semi-cultivated landscapes where cropland merges into wooded pasture. Access to perennial streams means animals maintain better hydration and, consequently, glossier coats and higher foal survival than their Sahelian counterparts. Interviews with smallholders reveal mixed attitudes: some value the donkeys for manure deposition, while others complain of crop nibbling yet seldom pursue lethal control.

Human–Wildlife Interaction – Kélo

Because cattle and small-ruminant herds are stall-fed during the cropping season, competition for pasture is limited and most farmers regard the donkeys with indifference.

Comparative Analysis of Wild-Donkey Populations

Factor	Wadi Fira	Kélo
Climate	Hot, semi-arid	Humid savanna
Water availability	Episodic pools	Perennial streams
Terrain	Flat plains, rocky outcrops	Rolling fertile lands
Diet	Woody shrubs, dry grass	Grasses, crop residues

Ecological comparison of feral donkey populations in Wadi Fira and Kélo.

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Ecological comparison of feral donkey populations in Wadi Fira and Kelo.

Key Findings

Wadi Fira hosts larger feral aggregations owing to historic abandonment, whereas Kelo numbers are naturally regulated by settled agriculture and occasional recapture. Climate and resource gradients dictate behavioural adaptations – water-digging and nomadism in the east versus opportunistic crop foraging in the south. Despite the AU moratorium, cross-border demand for skins continues to drive clandestine off-take, threatening both working and wild donkey pools.¹³ Chad also remains enzootic for African horse sickness¹⁴ and recent surveys confirm trypanosome infections in equids of the southern belt.¹⁵

Strategic Recommendations

1. Deploy GPS collars and run quarterly line-transect counts to track donkey movements.
2. Broker grazing accords with pastoral unions to emphasise draught value over hide sales.
3. Pilot "loan-for-foal" schemes to reintegrate captured juveniles into local economies.
4. Evaluate donkey impacts on shrub encroachment (Sahel) and pasture regeneration (savanna).
5. Form a Chad – Niger – Nigeria – Cameroon patrol unit using e-permit waybills to curb night trucking.

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CAMEROON

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN CAMEROON

Introduction

Donkeys remain indispensable to the livelihoods of farming and pastoral households in Cameroon's Far North and North Regions, providing affordable traction, transport, and income diversification. According to FAO's DAD-IS database, the national donkey herd was approximately 40,086 head in 2023, with the highest densities recorded in Diamaré, Logone-et-Chari and Mayo-Tsanaga divisions¹. A recent socio-economic survey across Bogo, Gazawa and Zamaï confirmed that 91 % of donkey owners are smallholder men who rely on the animals for mixed crop – livestock systems and market access².

Expansion of Trade Networks and Slaughter Activity

Since 2015, Chinese demand for ejiao (donkey-hide gelatin) has driven an aggressive trans-Sahel supply chain. A 2024 briefing by The Donkey Sanctuary identified Cameroon as one of five "hot-spot" source countries feeding the global skin pipeline³. Market prices for live donkeys doubled between 2018 and 2023, mirroring trends reported by ISS Africa⁴. Field officers in Zamaï

estimate that approximately 200 head are slaughtered weekly, with additional clandestine movement of livestock through Kerawa and Fotokol into Nigeria.

Policy Landscape after the PADCO/AU Moratorium

At the 37th African Union Summit (Addis Ababa, 18 February 2024), member states adopted a continent-wide moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter and skin export⁵. This resolution echoed PADCO-2022 recommendations to "halt all industrial or export-oriented donkey-hide processing in Africa"⁶. Cameroon has not yet gazetted implementing regulations. Draft welfare legislation submitted by Foundation for Animal Welfare Cameroon (FAWCAM) in March 2024 remains pending.

Market Dynamics in the Far North

A rapid appraisal conducted in 2023–2024 covered seven primary donkey markets. Supplies peak during the dry season when pastoralists liquidate stock, and crash during planting when traction is needed. Prices vary widely – CFA 32,000 to 150,000 – depending on size, sex and condition:



Plate 1: Donkey Market in Doumrou (Mayo-Kani Dept. Extreme-Nord Region Cameroon)

Division	Market (weekly day)	Avg. head offered	Avg. price (CFA)	Key destinations
Diamaré	Gazawa (Fri)	25-100	45 000	Chad → Gazawa → Zamaï
Mayo-Kani	Doumourou (Mon)	15-30	50 000-90 000	Kaélé, Zamaï
Mayo-Kani	Moulvoudaye (Fri)	8-30	32 000-150 000	Guidiguis, Dargala
Mayo-Danay	Gobo (Mon)	26-75	50 000	Yagoua, N'Djamena
Logone-et-Chari	Mada (Wed)	25-100	45 000	Fotokol → Nigeria
Mayo-Sava	Mémé (Fri)	10-50	35 000	Dalazoulgo
Mayo-Tsanaga	Zamaï (Mon)	25-100	45 000	Koza, Nigeria

Source: Field data from key informants in donkey markets (March–June 2025)⁷.

Enforcement Gaps

Despite the AU moratorium, OIPA's 2025 field mission documented continued cross-border trucking at Gazawa and Doumourou, facilitated by informal levies at secondary checkpoints⁸. Investigative reports indicate hides are consolidated in Maiduguri (Nigeria) before export through Lagos, often mislabeled as bovine leather⁹. Interviews with market actors further revealed:

- Customs hurdles and unofficial fees add ≥ 15 % to trader costs.
- Veterinary oversight is minimal – no ante-mortem inspection and a high prevalence of chronic wounds, pneumonia and parasitism.
- Security risks: organized theft rings target trekking herds at night.

Strategic Action Point for Cameroon

1. Gazette the draft Animal Welfare Bill with explicit prohibition of industrial slaughter for skins.

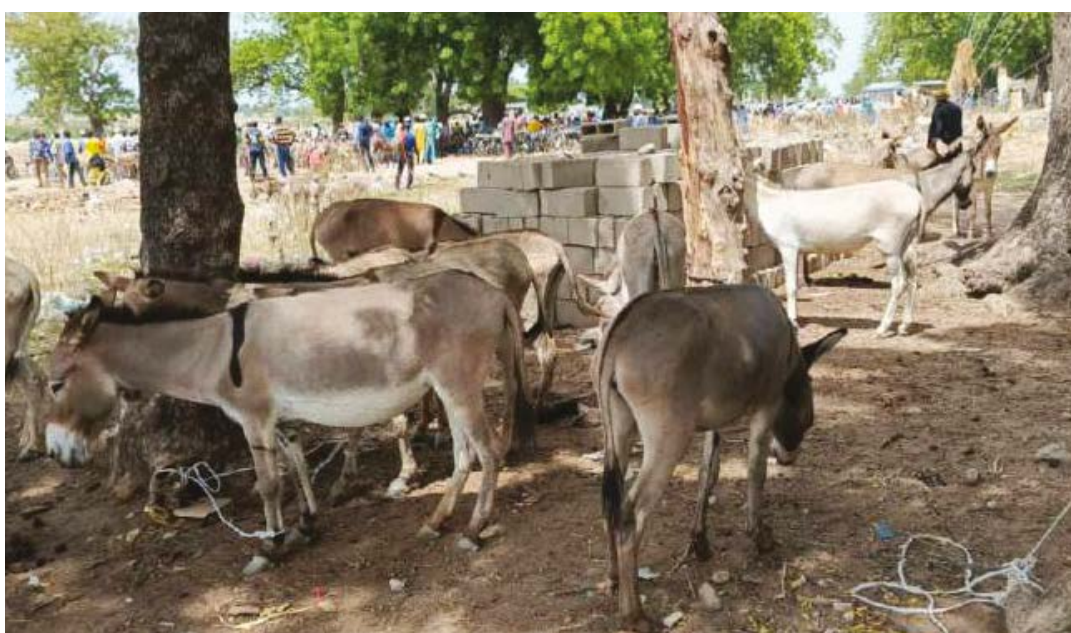


Plate 2: Donkey Market in Doumourou (Mayo-Kani Dept. Extreme-Nord Region Cameroon.)

2. Designate donkeys as "strategic livestock" under Law No. 78/20 to unlock dedicated veterinary budget lines.
3. Establish a Cameroon – Nigeria – Chad cross-border task force with joint patrols and e-permit tracking for live-equid movements.



Plate 3: Donkey Market in Doumrou (Mayo-Kani Dept. Extreme-Nord Region Cameroon)

4. Upgrade market infrastructure (shade, water points, crush pens).
5. Conduct community sensitization programmes targeting Mbororo and Musgum herders on sustainable herd management.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

Based on available data, Cameroon has not reported any official outbreaks of WOAH-notifiable equine diseases.

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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

POST-AU MORATORIUM: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

Introduction

The Central African Republic is a land-locked, low-density country whose working-equid population is tiny by regional standards. In the 2023 FAO Rural Household Survey (Round 4) only 0.7 % of rural households owned any equid (donkey, horse or mule); the 2022 round recorded 0.4 %¹². Extrapolating these proportions to CAR's ≈ 1 million rural households suggests a national donkey herd of < 5,000 head. These animals nevertheless underpin subsistence transport in the savannah prefectures of Nana-Mambéré, Ouham-Pendé and Vakaga¹.

Regulatory and Policy Setting

- **No licensed equid abattoirs.** Neither the Ministry of Livestock's published plant list nor does WOAH (OIE) register any slaughter facility for donkeys in CAR.
- **Generic welfare provisions only.** The 2014 national Animal-Health Code covers humane handling but contains no species-specific clauses on equids.
- **Moratorium by default.** Bangui endorsed the African Union's continent-wide ban on donkey-skin exports (adopted 18 Feb 2024) and has begun drafting transposing legislation.⁷

Trade Dynamics & Security Context

Corridor	Modus operandi	Status (Q2 2025)	Key evidence
Béloko – Garoua-Boulai (Cameroon)	Live donkeys walked at night; hides aggregated at Garoua-Boulai and declared as bovine leather.	Customs post at Béloko burned in Jan 2023 rebel attack; border controls remain thin.	Wikipédia Béloko page ³ ; Garoua-Boulai border post ⁴
Koui/Paoua – Moundou (Chad)	Rustlers swap donkeys for arms or motorcycles along trans-humance trails.	Insecurity in the so-called "triangle of death" drives weekly livestock thefts.	<i>Guardian</i> investigation ⁵
Ndélé – Am-Dafock (Sudan/S. Sudan)	Barter of small donkey lots for grain; hides trucked to Nyala (Sudan).	Sudan conflict (2023–25) has increased cross-border animal flows.	UN & media field reports (no official seizures yet)

Cameroon's OIPA-supported task-force reports "regular inflows of skins from neighbouring conflict states, explicitly naming CAR"⁸

Welfare and Socio-Economic Risks

Population collapse scenario. The Donkey Sanctuary's demographic model shows that removing 800 animals / year would wipe out CAR's herd inside five years, eliminating affordable haulage for ≈ 50,000 villagers.⁹

Criminal convergence. Donkey hides are routinely co-loaded with other wildlife contraband (pangolin scales, ivory) in West- and Central-African supply chains, complicating CITES enforcement¹⁰

Gender lens. Donkey loss disproportionately hits female-headed households, which carry the primary burden of water and firewood transport; Brooke estimates up to 6 million donkeys slaughtered for skins annually across Africa⁶.

Strategic Action Point for CAR

1. Gazette the AU moratorium in national law, explicitly banning HS codes 4101.20 (raw hides) and 0511.99.90 (other animal products).
2. Re-establish veterinary customs teams at Béloko and Am-Dafock with UV/XRF hide-scanners.
3. Rapid donkey census (2025) using FAO TAD-info templates to confirm a post-ban baseline.
4. Border-community micro-grants for women's co-operatives to build night paddocks and roll out ear-tagging pilots (Nana-Mambéré first).
5. Regional intelligence MoU with Cameroon, Chad and Sudan to track cross-border theft and prosecute organised-crime cells.
6. Logistics choke-point. Support shipping-line blacklists (e.g. Swire Shipping's 2025 ban) to restrict maritime export of hides⁹.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

A query of the WOAH-WAHIS dashboard shows no immediate, follow-up or annual notifications for African horse sickness (AHS), equine influenza, equine infectious anaemia, glanders, dourine or West Nile fever from the Central African Republic (CAR) between January 2018 and June 2025¹². The CABI Compendium corroborates this absence, listing CAR as "Absent – no presence record(s)" for AHS and other notifiable equine diseases¹³. Such silence is not proof of freedom: the national equid herd is very small (< 5 000 head) and diagnostic capacity has been weakened by years of insecurity, so low-level circulation could pass undetected.

CAR therefore functions as a "silent sentinel" wedged between neighbours that do register outbreaks – notably an AHS episode in Chad in April 2019¹⁴ and a confirmed case series in Nigeria in October 2024¹⁵. These cross-border events, combined with porous frontiers and informal livestock movements, underscore the urgency of low-cost early-warning measures (Culicoides-midge trapping, syndromic reporting by farriers and rapid PCR access) to protect CAR's few but indispensable working equids.

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GABON

POST-CONTINENTAL MORATORIUM: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN GABON

Introduction

Gabon is a heavily forested Central-African state ($\approx 85\%$ forest cover) with a sparsely distributed population of ≈ 2.3 million and a land area of $267\,667\text{ km}^2$ ¹. FAO livestock statistics list no standing population of domestic donkeys, underlining that the species has never been integrated into local farming systems².

Slaughter, Hide Demand & Transit Risk

- No licensed equine abattoirs exist and there are no records of local slaughter or consumption.
- No statute specifically prohibits donkey-hide exports; this legal vacuum could attract traffickers looking for an Atlantic seaport outside the usual enforcement spotlight.
- A Donkey Sanctuary risk-mapping study flags Libreville and Port-Gentil as potential "red-flag" ports where hides might be shipped under generic leather codes³.
- Market-monitoring sites already quote indicative live-donkey prices for Gabon (US \$ $4\text{--}9\text{ kg}^{-1}$), even though there is no domestic herd – evidence that speculative traders are poised to exploit any loophole⁴.

Policy Landscape after the PADCO / AU Moratorium

Level	Current status	Gap / risk
Domestic law	Generic Wildlife & Maritime Codes; no animal-welfare act.	No clause on equids or hide export.
PADCO 2022	Gabon co-signed Yaoundé declaration.	No implementing regulations published.
AU Moratorium (Feb 2024)	Supported in principle.	Not yet transposed into customs tariff.

Enforcement & Bio-security

- Customs focus is mainly on timber and ivory; officers receive little training on donkey-skin trafficking.
- Logging corridors link Cameroon/ROC to coastal highways, giving traffickers concealed truck routes.
- No equine-disease outbreaks (AHS, EI) have been reported, but any clandestine live-animal flow would raise bio-security concerns.

Recent Industry Signals

On 8 May 2025 Swire Shipping became the first global container line to ban carriage of donkey skins, citing reputational and bio-security risks⁵. International media continue to highlight the continent-wide threat posed by the ejiao trade⁶ – reinforcing the need for Gabon to close regulatory gaps before traffickers shift south-west.

Strategic Action Points for Gabon

1. Gazette the AU moratorium and insert donkey skins into Chapters 41 & 43 of the customs tariff.
2. Add donkey hides to Gabon's PORTNET "sensitive wildlife" watch-list and train port agents on red-flag indicators.
3. Joint road-patrols with Cameroon and the Republic of Congo on major logging corridors.
4. Rapid-response protocol for any live-equid consignment arriving without veterinary clearance.
5. Public-awareness campaign targeting shippers and freight forwarders to deter use of Gabonese ports for wildlife-linked cargo.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

Using the World Organisation for Animal Health's WAHIS system, no cases of equine diseases have been reported by Gabon from 2020 through 2024. Also, reviewing scientific studies from that time frame found no confirmed cases of African Horse Sickness, Equine Influenza or other main notifiable diseases in horses in Gabon.

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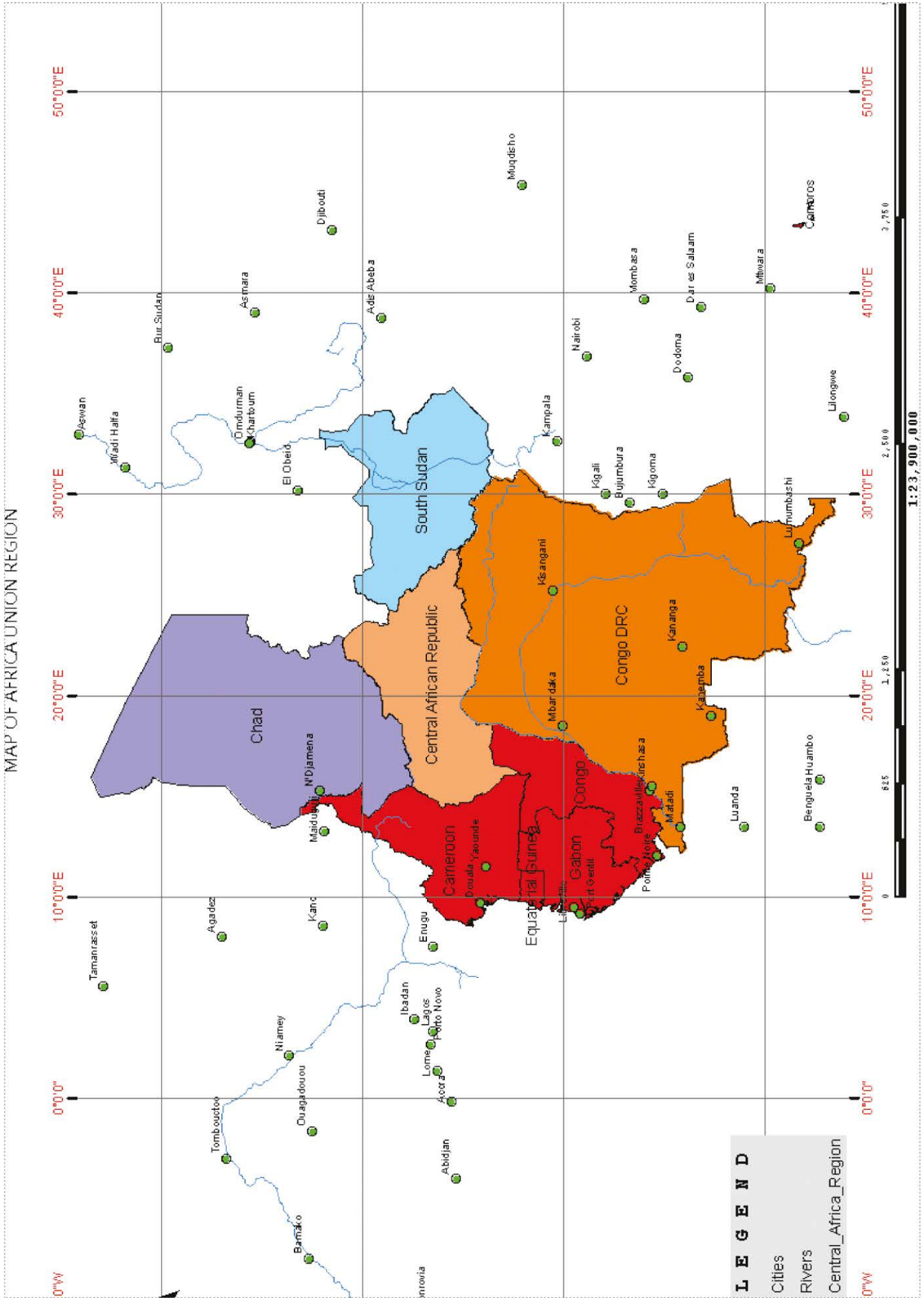
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Central Africa



Western Africa



WESTERN AFRICA

West Africa has been the epicentre of Africa's donkey-skin boom and, despite successive bans, remains the corridor through which countless hides still reach Asian markets.

Nigeria and Ghana hosted the region's first export abattoirs in the mid-2010s, drawing live animals from source nations such as **Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali** and **Senegal**. Rapid herd depletion, soaring theft and violent night-drives soon followed, prompting the 2016 **ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Abuja resolution** that urged every member state to halt slaughter and export of donkeys. Implementation, however, has been weak. Burkina Faso and Niger outlawed exports but bush-slaughter flourished; Côte d'Ivoire moved in 2022 to ban killing outright, yet hides still slip across porous borders into Ghana and onward to ports in Togo and Benin.

Nigeria's customs service has regularly seized multi-tonne consignments – containers of hides at Lagos, sacks of genitals at Kano, even truckloads of salted skins in Kebbi – yet underground abattoirs persist from Kebbi to Abia, supplied by organised theft rings that operate along transhumance routes.

Across the Sahel, donkey prices have quadrupled; communities that once depended on the animals for ploughing, water hauling and market trips now struggle to keep breeding stock. The AU's 2024 continent-wide moratorium hardened political resolve, but enforcement resources are thin: more than 3,000 informal crossing points perforate West Africa's borders, veterinary inspectors lack legal power, and bush-slaughter camps quickly relocate when uncovered. Meanwhile, traffickers exploit long-standing livestock corridors – Diffa – Geidam, Dori – Walewale,

Hamélé – Bawku – moving herds on the hoof at night, then hiding hides in containers or underneath trucks alongside other contraband for Atlantic ports. Until ECOWAS countries harmonise penalties, fund border patrols and rebuild herds through small scale welfare-friendly breeding programmes, West Africa's working donkeys – and the livelihoods they underpin – will remain under severe and mounting pressure from the clandestine skin trade.

BURKINA FASO

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN BURKINA FASO

Introduction

Donkeys are highly used in Burkina Faso to transport goods and people around villages, but because of a market increase for donkey skins, they are now becoming rare.

When the Council of Ministers became concerned by the slaughter of tens of thousands of donkeys in 2015 and 2016, it adopted Decree No 2016-802/PRES/PM/MRA on 3 August 2016. This ruled out hide export and set requirements for donkey slaughter.²

The mandatory rules and the 2024 AU moratorium have not been enough to stop donkey deaths and illegal export of hides.

Trade Expansion and Regulatory Response

Between October 2015 and January 2016 customs officers recorded **19 t of donkey hides** flown from Ouagadougou to Hong Kong.² A subsequent government review estimated **≈ 45,000 donkeys** slaughtered nationwide in the preceding six months, far out-stripping reproduction rates.³

One focal point was a 2011 Ouagadougou abattoir leased to a Franco-Chinese consortium, Best Trade Centre, which processed **150–200 head per day**¹, trucking animals from Mali and Mauritania and shipping hides to China and meat to Vietnam.⁴ Villagers in Balolé – 25 km west of the capital – rebelled when toxic effluent from the plant ruined market gardens, releasing more than 400 donkeys in protest and forcing temporary closure.⁵

The 2016 decree thereafter banned export of hides and live equids, but allowed regulated domestic slaughter; however, no plant has since secured a compliance certificate.

Enforcement and Welfare Gaps

Exports are not allowed, but despite this, people now walk live donkeys across weak border points into Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger for bush slaughter. They return with cured donkey skins. Routine welfare and environmental laws are violated during field inspections: bodies are dumped in fields, blood soil is present and there are no pre-mortem checks.⁶

Customs staff have limited power, cannot tell donkey from bovine hides by speedy tests and summons are relatively small unless offenders get caught twice. Many people reliant on using donkeys for draught work say theft has gone up and prices are way too high, with some areas reporting that their donkey herds are now 60% smaller than they were in 2016.⁷

Current Status (2024 – 2025)

In March 2024, the Ministry of Animal Resources presented guidelines for the AU moratorium, though these will not come into effect until they get approval from parliament. As a result, bush slaughter is still common in Bobo-Dioulasso and Gourcy and each week, large convoys of 40–60 donkeys move through Hamelé and Kantchari.

In February 2025, representatives from NGOs spotted salted hides being prepared for smuggling at warehouses near the Ouagadougou airport, waiting for better surveillance⁸. At the same time, the government has launched mini-ranching projects in Centre-Nord Region in an effort to rebuild the herds, but funding is insufficient.

Strategic Action Point for Burkina Faso

Although Burkina Faso tightened rules on donkey hide exports and commercial killing for export by enacting Decree No. 2016-802, enforcing these laws inside Africa has been very challenging. Live-animal traffic and mass slaughter of donkeys are still threatening the country's herds and some local people say that the number of donkeys they have dropped by around 60% since 2016.

To address this, Burkina Faso must urgently *domesticate and legislate* the 2024 AU moratorium, strengthen border surveillance (particularly at Hamelé and Kantchari), and equip customs agents with species-specific identification tools to distinguish donkey hides from others⁶. Additionally, increasing the penalties for those who continue to smuggle requires judicial action as well.

At the same time, small scale community based breeding initiatives in Centre-Nord Region could be piloted to restock donkey populations while meeting good welfare standards. These activities require a national census to confirm the base of the herd and update recovery plans using clear objectives.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

There have been no official WOAHP notifications for equine diseases in Burkina Faso for 2021, 2022, or 2023.

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MALI

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN MALI

Introduction

Since traditional census efforts overlook donkeys in national livestock surveys, Mali's herd – now estimated at roughly 1.19 million head – ranks it among the world's top 15 donkey-holding nations¹. Across the arid plains of Mopti and the riverine croplands of Ségou, donkeys remain indispensable: hauling water, ferrying firewood and grain, and linking remote villages to weekly markets where motorized vehicles cannot venture.

The last few years have seen donkey hides become more valuable on the global market, leading to a major drain on Mali's horses. Although there are only low numbers of exports from Mali, it appears that some traffickers quickly take skins to Niger and Burkina Faso, where they process them for overseas shipments. Village herders say that often, a whole set of donkeys can go missing suddenly which reduces their income and makes food scarce.

Mali accepted the African Union's February 2024 moratorium on donkey slaughter and skin export right away², but as of now, there is no domestic law in place to fulfil this commitment. Without species-specific statutes or clear penalties, enforcement remains ad hoc – and porous frontiers continue to facilitate illicit donkey movements.

Veterinary services in Mali's rural areas are so scarce that these legal gaps are made even wider. In several villages, there is no basic health care for animals, so donkeys often go without treatment when they get hurt⁴. Unable to care for their animals and lacking funds, many farmers are forced to sell donkeys which then helps supply the black market with donkey hide.

Strategic Action Points for Mali

1. Guide the development and passage of a law that adopts the AU moratorium into Malian law which bans both the selling and shipping of donkey skins.
2. Border Protection: Send mobile forces and set up cross-border checkpoints at vital donkey trading centres (such as Gourma and Ménaka) to stop the entry of illegal donkey consignments.
3. Working with local cooperatives, run programmes explaining the strengths of healthy donkey herds, as well as suggesting different income options.
4. Train extra vet workers for care of donkeys and roll out discounted programmes to improve their health and make it less likely they will be sold early.
5. Establish one database for all donkeys, using e-ID, to monitor changes in the donkey population and note cases of theft or illegal trafficking.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

According to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), in the period from 2021 to 2024 Mali has not reported outbreaks of African Horse Sickness or Equine Influenza⁵.



Plate 4: Donkey cart to deliver vaccines to the children of Kankelena village, in Mali's volatile region of Mopti.
Source: Unicef/UN0293636/Keita

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THE GAMBIA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN THE GAMBIA

Introduction

With a population of just under 2 million and one of the smallest land areas in mainland Africa, The Gambia's reliance on donkeys for agricultural haulage, short-distance transport, and food distribution is significant—especially in its rural hinterlands¹. According to the 2013 census, The Gambia had an estimated 5,857 donkeys². These animals are mainly used for ploughing and cart transport in farming communities throughout the country and border areas near Senegal.

Donkey Population and Community Trade

Donkeys in The Gambia are rarely slaughtered locally for meat or hides. Rather, they are trafficked informally across porous borders into Senegal for processing³. Nearly one million donkeys are believed to be present in Senegal⁴, many of them imported illegally through Gambian and Malian routes. Donkeys are exchanged across these frontiers via informal livestock markets, with transportation facilitated by trailers or on foot, especially during livestock market days such as the Soma and Brikama markets⁵.

Trade Expansion and Regulatory Response

There have been no official donkey abattoirs registered in The Gambia, nor have there been formal licenses for hide export. However, cases of cross-border trafficking into Senegalese slaughter zones — including Kolda, Tambacounda, and Kaolack — have been reported since 2020⁶. Despite a 2015 ban on donkey slaughter in Senegal, enforcement has been inconsistent, enabling The Gambia to serve as a low-risk source and transit point⁷.

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Following the African Union's moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter and skin exports in February 2024⁸, The Gambia endorsed the resolution through the Ministry of Agriculture. However, as of mid-2025, no implementing regulations have been gazetted locally. The absence of binding domestic law complicates enforcement and limits the powers of veterinary and customs officers at border crossings like Farafenni, Soma, and Brikama.

Instrument	The Gambia's Response	Gap
AU moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter (Feb 2024)	The Gambia endorsed via Ministry of Agriculture memo (March 2024) ⁹	No implementing decree or border enforcement framework
Customs regulations	No species-specific declaration system for donkeys	Risk of misclassification of hides persists
Veterinary inspections	Occasional NGO-led campaigns	No permanent donkey health monitoring in rural markets

Enforcement and Welfare Gaps

Although the Gambia Police and Gambian Veterinary Services have periodically intercepted donkey movements along the Trans-Gambia Highway, no permanent inspection regime exists. NGOs report regular injuries, dehydration, and hoof wounds in working donkeys⁵. Moreover, the lack of ante-mortem inspections or hide traceability leaves room for abuse, especially for animals rerouted to Senegal's informal abattoirs⁷.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

Field reports indicate donkey-related transactions persist along the eastern corridor into Senegal via Bansang and Basse. Traders describe demand spikes in the dry season when donkeys are less essential for farming, leading to increased sales for cross-border movement. Gambia's role remains that of a feeder state for Senegal's donkey skin market despite continental efforts to curb the trade⁵.

Strategic Action Points for The Gambia

1. **Legislate Species-Specific Protections:** Enact a donkey-specific protection and export control law in line with the AU moratorium.
2. **Establish Permanent Border Inspection Units:** Deploy veterinary checkpoints at Farafenni, Soma, and Basse to inspect donkey movements and verify transport permits.
3. **Support Community Education and Livelihood Alternatives:** Expand outreach via police radio and NGO campaigns to dissuade rural sale of donkeys for trafficking.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

No equine disease outbreaks have been officially reported to the WOAHA by The Gambia in the past three years (2022–2024). Nonetheless, with cross-border animal movement continuing unchecked, the risk of disease spread—such as African Horse Sickness or trypanosomiasis—remains a concern, particularly during the rainy season¹⁰.

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SENEGAL

POST-MORATORIUM TRENDS IN DONKEY SLAUGHTER AND SKIN TRADE IN SENEGAL

Introduction

Donkeys remain vital to rural livelihoods in Senegal, providing water collection, farm traction and market transport. A 2018 national study estimated about 462 000 donkeys, concentrated in the northern regions of Saint-Louis and Louga¹. Since then, veterinarians and producer associations report that more than half of the animals in many northern communes have disappeared over the past five years, mainly because of organised theft and clandestine slaughter confirmed by the Institute for Security Studies². This rapid decline threatens the daily income of thousands of women and children who depend on working donkeys.

Regulatory Timeline (2016 – 2025)

- **May 2016:** After inspectors seized 20 t of donkey meat (≈ 800 carcasses) in Dahra Djolof, the Ministry of Livestock issued an *arrêté* banning donkey slaughter and the export of meat and skins³.
- **2016 – 2023:** A non-binding ECOWAS memorandum limited veterinary permits for live-donkey movements, but trade quickly shifted to bush slaughter and cross-border trucking².
- **February 2024:** Senegal publicly reaffirmed its national ban when the African Union moratorium on commercial donkey-skin exports entered into force⁴.
- **January 2025:** A Brooke – British Embassy round-table in Dakar urged stronger prosecutions and traceability; government officials pledged joint border patrols with Mali and Burkina Faso⁵.

Key Trade Routes and Hotspots

- **Dahra Djolof (Louga):** epicentre of the 20-t 2016 seizure that triggered the ban³.
- **Kaolack central market:** site where a Chinese trader was arrested for passing donkey meat as beef in January 2016⁶.
- **Mbour suburbs (Thiès):** police intercepted six suspects butchering about 50 donkeys in May 2016⁷.
- **Tambacounda → Kaolack corridor:** live animals trek in from Fada N'Gourma (Burkina Faso), then move west to clandestine points or onward to Ghanaian abattoirs².

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Despite the AU ban, traffickers now pay over US \$200 per hide, keeping the business lucrative^{3 4}. Rather than risk detection in Senegal, many animals are trucked east to Ghanaian markets, where inspections are laxer⁵. Food-fraud cases have also resurfaced: inspectors recently found unstamped red meat in Dakar's Dalifort cold store, echoing the 2016 scandals⁸.

Enforcement and Governance Gaps

Enforcement is hampered by **porous borders** – there are roughly 40 recognised crossings with Mali and Burkina Faso, yet only eight have facilities for inspecting livestock². Penalties for donkey-skin offences range from 50 000–200 000 XOF (US \$80–320), well below the street value of a single hide. Traceability is also weak: there is no national identification system for equids. A microchip pilot proposed by Université Gaston Berger remains unfunded. Strengthening border control, raising fines and adopting equid ID technology are essential steps to align national practice with the AU moratorium⁹.

Welfare, Biosecurity and Public-Health Concerns

Abattoir spot checks reveal methods such as bludgeoning or tendon-cutting before slaughter, breaching WOAHA welfare standards². Offal discarded near Dahra Djolof attracts scavengers and heightens the risk of glanders and equine-influenza spill-over.

Official and Civil-Society Action

A draft decree would make it illegal to possess more than ten donkey hides without written authorisation. In Saint-Louis and Louga, local NGOs have teamed up with Brooke West Africa to run neighbourhood watch groups that report suspicious movements and teach humane handling to owners⁵.

Strategic Action Points for Senegal

1. Embed the 2016 *arrêté* in primary legislation with prison terms of at least two years and asset forfeiture.
2. Deploy joint ground and drone patrols along the Tambacounda and Matam corridors.
3. Launch a national equid census and database to track legal movements.
4. Expand livelihood programmes for women to reduce economic pressure to sell donkeys illegally.
5. Harmonise penalties with neighbouring states and fast-track adoption of the AU Donkey Strategy.

Recent Equine-Health Trends (2023 – May 2025)

- **Old World screwworm (*Chrysomya bezziana*):** From July 2023 to March 2024, more than **2,000 suspected cases** were logged across seven regions, driven by prolonged rains and delayed treatment^{10 11}.
- **Tick-borne piroplasmiasis (*Theileria equi*, *Babesia caballi*):** remains endemic, with seroprevalence around 90 %; incidence peaks late in the dry season².
- **West Nile virus:** no clinical outbreaks since 2016, but a sentinel study found **92 % of horses seropositive**, confirming silent circulation¹².

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GHANA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN GHANA

Introduction

Ghana's donkey population was officially estimated at approximately 11,797 animals in 2015¹. The situation worsened after the opening of the Blue Coast donkey abattoir in Walewale in 2013. Located along a major livestock trade route that passes through Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, and northern Nigeria, the facility rapidly increased the slaughter of donkeys. This expansion led to theft of animals, unrest in local communities, and increased sourcing of donkeys across borders¹.

To address the growing crisis, Ghana's Veterinary Services Directorate (VSD) announced a nationwide ban on the slaughter and export of donkey skins on January 17, 2017². This decision aligned with a resolution made by ECOWAS in Abuja in September 2016, urging West African nations to take similar action³.

Following the ban, Ghana's donkey population began to recover. As of 2023, the population stands at approximately 15,140 animals, reflecting a 28% increase since 2015⁴. This growth can be attributed to four main factors:

1. Natural herd growth due to reduced slaughter pressure;
2. Legal and informal importation of donkeys from neighbouring countries¹;
3. The deterrent effect of the 2017 ban²;
4. Community awareness and support from NGOs, including the enforcement of local rules and the provision of alternative income sources¹.

Despite these positive developments, the population is still considered low and remains vulnerable to renewed demand from the skin trade. Continued government commitment, accurate data collection, and sustainable and welfare-friendly breeding support are necessary to secure further progress.

Licensed Abattoir Timeline

Plant	District	Key Dates	Status
Blue Coast Trading	Walewale (North-East)	Opened in April 2013; local stock depleted by mid-2015; Chinese operators left in Jan 2017 following the VSD ban; seen operating covertly in Jan 2022	Irregular bush-mode supply ¹²
Johnny's Food Meat Complex (JFAMCO)	Accra (Greater Accra)	Added donkey line in 2015 without a licence	Operations halted after VSD notice ²

Throughput at Walewale: 150–170 donkeys slaughtered during 2013–2014; estimated daily capacity was 70 animals.

Trade & Supply Dynamics

- **Phase 1 (2013–2014):** Donkey hides were exported, and the meat was discarded.
- **Phase 2 (2014–2015):** Meat also exported to China and sold in Ghana as horse meat ("cheval").
- **Phase 3 (2015–2016):** Local depletion led to importation from Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso; theft cases increased.
- **Phase 4 (2017–2024):** Ban led to underground operations, with bush slaughter sites in Bolgatanga killing about 20 donkeys daily at over 25 locations. Skins are still moved south for illegal export³⁴.

Policy Landscape After the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Ghanaian Response	Gap
VSD Ban (Jan 2017)	Still in force; regional officials instructed to enforce	No legal authority to prosecute under Criminal Code
AU Moratorium (Feb 2024)	Supported by Ghana; no new legal penalties created	Enforcement still depends on the 2017 directive
Criminal Code Review	Ongoing; current laws on animal cruelty are outdated	Weak sanctions for donkey theft and abuse

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Although the 2017 ban remains in place, enforcement is weak. Veterinary officers have no authority to arrest offenders, and former exporters now source hides through bush slaughter sites outside government oversight. In urban markets, donkey meat is sometimes falsely labeled and sold as bush meat. National efforts to align with global welfare standards have also faced setbacks. For example, in 2020, a government official publicly supported the donkey skin trade, undermining progress.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

Recent investigations confirm the trade continues illegally. A joint inspection by Eyes on Animals and WACPAW in September 2024 reported weekly slaughter of 15–24 donkeys at Awinpala in Bolgatanga⁵. In July 2024, local activists petitioned the Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly to close hide-processing facilities, citing growing public concern⁶. In addition, a 2024 academic study reported continued welfare violations and confirmed that Ghana remains a key transit point for donkey skins, despite both national and AU bans⁷.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreaks

A 2023 study found antibodies to equine encephalosis virus (EEV) in donkeys and horses in Ghana. This finding suggests silent transmission and underscores the disease risk linked to unregulated cross-border movement of animals⁸.

Strategic Action Points for Ghana

1. Enact national legislation to give legal force to the AU donkey moratorium.
2. Update the Criminal Code to include stronger penalties for illegal slaughter, theft, and skin export.
3. Launch a national census to update donkey population data.
4. Create joint enforcement teams involving police and VSD staff at borders and ports.
5. Expand community surveillance and provide incentives to reduce theft of working donkeys.

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GUINEA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN GUINEA

Introduction

With fewer than 2,000 donkeys in 2023, according to the latest FAOSTAT-based analysis¹, Guinea has one of West Africa's smallest herds. Yet in subsistence areas such as Kankan and Faranah, these animals remain vital for carting rice, water and firewood.

Regulatory and policy setting

Guinea has no licensed donkey abattoirs, as the Directorate-General of Veterinary Services has never received an application to slaughter the animals commercially³. The 2011 Veterinary Code offers only broad welfare provisions, lacking equid-specific clauses – a regulatory gap that traffickers could exploit if commercial demand re-emerges³. Although Conakry formally endorsed the AU's moratorium on donkey-skin exports in February 2024, the enabling bill remains before the National Assembly².

Trade dynamics and smuggling routes

Regional investigations highlight three gateways⁴:

Corridor	Modus operandi	Current status, 2025
Kouremalé (Mali border)	Night trekking; hides consolidated near Bamako then re-labeled "bovine leather".	Traffic has slowed since the AU ban, but spot checks still find mixed consignments.
Koundara (Senegal/Guinea-Bissau border)	Traders pay ~ US \$160 per skin; animals cross on foot to Senegalese depots.	Local chiefs report monthly thefts.
Port of Conakry	Containers declared "inedible meat by-products".	Shipping lines tightened controls after Swire Shipping barred skins in May 2025 ⁵ .

Welfare and socio-economic risks

Untreated hides often travel with wildlife contraband such as pangolin scales and ivory, heightening zoonotic-disease risk⁶. Demographic modelling shows that removing just 400 donkeys a year would halve the national herd within five years, depriving about 35,000 rural households of draught power¹.

Because women depend most on donkeys for daily water collection, they would be disproportionately affected⁷.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

The WOAH immediate-notification database (consulted 6 June 2025) lists no reports of African horse sickness, equine influenza or other WOAH-listed equine diseases from Guinea for 2020–2025⁸ – an encouraging status that could quickly change if cross-border movements resume unchecked.

Strategic Action Points for Guinea

1. Domesticating the AU ban by gazetting an explicit prohibition on HS codes 4101.20 (raw hides) and 0511.99.90 (other animal products).
2. Create joint border task forces at Kouremalé and Koundara, equipped with handheld UV or XRF scanners for real-time hide detection.
3. Undertake a rapid donkey census (2025) using FAO TAD-info templates to establish a post-moratorium baseline.
4. Fund community-watch schemes and compensation for women's cooperatives that rely on working donkeys.
5. Share intelligence with Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone to map flows and prosecute organised-crime cells.

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CÔTE D'IVOIRE

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) has no published census of equids, yet its Atlantic deep-sea ports at Abidjan and San-Pédro and its northern borders with Burkina Faso and Mali place it squarely on West Africa's livestock-trading axis. Most donkeys are used for transportation in the north, but the desire for skins in the market led to illegal slaughter inside the country after 2018.

Timeline of Slaughter and Regulatory Action

- **Oct 2019:** Local press uncovers a covert abattoir at Ouangolodougou (northern border) supplying hides and meat to Chinese intermediaries.
- **Nov 2019:** MFacility raided; two operators arrested after CVO intervention.

- **Sep 2021:** Brooke West Africa meets Ministry of Livestock; draft decree to outlaw donkey slaughter drawn up.
- **13 Jul 2022:** Government decree **No 2022-557** bans slaughter and export of donkeys and their derivatives.

Trade Dynamics & Illicit Risks

Before the 2022 decree, Ouangolodougou's bush plant is believed to have processed up to 40 donkeys per day originating in Burkina Faso. Hides moved south by truck to Abidjan for container export. Since the shutdown, intelligence suggests traffickers re-routed animals eastward into Ghana or westward into Mali to evade Ivorian controls.

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Côte d'Ivoire response	Gap
Decree No 2022-557 (national)	Prohibits slaughter, hide export and live-animal export for slaughter.	Enforcement regulations still under draft.
AU moratorium (Feb 2024)	Decree already meets AU requirements; Ministry has circulated reminder note to prefects (Mar 2024).	No penalties updated in Penal Code.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Oversight along the donkey-skin corridor is undermined by chronic resourcing shortfalls. Border posts at Korhogo – Ouangolodougou and Pogo operate with skeletal staffing, and their customs agents receive no specialised training to distinguish salted donkey hides from other leathers, allowing trafficked consignments to slip through undetected.

The absence of a compensation scheme for seized animals discourages owners and whistle-blowers from reporting illegal movements, while public-awareness efforts remain limited to sporadic radio messages. Consequently, demand for clandestine donkey meat continues in Abidjan's informal settlements, sustaining a black market that persists in spite of the 2022 national ban.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

A joint six-month awareness campaign led by Brooke West Africa and the Ministry of Livestock ran from August 2024 to January 2025 across five northern départements, using market meetings, community radio, and border-post briefings to publicise the national ban. By May 2025 prefectural veterinary services had reported no fresh discoveries of clandestine abattoirs; however, a November 2024 seizure of salted hides in neighbouring Ghana was traced to animals originating in Burkina Faso and moving southward through Ivorian territory before being re-exported, underscoring the continuing need for vigilant cross-border surveillance.

Demonstrating its determination to enforce the 2022 decree and to champion regional cooperation, Côte d'Ivoire has committed to host the second Pan-African Donkey Conference (PADCo2) in Abidjan in June 2025 in collaboration with Brooke and other organizations, bringing together AU policy-makers, customs authorities and welfare NGOs to review progress since the continental moratorium and to agree a common action plan for border surveillance, prosecution standards and livelihood alternatives. This high-profile event signals to traders and neighbouring states alike that the Ivorian government intends to remain at the forefront of efforts to eradicate the illicit donkey-skin economy in West Africa.

Strategic Gateway in the Donkey-Skin Corridor

Korhogo, the commercial hub of Côte d'Ivoire's northern **Savanes District**, straddles both the RN-10 trunk road and the Abidjan – Ouagadougou rail corridor, providing traders with seamless access to Burkina Faso's sizeable donkey herds and to the Atlantic export port at Abidjan¹. Its weekly livestock market – historically dominated by Fulani transhumant herders – now attracts multi-species buyers from Mali, Ghana and Burkina Faso, reinforcing

the town's role as a regional aggregation node². The same infrastructure, coupled with lightly policed border posts at Pogo and Ouangolodougou, allowed Côte d'Ivoire's first clandestine donkey abattoir to flourish in Ouangolodougou until veterinary police shut it down in late 2019³.

Despite the national decree of July 2022 that prohibits all donkey slaughter and export, Korhogo remains the "neck of the hourglass": without specialised training for customs and market inspectors, traffickers can still channel live animals and salted hides through its networks under misdeclared codes.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

A review of WOA's (WOAH/OIE) WAHIS early-warning database shows no immediate notifications or follow-up reports of African Horse Sickness, equine influenza, or any other WOA-listed equine disease submitted by Côte d'Ivoire during the past ten years. The Chief Veterinary Officer has submitted a technical note to the Directorate of Veterinary Services warning of African Horse Sickness risk after seropositive donkeys were detected in a 2023 cross-border surveillance project near Ferkessédougou; no clinical outbreaks have been recorded to date.

Strategic Action Point for Côte d'Ivoire

1. Publish implementing orders specifying fines and custodial sentences for donkey-hide trafficking.
2. Train border and port officials in hide identification and HS code discrepancies.
3. Create a rapid-response task-force linking customs, police and veterinary officers in Korhogo region.
4. Undertake a baseline donkey census to monitor herd impact and design livelihood-replacement schemes.

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MAURITANIA

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN MAURITANIA

Introduction

Mauritania lies between Western Sahara, Algeria, Mali and Senegal, with a 700 km Atlantic coastline positioning Nouakchott and Nouâdhibou on a busy north-south maritime corridor. Donkeys are vital to household economies, hauling water, produce, firewood and building materials, yet religious and cultural norms prohibit their slaughter for meat. SPANA's mobile clinics treat thousands of working donkeys each year in Nouakchott and the interior, underscoring their importance to livelihoods¹.

Industrial-Slaughter Proposals and Public Resistance

In 2019-2020 a Chinese investor approached the Ministry of Commerce with plans for a donkey-processing plant; the proposal was rejected by the Ministry of Livestock after strong objections from

religious leaders and the animal-welfare NGO SAUVER L'ANIMAL. The company attempted to win local favour by building a primary-school playground, but no licence was issued and no legal abattoir operates in the country (no permit recorded in the *Journal Officiel* as of May 2025).

Trade Dynamics & Illicit Risks

National Geographic's 2022 investigation lists Mauritania among African states where the donkey-skin trade remains legally possible, making it attractive to traffickers seeking a coastal export point². Although no formal export statistics exist, SPANA field staff report sporadic bush slaughter in peri-urban Nouakchott, where hides are quietly shipped to informal tanneries before onward transport north. Burying skins in sand dunes has been noted as a concealment tactic since the COVID-19 food-insecurity spike in 2020, when clandestine meat sales also rose (local media reports, 2020-2022).

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Mauritanian Position	Gap
AU moratorium (18 Feb 2024)	Voted in favour; communiqué welcomed by Ministry of Livestock on 22 Feb 2024 ³ .	No decree has yet transposed the ban into customs or penal code.
National legislation	Animal-welfare provisions exist within the Directorate of Veterinary Services; no article covers donkey hides or export certification.	Absence of specific sanctions hinders enforcement.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Mauritania maintains an Animal Protection Service within the national veterinary directorate, but border posts at Rosso (Senegal) and Néma (Mali) lack staff trained to recognise salted donkey skins. Tanning firms in Nouâdhibou process camel and goat leather; none

officially admit to handling donkey hides, yet inspectors have no legal grounds to seize suspicious consignments. SPANA cases highlight chronic lameness and untreated wounds among cart donkeys, reflecting limited owner resources rather than organised trade cruelty¹.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

- Civil-society petitions submitted to the National Assembly in October 2024 request rapid domestication of the AU moratorium.
- Local press reported seizure of 180 salted hides at Nouakchott port in January 2025; the shipment was declared "bovine leather" and is under investigation by customs⁴.
- SPANA launched a 2025 awareness campaign linking donkey welfare to family income, aiming to reduce covert slaughter for quick cash¹.

Equine Diseases Profile

Neither the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) nor the peer-reviewed literature record any recent outbreaks of WOAHL-listed equine diseases in Mauritania. The WOAHL Immediate Notifications in Africa database shows no equine disease notifications for Mauritania over the past decade.

Country-Specific Recommendations

1. Gazette the AU moratorium through a presidential decree, amending customs schedules to list donkey skins as prohibited exports.
2. Train customs and police at Nouakchott, Nouâdhibou and Rosso to identify donkey hides and associated HS codes.
3. Introduce movement permits for all inter-wilaya transport of donkeys to curb theft.
4. Expand SAUVER L'ANIMAL community patrols to detect bush-slaughter pits and report cases to prosecutors.
5. Support SPANA's veterinary outreach with micro-grants for harness improvement, reducing owner incentive to sell animals for slaughter.

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NIGERIA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN NIGERIA

Introduction

Nigeria's 1 608 km of porous northern frontier with Niger, Chad and Cameroon places the country astride West Africa's principal Sahelian livestock corridor. Centuries-old markets at Jibia, Mai'adua, Maigatari and Geidam still funnel donkeys southward for meat and hides. Rising Chinese demand for ejiao transformed the animal from a draught asset into a lucrative skin commodity, especially after the 1972-74 Sahel drought when protein shortages intensified trading in equine meat¹. Today donkey flesh is widely eaten in the south-east and in pockets of the north, while skins continue to reach export hubs despite repeated federal bans.

Food-fraud investigations show that donkey meat is routinely substituted for beef. A DNA-speciation study of tinko (dried meat) from three Lagos markets found the

product was entirely donkey rather than cattle². Similar substitution was reported in Calabar in June 2024, where consumers complained that snake, donkey and horse meats had "flooded" stalls after a beef-price spike³.

Enforcement snapshots underscore the scale of the clandestine trade: four women were arrested in Benin City's New Benin Market in July 2021 for selling donkey cuts as beef⁴, while Customs has intercepted multiple consignments – among them a truckload of bush-slaughtered meat worth NGN42 million in Kebbi (March 2022)⁵ and 750 sacks of dried donkey meat in Kaduna (May 2023)⁶. Because a whole donkey carcass retails at roughly 40 % below the price of beef, urban demand remains strong.

Chronology of Key Policy Actions and Major Seizures

Date	Event / Agency	Details & quantity	Declared value (NGN)	Source
Sep 2016	ECOWAS Chief Veterinary Officers (Abuja)	Regional resolution to halt donkey-skin trade	–	2
Jan 2017	Veterinary Services Directorate	National directive banning indiscriminate slaughter & export	–	3
31 May 2019	NCS FOU Zone A	Two export containers of salted hides seized (Lagos)	15 billion	5
8 Sep 2022	NCS MMIA Airport	7 000 dried donkey penises (16 sacks) seized	–	7
20 Mar 2024	NCS Zone D	3 712 salted hides confiscated on Kano/Jigawa border	–	8
30 Jul 2024	NCS FOU Zone A	6 168 hides in 40-ft container intercepted	8 billion	12
5 Feb 2025	NCS FOU Zone A	4 410 dried hides bound for export seized	4.24 billion	13



Plate 5: makeshift earthen trenches for smoking donkey carcasses, enabling dried meat fraud in regional markets



Plate 6: Discarded donkey bones at Tattara/Kondoro slaughter field, Nasarawa (20 Mar 2025) Physical proof of high volume of illicit kills

Enforcement & Welfare Situation

Nigeria's 3 445 illegal entry points render the country's 44 official veterinary control posts largely ineffective⁹. Veterinary officers have no independent prosecutorial power, and many cases collapse for lack of follow-up. Bush-slaughter hubs – Maraban Idda, Kaltungo, Tattara, Ezamgbo, Agbor and Ogbolafor – each process about 60 donkeys per night, supplying hides to covert warehouses in Enugu and Ebonyi.

Once Customs surveillance relaxes, the hides are relabeled and moved to coastal ports. These gaps in enforcement translate directly into welfare violations: no ante-mortem inspection, crude stunning with axes, and indiscriminate processing of pregnant jennies.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

Traffickers increasingly diversify loads to mask donkey items: recent Lagos seizures bundled hides with dried fish, pangolin scales and monitor-lizard skins¹². Community vigilante groups in Kebbi and Katsina intercepted four night-time convoys of stolen donkeys in early 2025, although drivers escaped¹⁵. ETS Emmalex's Nasarawa breeding pilot now lobbies for federal tax incentives to expand to Kebbi and Delta¹⁶.

Key Donkey Trade Routes, Markets, and Slaughter Points in Nigeria by State

State	Location	Type	Summary Details	Reference
Borno	Lake Chad Corridor	Trans-national route	Donkeys trafficked from Chad (Mongo, Massakory, Biltine), Sudan, and Niger via porous Lake Chad border points into Nigerian markets, then redistributed further west.	Field Engagement, Lake Chad Corridor (April 2025)
Yobe	Geidam outskirts	Clandestine loading point	Major aggregation point receiving 9,000+ donkeys weekly (90% Chad, 10% Sudan). Traffickers operate at night (2–3 AM); weak enforcement since 2021.	Yobe State Field Report (April 2025)
Gombe	Ture Village (Kaltungo LGA)	Slaughter field	Slaughters 5–6 donkeys/session (10–12 weekly). Donkeys arrive underweight, ill, or dead; fetal consumption reported. No inspection or humane slaughter.	Donkey Markets & Slaughter in Gombe State (March 2025)
Gombe	Lalaipido; Bangunji; Kaltungo Main; Baganje	Donkey markets	Supply points for Ture field. Daily operations with peak inflow pre-slaughter. Donkeys often dehydrated and sick; youth used as drivers.	Donkey Markets & Slaughter in Gombe State (March 2025)
Kebbi	Amagoro (Arewa LGA)	Donkey market	Border-linked market (30–50 donkeys/session); likely sources include Niger.	Kebbi State Field Survey (March 2025)
Kebbi	Makera (Birnin Kebbi)	Donkey market	Capital-based hub distributing 100–150 donkeys biweekly.	Kebbi State Field Survey (March 2025)
Kebbi	Bachaka (Arewa LGA)	Donkey market	Secondary rural trade point with 20–30 donkeys traded weekly.	Kebbi State Field Survey (March 2025)
Kebbi	Doduru (Gwandu/Tambuwal)	Donkey market	40–60 donkeys traded weekly on northern routes.	Kebbi State Field Survey (March 2025)
Kebbi	Bunza (Bunza LGA)	Donkey market	Village-level market trading 10–15 donkeys/market day.	Kebbi State Field Survey (March 2025)
Kebbi	Rara (Maiyama LGA)	Slaughter site	Slaughters ~10 donkeys per session for local meat.	Kebbi State Field Survey (March 2025)
Kebbi	Bindanu Kara (Zuru axis)	Market & slaughter field	Livestock hub with 500+ donkeys/day. Unregulated bush slaughter and zero veterinary oversight. Market demand outpaces supply.	Field Survey, Fakai LGA (Mar–Apr 2025)
Nasarawa	Tattara village	Slaughter field	Slaughters ~150 donkeys/week. Inhumane stunning, unregulated processing, and fetal recovery noted. Skins traded, but source chain is opaque.	Field Interview Report, Tattara (March 2025)

Ebonyi	Ezzambo	Slaughter field	Largest donkey slaughter site in Eastern Nigeria; extensive daily processing for regional meat distribution, minimal oversight or welfare regulations.	Field Survey, Ebonyi State (March 2025)
Southern States	Various minor slaughter fields	Slaughter fields	Numerous small-scale donkey slaughter operations dispersed across southern Nigeria; collectively notable for limited regulation, poor animal welfare, and contribution to regional meat fraud.	Field Surveys, Southern Nigeria (2025)

Note: A traditional leader in Gombe halted mass slaughter in his community, citing rising youth involvement and social risks. In Anambra (Onitsha), recent hide seizures caused NGN75 million/day losses and halted trade in Bindanu, Kebbi State, north west Nigeria.

Meat Fraud in Donkey Trade Context

Donkey meat fraud is an expanding issue across African meat markets. In Nigeria, open-air markets frequently sell donkey meat as beef or bush meat, exposing consumers to health hazards and undermining trust. A 2023 study highlighted widespread adulteration in the meat industry¹. Similar findings emerged from South Africa, where DNA tests uncovered donkey and other species in beef-labeled products². These incidents underscore the need for robust food safety enforcement and improved meat traceability, supported by the Nigerian Meat Edict (1968) and the Animal Diseases Control Act (2004)³.

Equine-Disease Profile

Nigeria remains a hotspot for African Horse Sickness (AHS). Following multiple 2024 outbreaks in Kano, Abuja and Jos, new AHS cases were notified in Borno in January 2025¹⁰. WOAHA also recorded an equine-influenza

(H3N8) episode in Lagos (August 2024) involving 17 sport horses¹¹. Serosurveys at Jibia and Mai'adua markets found $\geq 40\%$ antibody prevalence to equine influenza among donkeys, underscoring silent viral circulation along trade routes¹¹.

Strategic Action Points

1. Legislate a Donkey Protection Act that domesticates the AU moratorium and introduces custodial penalties.
2. Reinforce border posts on the Geidam – Diffa and Jibia–Maradi axes; train officers in hide forensics.
3. Fast-track CITES uplisting and list donkeys under Nigeria's Endangered Species Act.
4. Scale community breeding schemes via NAPRI and incentivise foal-loan programmes.
5. Launch nationwide awareness on meat fraud and zoonotic risks from clandestine slaughter.

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Plate 7: Overloaded lorry of live donkeys legs trussed with rope – departing Kebbu State markets north west Nigeria for distant slaughter sites (GPS 12.45 N 4.20 E)
The cramped inhumane transport breaches basic welfare standards



Plate 8: Donkeys at Maraban Idda Kagarko Local Government Area of Kaduna State. A known and inhumane slaughter field under surveillance by donkey merchants. strategically located along a major transport corridor, this site facilitates the rapid movement of donkey meat and skins across Nigeria



Plate 9: Donkey meat fraud is escalating across Africa, particularly in Nigeria where illicit practices threaten public health ,consumer trust, and the survival of the donkey population



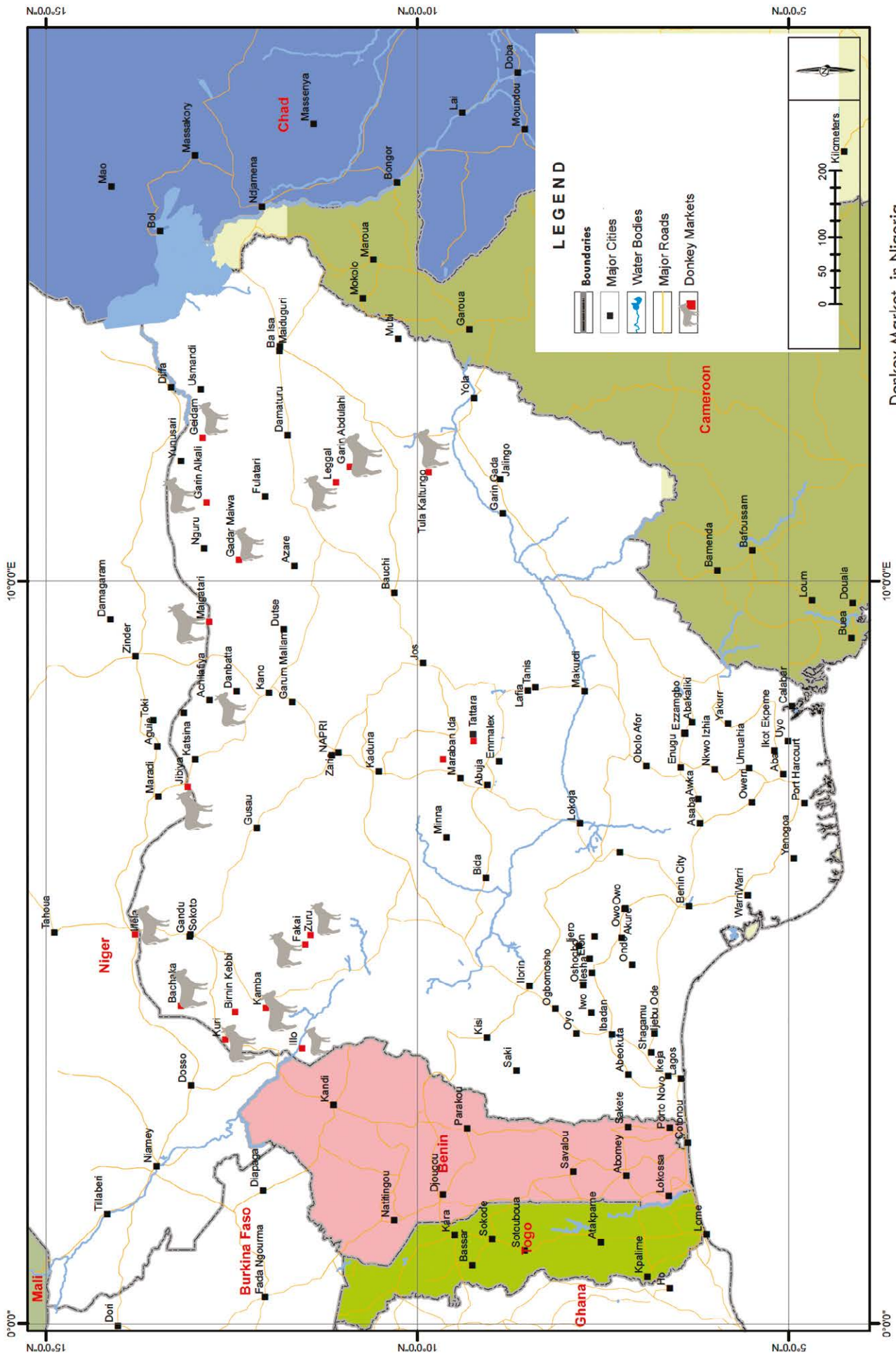
Plate 10: Donkeys awaiting sale and transport at Ungan-Bawa market, Kebbi State (17 March 2025), destined for slaughter fields across northern and southern Nigeria

Meat References

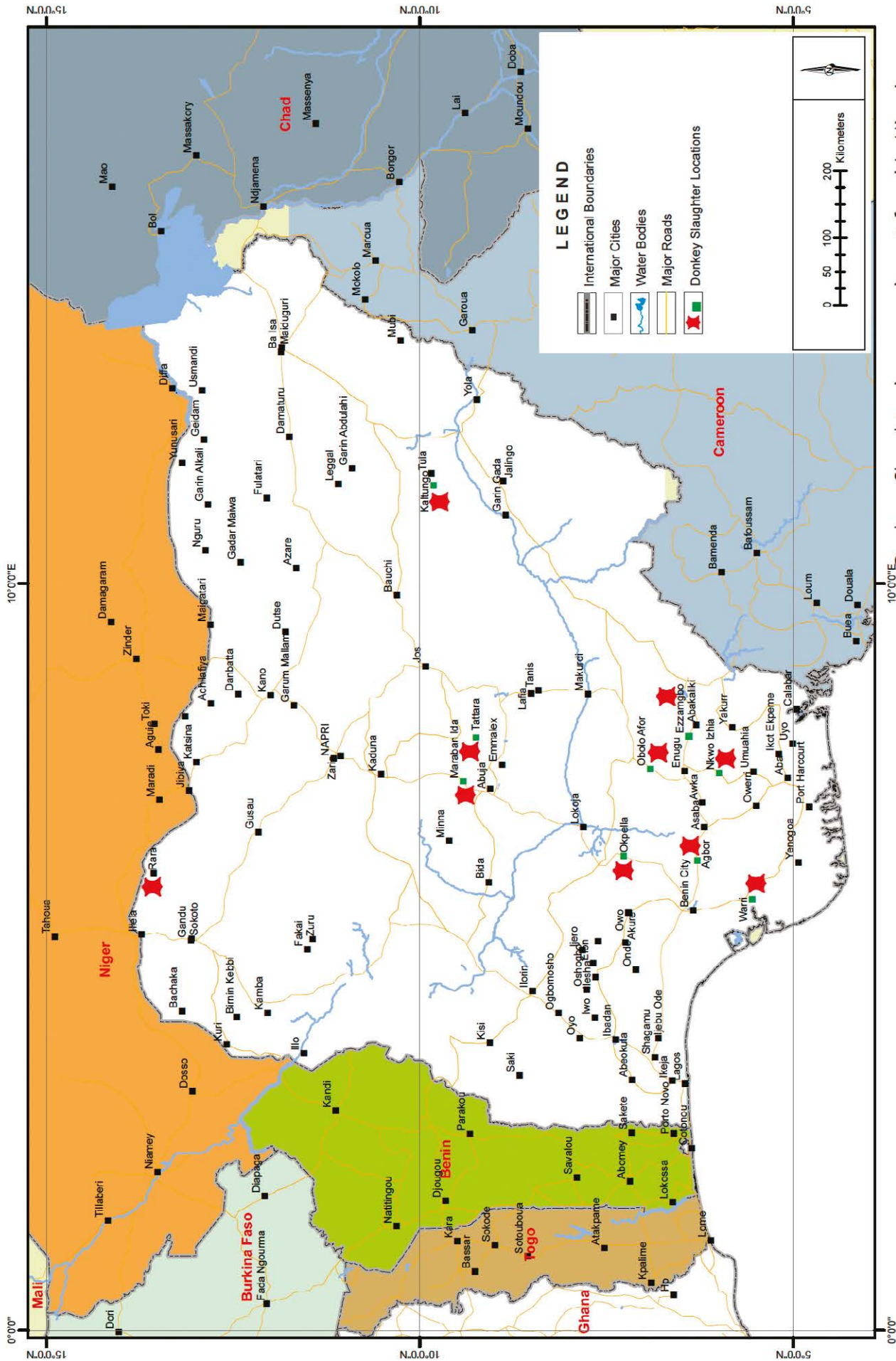
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Donkey Market in Nigeria



Donkeys Slaughter houses and meat fraud in Nigeria

NIGER REPUBLIC

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN NIGER REPUBLIC

Introduction

Niger became West Africa's principal source of live donkeys in 2016. Official figures recorded ~ **80,000 head exported in January–September 2016, up from 27,000 in 2015**.^{1,2} As demand from Nigerian abattoirs and Chinese skin-buyers soared, farm-gate prices tripled, rising from about **US \$35–40 to US \$120–145 per animal**.^{1,3} Livestock dealers quickly diverted capital from cattle and small-ruminants into the faster-growing donkey trade.

Export-ban decree in 2016

Alarmed at herd depletion, the **Ministries of Agriculture, Finance, Internal Affairs & Trade** issued a joint decree in September 2016 that *banned both the export and the domestic slaughter of donkeys*.¹ Enforcement, however, was weak along Niger's 1 500 km southern frontier, and most commerce shifted underground.

Clustered supply markets feeding Nigeria

Region (cluster)	Market	Regular market-day*	Main outlet into Nigeria	Source
Gandu belt	Gandu	Wed	Kano/Katsina axis	8
	Sabon Mashi	Tue		8
	Wuqaino	Tue		8
	Batte	Thu		8
	Tossano	Sun		8
	Achilirafie	Thu		8
	Chaker	Sun		8
	Toki	Wed		8
	Gagewe	Fri		8
	Agule	Mon		8

Region (cluster)	Market	Regular market-day*	Main outlet into Nigeria	Source
Zinder belt	Bakin Birgi	Mon	Maigatari / Illela	7
	Ajeri	Tue		8
	Kundumauei	Tue		8
	Murya	Sun		8
	Damagaram (Zinder city)	Daily		8
Agadez belt	Batte	Thu	Diffa–Geidam trek	8
	Sarkin Arewa	Fri		8
	Aabla Mai Ruwa	Thu		8
	Aderbisala	Fri		8
	Takuku	Wed		8
	Kyalle	Mon		8
	Tanis	Sat		8
Other (state TBC)	Gegime	–		8
	Kaulah	–		8
	Kinza Yindi	–		8

*Days refer to the principal weekly livestock fair.

Source 7 = WFP/IDRC "Mobile Phones & Grain Markets" study (confirms Bakin Birgi Monday); Source 8 = informants field mapping (2023) for remaining market schedules.

Principal clandestine corridors (post-ban)

Axis	Typical way-points	Border gate (NG)	Field notes	Key sources
Eastern trek	Diffa → Maine–Soroa → Usmandi → Garin Gada	Geidam (Yobe)	150–300 head walk south; 6–8 week trek from Chad	2,10
Central trek	Bakin Birgi → Batte → Takuku	Illela (Sokoto) / Maigatari (Jigawa)	Mixed lots trucked after Zinder rail-head	7,5
North-west trek	Achilirafie → Tossano → Tanis	Jibia (Katsina)	Foot caravans link to Katsina abattoirs	8

Market Dynamics After the Ban

Prices remained high, attracting traders who **abandoned cattle and goats to specialise in donkeys**.³ Hides act as quasi-currency: dealers often accept part payment in skins collected later by Chinese agents in Kano and Lagos.⁴

Enforcement indicators

Although Niger licenses **no official donkey-skin plants**, seizures in Nigeria confirm cross-border processing. On **20 March 2022 the Kano/Jigawa Customs Area Command seized 3 712 salted skins** worth NGN416 million.⁵

Strategic Action Points for The Niger Republic

- Align penalties with Nigeria's anti-trafficking statutes to erase price arbitrage.
- Deploy joint Niger–Nigeria patrols along the Diffa–Geidam axis and equip them with mobile Radio-frequency identification (RFID)/QR scanners.
- Integrate equine-influenza surveillance into all weekly livestock markets.
- Offer micro-grants for motorised tricycles to offset traction losses in villages where donkey numbers have crashed.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

Unregulated trekking and bush lairage amplify disease spread. Equine influenza (H3N8) resurged across West and Central Africa in 2018–19 and remains a WOAH priority transboundary threat.⁹

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TOGO

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSE IN TOGO

Introduction

Togo's 2023 FAOSTAT-estimated donkey population stands at approximately 3,510 head.¹ This figure places Togo near the lower end of national totals globally, largely concentrated in its northern, semi-arid regions (Savanes and Kara), and underscores the urgency of targeted interventions like the 2025 anti-slaughter decree to protect one of West Africa's smallest working equid populations that helps to move water, firewood and farm produce for rural households.

Ban, Advocacy & Legal Framework

On 10 June 2025 the Ministry of Animal Resources issued an inter-ministerial decree banning the slaughter and export of donkeys and all derivatives.² Brooke West Africa and its partner Inades-Formation Togo publicly welcomed the measure and pledged technical support, urging other AU Member States to follow suit.² A desktop review of national registers and media reports found no licensed donkey abattoirs or collection centres in Togo as of June 2025. The porous northern border still poses a smuggling risk.

Instrument	Togolese position	Outstanding gap
AU moratorium (Feb 2024)	Togo voted in favour and endorsed the ban.	—
Inter-ministerial Decree (10 Jun 2025)	Converts the AU ban into national law; empowers customs, police and veterinary services. ²	Implementing orders (border-inspection forms, e-permit templates) still to be gazetted.

Enforcement & Welfare Situation

- **Customs challenge:** Smugglers reroute animals through unofficial crossings into Ghana and Benin, countries that have weaker controls.
- **Veterinary cover:** Publicly available data show just one state veterinarian is posted to Savanes; detailed staffing figures are not published.
- **Key welfare issues:** Long dry-season treks (>20 km day⁻¹) for water and rope harness wounds persist in the absence of affordable padded tack. Brooke-run mobile clinics and youth farriery pilots cover only a fraction of high-need villages.²

Strategic Action Point for Togo

1. Gazette implementing orders for the June 2025 decree (standard inspection forms, e-permit and hide-tracking codes).
2. Launch a rapid donkey census using GPS-enabled survey tools to update 2013 herd data.
3. Scale up mobile equine clinics and farriery training to at least ten high-use districts, prioritising harness-pad distribution.
4. Create a cross-border task-force with Ghana, Benin and Burkina Faso for quarterly joint patrols and data-sharing.
5. Support women-led micro-enterprises that manufacture padded harnesses and donkey carts, turning welfare upgrades into household income.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

No WOAH-notified equine diseases (African horse sickness, equine influenza, equid herpesvirus-1, West Nile fever) recorded for 2024-2025.³ African horse sickness outbreaks were reported in Nigeria (Oct 2024) and Kenya (Sep 2024) – highlighting the need for vector surveillance along Togo's borders.³

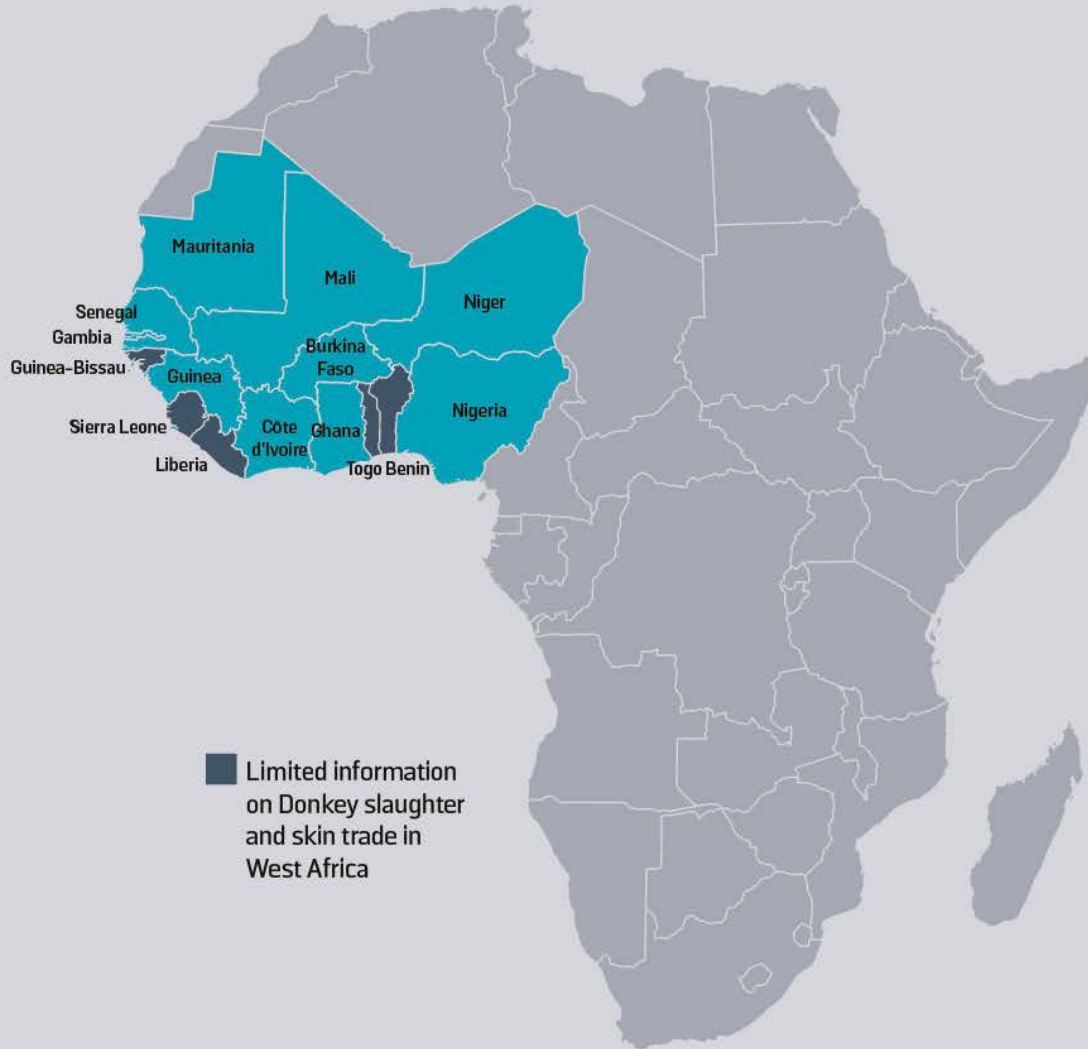
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Western Africa



Eastern Africa



EASTERN AFRICA

East Africa is one of the battlegrounds in the global donkey-skin trade. At the start of 2014, Dodoma and Shinyanga started commercial export slaughter in Tanzania, while Kenya followed in 2016–18, allowing four abattoirs to handle more than a thousand animals daily.

At their strongest, these places accessed live donkeys from all the neighbouring countries – Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia, South Sudan, Djibouti, Eritrea – and this led to more donkey stealing, many hazardous cross-border drives, rising prices and poorer families losing their main work animals.

Even after people in the region criticised the trade and demanded a stop to it, China's market for bush-meat meant the practice ended up operating secretly and illegally.

The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) gathered in Nairobi in 2019 and the ministers at the summit backed tighter border checkpoints and projects aimed at caring for and reproducing livestock. There has not been equal advancement; opposition in Kenya, stop-start openings in Tanzania and limited enforcement elsewhere have allowed secret traffic to persist.

Although the protest by the African Union carries political influence, there is not enough agreement on how the moratorium should be enforced, so well-financed groups remain active in moving the skins into neighbouring nations.

As a consequence, working donkeys in East Africa are facing many challenges, so authorities and organisations should develop strong regulations and better alternatives for the families who depend on them.

BURUNDI

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN BURUNDI

Introduction

Most Burundians work in agriculture, with farming comprising a major share of the country's GDP. Although donkeys are not indigenous to Burundi, animals introduced from Tanzania in the 1950s are now used as pack animals in limited areas such as Gitega and Ruyigi. Traditionally overlooked, these donkeys are increasingly essential to women and children who rely on them to fetch water, gather firewood, and transport farm produce¹. Donkeys in Burundi remain relatively uncommon, but their economic and social value is growing in rural regions where mechanized alternatives are lacking⁶.

There is no official census of the donkey population; however, field estimates by local NGOs suggest only a few hundred animals exist⁶. These are used solely for draught and transport, with no evidence of meat consumption or industrial slaughter⁶. Their foreign origin has also influenced policy; in 2018, a donation of ten French donkeys was rejected after a quarantine process, citing inadequate veterinary clearance – highlighting the government's caution toward "exotic livestock"⁵.

Policy & Regulatory Landscape

Burundi currently lacks species-specific laws on donkey trade or slaughter. Import controls are ad hoc, as illustrated by the 2018 incident, and there is no established veterinary inspection protocol for equids⁵. Although Burundi endorsed the African Union's 2024 moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter and skin export, no enabling legislation has yet been gazetted³.

A bilateral agreement with China to modernize Bujumbura airport, signed in 2022, could enhance cargo flows and inadvertently create new trade vulnerabilities².

Trade & Transit Risks

While there is no confirmed slaughter of donkeys within Burundi, the absence of domestic regulation combined with growing air-cargo capacity presents potential risks. Field informants report that young men are already being recruited to act as "skin runners" moving salted hides across porous land borders from Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Rwanda. Weak enforcement and limited customs knowledge on wildlife derivatives make Burundi a potential transit corridor⁶.

Challenges to Moratorium Enforcement

Porous borders and limited checkpoint infrastructure severely undermine the country's ability to enforce the AU moratorium. Customs and veterinary officers lack formal training in identifying donkey hides, and officer shortages increase vulnerability to wildlife trafficking. Compounding this is a general lack of national prioritization for donkey welfare⁶.

Strategic Action Point for Burundi

Burundi should formally gazette and enforce the AU moratorium through national decree. Customs officers at key border posts like Kobero and Gatumba should be trained to identify and intercept salted donkey hides. Furthermore, donkey welfare and husbandry should be integrated into Burundi's Livestock Development Strategy to ensure that donkey-owning households can access government support and veterinary resources.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

According to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), Burundi has not reported any outbreaks of WOAH-notifiable equine diseases.



Plate 11: Donkeys gifted to Burundi by France sparked public debate over cultural perceptions and utility.

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ETHIOPIA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN ETHIOPIA

Introduction

Donkeys play an important role as pack and cart pulling animals, for transporting diversity of loads ranging from people, agricultural produce, food and water to building materials. They have multiple functions, which are not

limited to economic aspects, but are also related to socio-cultural issues, supporting women and fostering connections, especially in rural areas¹. All of these fit well with UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Timeline of Industrial Slaughter

Year	Event	Source
Mar 2017	Shandong Dong opens Africa's first export donkey abattoir at Bishoftu (capacity ~ 200 head/day), but it is shut down by the government in March 2017, following public outcry	The Reporter ²
Oct 2021	China-based Rhong Chang resumes operations at Asella, Oromia, after a seven-year hiatus	Food Business Africa ³
FY 2021/22	Ethiopia exports 492 t of donkey meat and hides (~ 600 animals) via Rhong Chang; Bishoftu remains closed	The Reporter ²

Trade Dynamics & Illegal Flow

After the shutdown in 2017, more donkeys began to be smuggled into Kenya to keep up with the hide trade². The decision to start locally-controlled slaughter again in

2021 was made partly because officials believed it would provide employment and to stop animals from being smuggled outside Ethiopia.

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Ethiopia's Response	Gap
AU moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter (Feb 2024, Addis Ababa)	Ethiopia endorsed the decision.	No enabling proclamation or enforcement directive gazetted as of May 2025 ⁴ .
Closure of donkey slaughter house in 2017	Nominally in force for Bishoftu; selectively waived for Rhong Chang via regional permit.	Creates a dual system that complicates oversight.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Because the suspension has no legal backing, veterinary officers cannot initiate legal actions against perpetrators. Bush slaughtering in Oromia and Somali regions is still leading to animal hides being exported by the licensed company.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

Starting FY 2021/22, Ethiopia has not produced any new figures on donkey export. Ethiopia's meat and dairy industry development is currently overseeing the donkey production and export.

Strategic Action Points for Ethiopia

1. Gazette the AU moratorium into national law and clarify the legal status of all donkey-processing plants.
2. Mandate full traceability for live-donkey movements and hide-exports.
3. Engage the government by clearly demonstrating the benefits of preserving donkeys rather than slaughtering them for their skins, including the long-term social, economic, and environmental consequences of the trade.

4. Leverage high-level institutional influence – such as the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), or World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) – to encourage government commitment and policy alignment.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

Ethiopia remains a hotspot for viral respiratory pathogens: in 2022, EHV-1 was detected in 76 % of donkeys sampled versus 52 % of horses, while EHV-2 and EHV-5 were found in 53 % and 25 % of tested equids, respectively⁵. Multiple African Horse Sickness serotypes (AHSV-2, -4, -6, -8, -9) were confirmed in 2009–10 outbreaks—the first Ethiopian report of AHSV-4, -6, and -8⁶. Equine encephalosis virus has also been documented, indicating free circulation of vector-borne equine viruses⁷.

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KENYA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN KENYA

Introduction

Kenya formally classified donkeys as food animals in *Legal Notice 146 of 1999* under the Meat Control Act, thereby legalizing their slaughter for meat and enabling their regulation under veterinary inspection services¹. Commercial demand surged after 2016 when four donkey abattoirs were licensed for export: Goldox Kenya

Ltd (Baringo), Star Brilliant Ltd (Naivasha), Silzha Ltd (Turkana), and Fuhai Machakos Trading Co. (Kithyoko)². At their peak, these abattoirs collectively slaughtered over 1,200–1,500 donkeys per day, a rate that significantly outpaced the natural replenishment of national herds³.

Timeline: Slaughter, Ban & Court Actions

Date	Event	Source
Apr 2016	Star Brilliant opens; donkey thefts spike in Naivasha	4
24 Feb 2020	Ministry of Agriculture withdraws all four abattoir licences	5
5 May 2021	High Court quashes ministerial ban; reinstates abattoir applications	6
21 Feb 2024	AU announces a moratorium on donkey-skin exports	7

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Kenya's Response	Gap
AU moratorium (Feb 2024)	Recognized publicly, but not domesticated via gazette	Hides still listed under Meat Control regulations
Meat Control Act review	Draft amendment proposes to delist donkeys from the food-animal schedule	Bill not yet passed
Regional framework	Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) urged member states to regulate trade and adopt breeding guidelines	Kenya has not yet published a national blueprint

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Kenya's 2020 donkey slaughter ban lacked legal grounding and was overturned by the High Court in 2021⁶. Licensed abattoirs were found violating welfare standards, with donkeys held without food, water, or shelter³. Meanwhile, organized theft and smuggling networks remain active, especially along unregulated borders like Moyale and Namanga³, exposing continued enforcement and animal-welfare failures.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

- **Ongoing litigation:** Star Brilliant and Goldox are actively seeking licence reinstatement; cases have been adjourned multiple times⁴.
- **Community patrols:** Local donkey-owner networks in Naivasha and Kithyoko recover stolen animals regularly with Brooke East Africa's support³.
- **Regional dialogue:** At the IGAD donkey-trade summit (Addis Ababa, Nov 2024), Kenya pledged to finalize a breeding policy but has not yet done so⁷.

Strategic Action Points for Kenya

1. Amend the Meat Control Act to delist donkeys as food animals and prohibit donkey-hide exports.
2. Close licensing loopholes through legal reforms and embed welfare clauses (e.g., 24-hour lairage rule, access to water and shade).
3. Strengthen border surveillance at Moyale and Namanga through hide-identification and anti-smuggling training.
4. Develop sustainable and welfare-friendly national breeding strategy and programs in partnership with IGAD and others, to help rebuild stock.
5. Scale up community patrols and support livestock keepers with a national anti-theft hotline.

Equine Health Status

According to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), Kenya reported an outbreak of African Horse Sickness (AHS) on 10 September 2024⁸.

No other WOAH-notifiable equine diseases (e.g., equine influenza) have been reported between October 2024 and May 2025⁸.

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TANZANIA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN TANZANIA

Introduction

Tanzania licensed its first two export-oriented donkey abattoirs at Kizota (Dodoma) and Ibadakuli (Shinyanga) in 2014 to meet growing Chinese demand for hides.¹ At peak output the Kizota plant killed about **100 donkeys per day**, drawing animals from Kenya and Uganda and driving a surge in cross-border theft.² By 2017 – amid repeated welfare breaches, inhumane slaughter practices

and community protest—the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries suspended Kizota's permit.³ The Shinyanga facility was first closed by state order in October 2020, briefly reopened in May 2021, and was shut again in October 2021 after inspectors confirmed persistent violations.⁴ Its operating licence will lapse in October 2025 and has not been renewed.⁵

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Government stance	Outstanding gaps
AU moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter (Feb 2024)	Tanzania supported the Addis Ababa resolution but has not yet gazetted enabling regulations .	Donkey skins are still not listed on the Control of Goods (Import & Export) Regulations; Customs HS codes unchanged.
Animal Welfare Act 2008	Sets general transport and slaughter standards.	No donkey-specific clauses; penalties modest.
Meat Industry Act 2006	Provides plant-licensing framework.	Donkeys not explicitly covered; legal ambiguity hampers enforcement.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Despite permit revocations, the trade moved underground. Criminal gangs raid villages in Shinyanga, Manyara and Simiyu, marching stolen animals through unofficial tracks at Sirari and Namanga before loading them onto trucks for clandestine slaughter or for hide depots on the Dar es Salaam corridor. Field investigations by TAWESO and ASPA document animals kept for days without shade, water or feed, as well as breaches of stunning and bleeding requirements.⁴

Presently the fines under the Animal Welfare Act are too low to deter offenders, and prosecutions are rare because inspectors must rely on the general Penal Code when cruelty occurs outside licensed premises. Collaborative

patrols by Tikobane Trust, the Stock-Theft Unit and local chiefs have reduced open theft in Shinyanga, yet salted hides are still detected at Tanga and Dar ports disguised as bovine leather consignments.⁵

Current Status (2024–2025)

In October 2024, the Government of Tanzania officially removed donkeys and dogs from the national list of animals approved for slaughter and human consumption⁶. This decisive policy shift was announced during an animal welfare workshop in Dodoma and confirmed by the Directorate of Veterinary Services.

The directive, led by Dr. Annette Kitambi, Deputy Director of Animal Welfare, aimed to protect Tanzania's rapidly declining donkey population, which had come under

pressure due to the expansion of commercial slaughter and hide exports in regions such as Singida, Dodoma, and Shinyanga. As a result, all donkey slaughterhouses were ordered shut down, and future slaughter for commercial purposes was declared illegal.

This move represents a significant step toward animal welfare reform in East Africa and supports broader regional momentum to preserve working animal populations and discourage skin-trade-driven exploitation.

Tanzania's leadership in this area sets a strong example for other African Union Member States considering regulatory bans on donkey slaughter and skin exports.

Strategic Action Points for Tanzania

Tanzania should formally gazette the AU moratorium by amending the Control of Goods Regulations to list donkey hides as prohibited exports and by inserting donkey-specific provisions into the Meat Industry Act.

Penalties under the Animal Welfare Act should be raised to include custodial terms for commercial offences, and VSD inspectors granted seizure powers for hides and transport vehicles. Joint border patrols at Sirari,

Namanga and Holili need hide-identification training, while Customs officers at Tanga and Dar es Salaam ports require HS-code verification tools.

Finally, the Ministry should develop a sustainable and welfare-friendly community-based donkey-breeding and population-monitoring strategy, aligning with IGAD's 2019 recommendations, to help restock herds, safeguard rural livelihoods and reduce theft incentives.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

WOAH's WAHIS database records no immediate notifications from Tanzania for African Horse Sickness (AHS), equine influenza (EI) or other WOAHL-listed equine diseases during 2023–2024.⁷ However, university surveillance in Morogoro detected equine-influenza A (H3N8) antibodies in 19 % of 142 working donkeys sampled in 2023, indicating silent viral circulation.⁸ Tick surveys show *Rhipicephalus evertsi evertsi* as the dominant ecto-parasite on central Tanzania donkeys, posing a piroplasmosis risk.⁹ Continued illicit cross-border movement therefore heightens outbreak potential despite the absence of recent WOAHL notifications.

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UGANDA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN UGANDA

Introduction

Uganda keeps only small pockets of donkeys—mostly in the semi-arid Karamoja cluster and along Mount Kadam—where they haul water, firewood, and crops.¹ Routine slaughter is rare; carcass use is limited to occasional ritual kills in Moroto and Kadam communities.² However, Uganda's eastern border with Kenya has become a feeder line for Kenyan export abattoirs, driving organised theft in Karamoja and Teso districts.

Trade Dynamics & Smuggling Routes

Criminal gangs raid villages with sizeable herds, trek animals across porous border tracks at Amudat and Suam, then hand them to truckers bound for Kenyan auction yards or export abattoirs.³ Kenya's Meat Control Act does not oblige buyers to verify provenance, allowing stolen stock to vanish into formal supply chains. Since 2018 a growing share of cross-border wildlife-poaching networks have pivoted to donkey skins, attracted by rising prices and weak traceability.⁴

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Uganda's position	Gap
AU moratorium (Feb 2024)	Endorsed; no gazetted directive as of May 2025.	Customs tariff still lacks donkey-skin prohibition.
Licensing status	No donkey-abattoir licence has ever been requested or issued.	Absence of legal framework leaves enforcement ad-hoc.
Animal-welfare law	Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1957—does not address cross-border theft or skin trade.	BAM Clinics and NGOs lobby for update.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Enforcement in Uganda remains weak: livestock markets operate without statutory provenance checks, enabling drovers to move stolen donkeys across district and national boundaries unchecked. Surveillance along the Karamoja – Kenya frontier is particularly thin, and night-time raids on villages frequently spark violent clashes between cross-border communities. Donkey-welfare groups such as BAM Animal Clinics and Brooke East Africa report that rescued animals often arrive with severe wounds and exhaustion — evidence of the harsh conditions endured during illicit treks.^{E3} Meanwhile, traffickers are already eyeing the lightly monitored

Uganda–South Sudan border as the next conduit for hides and live animals, a shift confirmed by recent investigations into wildlife-crime networks operating in the region.^{E4}

Current Status (2024–2025)

Between January and April 2025, community patrol groups in Moroto District intercepted 38 stolen donkeys being moved through informal routes toward the Kenya border. However, a lack of holding facilities and formal protocols for dealing with intercepted animals continues to undermine enforcement efforts^{T1}. In Busia, a key cross-border town with Kenya, traders have resumed

covert donkey hide purchases at UGX 25,000 per piece – nearly twice the 2021 market rate—suggesting rising demand despite the continental moratorium on skin exports^{T2}. Responding to growing welfare concerns and trade-driven theft, Uganda's Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture tabled a draft Animal Welfare (Equines) Bill in March 2025. The bill – currently awaiting its first reading – seeks to establish legal safeguards for equine welfare, regulate ownership and transit, and penalize unlicensed slaughter^{T3}.

Animal-Health Note

A 2023 sero-survey in Karamoja detected African Horse Sickness virus antibodies in 73 % (16/22) of donkeys sampled—the first evidence of AHSV exposure in Uganda.⁵ No WOAHA-notified equine outbreaks were filed in 2023–24, but unregulated transhumance sustains high risk.

Strategic Action Points for Uganda

1. Gazette AU moratorium into customs schedules; list donkey hides as prohibited exports.
2. Amend Cruelty Act to criminalise donkey theft and cross-border skin trafficking.
3. Deploy joint patrols with Kenyan authorities at Amudat-Suam and Busia corridors.
4. Establish recovery pens and micro-insurance for owners in Karamoja to encourage reporting.
5. Fund epidemiological surveillance for AHS and other equine diseases along trade routes.

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ZAMBIA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN ZAMBIA

Introduction

Zambia is a land-locked crossroads linking southern, central and eastern Africa, and shares land boundaries with eight neighbours, including Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique – all of which have already curtailed or outlawed donkey slaughter¹.

Despite its pivotal location, the country's donkey herd is small: the last agricultural census to publish province-level figures recorded just **13 813 donkeys nationwide**, with more than half located in Southern Province². Most are owned by smallholder households that rely on them for haulage where motorised transport is unaffordable or roads are poor.

Trade Dynamics & Smuggling Routes

- **Cross-border theft:** Police in Namibia's Zambezi Region repatriated **nine stolen Zambian donkeys** in October 2024, confirming an active stock-theft corridor that runs from Western Province, through Kazungula ferry/bridge, into Botswana and Namibia.³
- **Transit pipelines:** Investigations by animal-welfare NGOs show that the same syndicates moving ivory and pangolin scales now move donkey hides through Zambia, exploiting "swing-state" status to consolidate loads before export.⁴ Typical route map (east-to-south): **Chipata** → **Lusaka** trucking depots → **Chirundu or Kazungula** → re-labeled as "bovine leather" for onward shipment via **Zimbabwe, Botswana or South African** ports.

Policy Landscape after the AU-wide Moratorium (February 2024)

Instrument	Zambia's current stance	Gap
AU moratorium	No Gazette notice, Cabinet decision or ministerial circular issued (status : pending as of May 2025). ⁴	Hides are not yet scheduled under Export-Control regulations.
Domestic law	<i>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960</i> criminalises cruelty but is silent on slaughter for skins, origin documentation or traceability. ⁵	No licensing standard for abattoirs; no movement permits specific to donkeys.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

- **Undeclared skins:** Border officers at Chirundu and Kazungula report frequent interceptions of "raw bovine skins" with no veterinary certificates; visual identification training is limited, so seizures rarely progress to prosecutions.⁴
- **Community intimidation:** Villagers in Eastern and Southern Provinces told welfare workers that organised gangs threaten retaliation if thefts are reported, limiting police intelligence-gathering.⁴
- **Animal-welfare concerns:** Rescue teams (ZAWS/WCP) document tether wounds, dehydration and emaciation in donkeys recovered from smuggling pens along the Lusaka–Livingstone and Mongu highways.⁴

Recent Equine–Health Signals

Zambia has filed no **WOAH immediate notifications** for African Horse Sickness or equine influenza in the last decade, but a 2022 tick survey found **Rhipicephalus evertsi evertsi** on village donkeys in Southern Province, underlining the risk of piroplasmosis spill-over if illicit movements continue unchecked.⁴

Current Trends (Jan 2024 – Apr 2025)

- **Border recoveries:** At least one formal livestock-repatriation event (nine donkeys) recorded by Namibian police in **Oct 2024**.³
- **Civil-society pressure:** A coalition led by Wildlife Crime Prevention Zambia submitted a position paper in **March 2025** urging the Ministry of Commerce to list donkey hides under the **Control of Goods Regulations** (under review).⁶
- **Price signals:** Market watchers in Lusaka report a steady uptick in live-donkey prices since the AU decision, reflecting tightening local supply.



Confiscated donkeys and cattle being handed over to their owners at Luhonono Police Station, Katima Mulilo, Namibia (26 October 2024). Photo credit: Namibia Press Agency (NAMPA). Reproduced with permission

Strategic Action Points for Zambia

1. **Gazette the AU moratorium** without delay and classify donkey hides as a controlled export.
2. **Mandate origin documentation** (seller ID, movement permit, veterinary inspection) for all donkey sales and slaughters.
3. **Train customs and police** at Kazungula & Chirundu to recognise salted hides and spot falsified HS codes.
4. **Conduct a rapid census** of the donkey population to establish a baseline for breeding and welfare support.
5. **Establish community watch schemes** with confidential hotlines, enabling villagers to report theft without fear of reprisals.

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ZIMBABWE

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN ZIMBABWE

Introduction

Zimbabwe's estimated **175,000** head donkey herd underpins rural transport, land preparation and household food security. When neighbouring Botswana and Namibia tightened controls on donkey-skin exports in 2016-17, Zimbabwe briefly emerged as an attractive fallback for investors.

In October 2017 a Bulawayo businessman announced a US \$150,000 abattoir with capacity for 70 donkeys a day – an off-take that would have exhausted the national herd in under five years if fully exploited.¹ The proposal galvanised animal-welfare groups, sparked parliamentary outcry and provoked a swift regulatory backlash.

Trade Proposal and Regulatory Response

Battlefront Investments' Bulawayo plant was to process hides for the Chinese market and meat for Vietnam. Within days of the announcement, the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) issued a circular instructing provincial officers to refuse movement permits and confirming that "no donkey will ever be slaughtered at any abattoir in Zimbabwe."² The move echoed regional concerns that unregulated export slaughter could decimate working-equid populations.

Although Zimbabwe's Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act provides fines or custodial sentences, the legal machinery proved uneven. After the abattoir project was halted, dozens of animals penned on site died from neglect, yet no prosecution followed because existing regulations did not clearly assign liability to proponents once licensing was refused.³

At the same time, small theft rings began exploiting porous borders around the Zambezi Region – using the Caprivi panhandle and neighbouring villages in Botswana and Namibia to source skins. Collaboration between the national Stock Theft Unit, Tikobane Trust, the SPCA and Donkey Protection Trust has reduced overt cruelty and intercepted several skin consignments, but clandestine routes remain difficult to police. Rural communities still report nighttime raids, and the minimum US \$200 penalty often fails to deter repeat offenders. A draft revision of the Cruelty Act now before Parliament seeks to raise fines, mandate custodial terms for commercial offences, and grant inspectors broader seizure powers.³

Current Status (2024-2025)

Zimbabwe has not licensed any donkey-processing facility since the 2017 circular, and DVS continues to deny movement permits for slaughter purposes. Border patrols in Matabeleland North and Bulilima implemented in late 2023 have curtailed south-bound donkey rustling into Botswana, according to police arrest data for 2024 (Q1 = eight cases versus 22 in Q1 2022)⁴.

Tikobane Trust community liaisons report a parallel decline in attempted thefts around Hwange. Nevertheless, intelligence suggests that small consignments of salted skins still transit north-west into Zambia before exiting at Walvis Bay in Namibia, mirroring regional "swing-state" trafficking strategies.⁵

Animal-welfare NGOs are lobbying for the AU moratorium (February 2024) to be transcribed into domestic law; Cabinet had not tabled enabling regulations by May 2025, leaving enforcement dependent on the 2017 administrative circular.

Strategic Action Points for Zimbabwe

1. Make and enforce laws that specifically ban the trading of donkeys and shipment of donkey skin, aligned with the African Union's intent to implement its 2024 donkey skin trade moratorium.
2. Increase the frequency of checks by veterinarians and customs inspectors at the points of access to Botswana, Mozambique and Zambia, so that illegal relocation of donkeys and their products can be halted.
3. Set up a national database for donkeys: Ensure all donkeys are registered, so it's possible to monitor their numbers and discount whether they have any diseases.
4. Help local people recognise that donkeys are valuable to the environment and make money by providing other ways to earn income instead of selling donkey skins.
5. Spend resources to increase the reach of veterinary care in rural areas so that detecting, treating and preventing diseases can occur as soon as possible.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) reports that Zimbabwe has seen no cases of African horse sickness or equine influenza from 2020 through 2025.

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MALAWI

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN MALAWI

Introduction

Malawi has a donkey population of just over 15,000, traced largely to about 300 animals imported in the late 1950s¹. These donkeys are essential for draught work and transport in districts like Dedza, Dowa, and Lilongwe, where few mechanized options exist. However, they are excluded from "principal livestock" in national agricultural surveys, rendering their trends and numbers effectively invisible to policymakers¹.

Slaughter and Hide Demand

No donkey-specific abattoir has ever been licensed; indeed, veterinary authorities agree that industrial-scale slaughter would rapidly deplete the national herd². Slaughter remains confined to sporadic backyard events, and LSPCA field reports from 2023 document occasional trafficking of hides across informal borders into Mozambique and Zambia¹. Rising demand for donkey-skin products (*ejiao*) puts Malawi at potential risk, though it currently serves primarily as a transit route¹.

Policy Landscape after the AU Moratorium

Malawi supported the African Union's moratorium on commercial donkey-skin exports in February 2024, but it has not yet made this decision part of its national law. The current Protection of Animals Act Cap 66:01 (1970) makes cruelty to animals a crime, but it does not cover issues like donkey population protection, hide trade limits, or export control³.

There is also no law that specifically regulates the slaughter of donkeys, their transport between districts,

or the issuing of hide export permits. Because of this, the AU ban cannot be fully enforced in Malawi. Although the Malawi Police Service has a unit that handles animal-welfare matters, their actions mostly rely on reports from NGOs instead of regular checks or inspections³.

Welfare Initiatives and Community Interventions

Several groups are working to improve donkey welfare in Malawi. The **Lilongwe SPCA (LSPCA)** runs the **Donkey Welfare Project (2016–2024)**, which provided health services such as deworming, vaccinations, and hoof care to 2,234 donkeys in 2022–23, helping 340 households⁴. Since 2021, **SPANNA (Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad)** has also supported donkey owners by offering low-cost veterinary treatment, training in kind handling, and protective harnesses⁴.

In addition, the **All Creatures Animal Welfare League (AWL)** is pushing for stronger animal protection laws. They work closely with local authorities to help close legal gaps and improve the enforcement of Malawi's animal-welfare rules³.

Smuggling & Disease Vigilance

As a landlocked country with porous borders, Malawi faces a risk of becoming a transit corridor for donkey skins – potentially following routes used for wildlife trafficking³. While no outbreaks of African Horse Sickness or equine influenza have been officially reported, a 2023 serosurvey in Kasungu District found that 28% of donkeys tested positive for antibodies to equine influenza (H3N8), confirming active viral circulation and highlighting biosecurity vulnerabilities⁵.

Strategic Action Points for Malawi

1. Gazette the AU moratorium and designate donkeys as a protected species under Malawi's upcoming Animal Health & Welfare Regulations.
2. Conduct a national working–equid census to inform sustainable off–take limits.
3. Introduce movement–permit and RFID–tag tracking for inter–district donkey transport.
4. Establish a trilateral border task force with Zambia, Mozambique, and Tanzania to intercept hide trafficking.
5. Scale NGO–led community programs to reach 5,000 donkeys by 2027 (LSPCA/SPANA).
6. Incorporate donkey welfare in Malawi's new Livestock Development Policy for better extension support access.

Recent Equine Health Trends

According to WOA's WAHIS system, Malawi has reported **no notifiable equine disease outbreaks** between 2021 and 2024⁶. However, the 2023 Kasungu serosurvey, published in the *Journal of Veterinary Medicine*, confirms a **28% prevalence of H3N8 antibodies**, highlighting ongoing exposure risks⁵.

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MOZAMBIQUE

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: RENDS AND RESPONSES IN MOZAMBIQUE

Introduction

The extended Indian–Ocean coastline and six–land borders result in Mozambique being a trail of traffickers to and across southern Africa with live donkeys and hides. Investigations reveal hides trucked in Botswana and Zimbabwe to Beira and Maputo to be shipped on to Asia¹. Donkeys on the other hand are also valued as source of cheap transport – taxiburros in towns and burro ambulancias in Sofala, connecting smallholders with markets and clinics.

Donkey Population and Role in Rural Communities

There is no recent census, and it is reported that the greater part of the national herd employed in draught–work. In 2022, 97 % of 88 donkeys surveyed in Maputo Province had Rhipicephalus ticks, an indicator of fundamental welfare deficiencies².

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Mozambique's status	Gap
National law	No statute regulating donkey slaughter or hide export; Animal Protection Act (1962) under revision	No licensing or inspection system
AU moratorium (Feb 2024)	No gazetted measure or ministerial statement as of May 2025	Donkey skins still move under generic hide codes ¹
Animal-welfare oversight	Universities apply their own protocols ²	No national standards

¹Based on questionnaire response from field informants, May 2025.

²Based on questionnaire response from a state veterinarian, April 2025.

Trade Dynamics & Smuggling Routes

Facebook adverts for donkey meat in Groot Aub (Maputo peri-urban) and rising thefts show a growing informal market. Hides are shipped through Beira and Maputo ports; many originate in Botswana and inland transit states. Smugglers favour remote crossings in the Caprivi/Zambezi strip, exploiting access to four neighbouring countries.

Trade Dynamics and Smuggling Routes

Social-media adverts for "fresh burro" in Maputo's suburbs, plus increasing thefts in Gaza, Inhambane and Nampula, signal a growing grey market. Smugglers favour remote crossings in the Zambezi/Caprivi strip before routing hides through Beira or Maputo ports¹.

Enforcement and Welfare Gaps

Back-yard slaughter has become widespread due to the absence of licensing regime. Perpetrators of animal theft almost never face justice and no compensation plans exist. Law enforcement agents at border posts and port inspectors are not trained to identify salted donkey hides and the laws in place (1962 law) offer minimal fines.

Current Trends (2024 – 2025)

- Hide prices have risen sharply as neighbouring states tighten controls.
- Online meat sellers rarely mention veterinary inspection, highlighting public-health risks.

Strategic Action Points for Mozambique

1. Gazette the AU moratorium and add donkey-hide restrictions to customs schedules.
2. Create a Donkey-Welfare & Trade Regulation covering licensing, traceability and humane slaughter.
3. Train border and port staff to spot donkey hides and falsified HS codes.
4. Support community patrols and micro-insurance to deter thefts and offset losses.
5. Complete the Animal Protection Act overhaul with species-specific penalties.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

WOAH's disease-alert dashboard lists no outbreaks of African Horse Sickness or equine influenza in Mozambique up to May 2025³, but passive surveillance remains limited.

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SOMALIA

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN SOMALIA

Introduction

Open-source livestock tables for the Federal Republic of Somalia list ~ 22,900 donkeys in 2023¹—the continent's tenth-smallest herd. Somaliland, which keeps separate statistics, lacks an official census, yet a 2024 Veterinary-Sans-Frontières Germany (VSF-G) survey estimates "over 120,000 donkeys" supporting water, fuel and goods transport for households around Hargeisa, Borama and surrounding highlands².

Across both jurisdictions these animals underpin daily commerce along the Shabelle River belt, Puntland's trading hubs and Somaliland's arid-zone settlements.

Regulatory & Policy Setting

Somalia has no licensed equid abattoirs, and none appear in Ministry registers or WOAH listings³.

A 2015 Animal-Health Law contains generic humane-handling clauses but no equid-specific rules³. Somalia nevertheless endorsed the AU moratorium on donkey-skin exports on 18 February 2024⁴.

Somaliland similarly issues no slaughter permits². Its 2021 Animal-Welfare Code drafts working-equid standards, and although not an AU member, the Ministry of Livestock & Rural Development has pledged full alignment with the continental ban².

Trade Dynamics & Security

- **Tog Wajaale (Ethiopia) → Hargeisa (Somaliland):** donkeys trek in at night, hides move by truck to Berbera. Weekly inflows persist; on 4 June 2025 Brooke East Africa and VSF-G met the Governor of Gabiley to curb smuggling⁶.
- **Baidoa → Doolow → Mandera (Kenya):** rustlers sell animals for cash; hides feed Naivasha depots. Kenyan police trace Somali-sourced donkeys to the hide trade⁵.
- **Burao → Bosaso (Puntland):** small lots bartered for grain; hides containerised as bovine leather (HS 4101.20). Port notices flag "bovine leather" exports, but no seizures recorded to date (port circulars 2024, on file).

Welfare & Socio-Economic Risks

VSF-G notes widespread neglect and over-work of Somaliland's working donkeys, driven by poverty and scarce veterinary cover². Donkey hides are often trafficked alongside pangolin scales or ivory, compounding biosecurity and CITES risks⁷.

Demographic modelling shows that removing 1,000 donkeys a year would halve Somalia's herd within five years, crippling draught power for > 30,000 rural households⁷. Women would suffer most: continent-wide, an estimated six million donkeys are slaughtered annually, undermining water collection and petty-trade logistics in female-headed homes⁸.

Strategic Action Points (2025 – 2027)

Federal Somalia	Somaliland	Joint / Regional
Gazette the AU ban and block HS 4101.20 & 0511.99.90 codes	Issue a matching ministerial order	Negotiate an IGAD-brokered MoU on cross-border donkey theft (Somalia – Ethiopia – Kenya)
Re-activate veterinary posts at Doolow & Tog Wajaale (UV/XRF scanners)	Deploy mobile inspectors at Berbera & Tog Wajaale	Share real-time seizure data with Kenya's Anti-Stock-Theft Unit
Launch an FAO TAD-info donkey census (2025)	Fund night-paddock grants and ear-tag pilots for women's groups	Support shipping-line blacklists (e.g. Swire Shipping, May 2025) ¹⁰

Conservation Status of the Somali Wild Ass

The Somali wild ass (*Equus africanus somaliensis*) is Critically Endangered, with < 200 mature individuals remaining in fragmented populations across Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea¹¹. Key threats include poaching, habitat loss and hybridisation with domestic donkeys.

Recent Equine-Health Trends

WOAH-WAHIS lists no notifications from Somalia for African horse sickness, equine influenza or other listed equine diseases (2018 – Jun 2025)³. Limited laboratory capacity, highlighted in the 2023 WOAH PVS evaluation, hampers surveillance³. Neighbouring Ethiopia (2019) and Kenya (2022–24) have reported AHS incidents, underscoring a persistent regional threat⁹ (WAHIS records).

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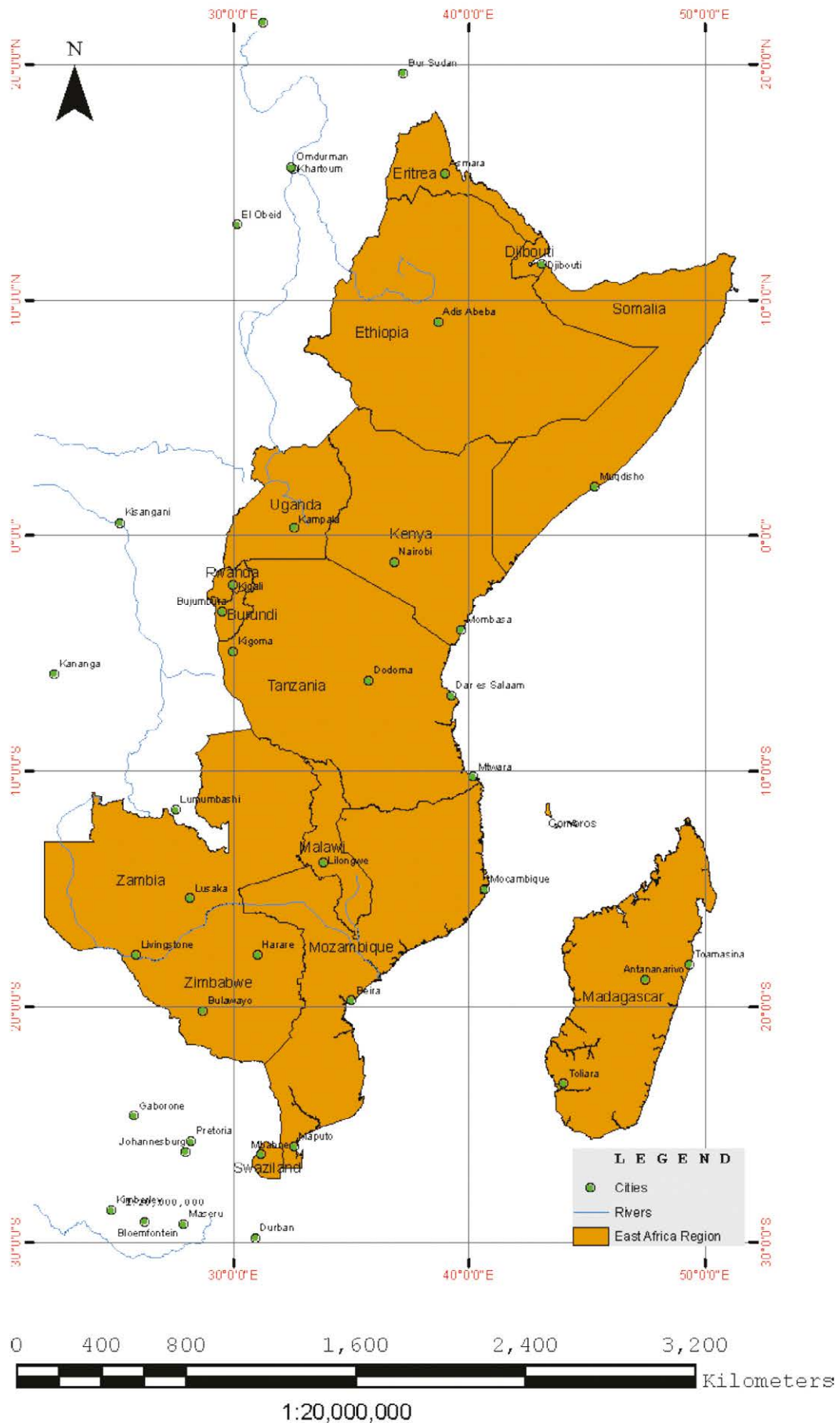
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MAP OF AFRICA UNION REGION



Eastern Africa



Northern Africa



NORTHERN AFRICA

In many villages and oasis settlements across North Africa, from the Rif region in Morocco to Egypt's Nile Delta, working donkeys assist with water, wood and market deliveries since transport by tractor or pick-up is rare.

The area is now vital in moving hides globally, with skins being shipped to Asia as the region copes with cultural standards, food hygiene and problems affecting its dwindling equid group.

The biggest country, Egypt, uses a quota system for both raw hides and live animals during the 2010s; Morocco and Algeria give limited approval to domestic slaughter under strict control; meanwhile, Tunisia, Libya and Sudan stop export completely, but illegal stripping at the borders and in Mediterranean ports takes place.

Although donkey meat is only allowed in some industrial areas under health ministry control, regular police checks still find donkey carcasses sold as beef in markets from Casablanca to Cairo. Even though most North-African governments kept their restrictions after the African Union's moratorium, skins are smuggled north into Egypt or west into the Maghreb, despite efforts to control the trade.

EGYPT

POST-AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN EGYPT

Introduction

Donkeys in Egypt once numbered 1.5 million, making it the second largest area for donkeys in Africa.¹ The animals remain indispensable for cart transport in the Nile Delta and Upper Egypt, yet demand for hides transformed the species into a high-value commodity after 2010. Local economists warn that if current off-take persists, Egypt's working-equid herd could collapse within two decades because the lengthy gestation period (\approx 12 months) cannot keep pace with slaughter.² Giza Zoo, Egypt's state zoological garden, legally culls donkeys to feed carnivores and exports selected skins, providing an official conduit that co-exists with a much larger clandestine trade.³

Trade Expansion and Regulatory Response

Evidence of organised skin exports dates back to 2008 when veterinary officers seized unlicensed consignments at Safaga Port.⁴ In 2012 the Ministry of Trade and Industry introduced a quota of 8,000 skins yr¹, later raised to 10,000, hoping to formalise revenues while controlling outflow.⁵ A 2016 bilateral agreement authorised the export of 10,000 live male donkeys to China, tripling hide prices overnight and triggering a wave of backyard slaughter.⁶

Media outlets soon carried images of carcasses dumped outside Menoufia and Beni Suef abattoirs, while donkey theft rose sharply in Qalyubia and Fayoum as herds dwindled.⁷ Despite public outrage, the quota system remains; insiders say a single syndicate effectively monopolises official skin export licences and brokers hide on the black market.⁸

Enforcement and Welfare Gaps

Formal abattoir oversight is limited, and many operators slaughter without veterinary inspectors, discarding viscera in irrigation canals. In rural governorates, thieves transport stolen stock at night to clandestine stripping sites; hides are cured with salt and trucked to Alexandria or Port Said for containerisation.

The remains enter an illicit meat chain: police raids in Ismailia (2021) and Cairo (2023) uncovered facilities mincing donkey or dog meat and selling it as beef or lamb.⁹ Although Egypt's Penal Code criminalises food fraud and the 1966 Animal Protection Law prescribes fines for cruelty, penalties are modest and rarely enforced.¹⁰

Current Status (2024 – 2025)

Egypt has not published any directive adopting the AU's moratorium (February 2024). Quota skin exports continue under the Ministry's permit system. Welfare NGOs report continuing carcass dumping in Minya and Assiut, though volumes appear lower than the 2016–2018 peak.

Live-donkey prices in rural markets have stabilised around EGP 7,000–9,000 (\approx US \$220–280), double pre-2016 levels but below the 2021 high, suggesting supply strain persists.¹¹

Strategic Action Points for Egypt

1. Halt Exports & Formalize Moratorium

Immediately suspend all donkey-hide export quotas and officially adopt the AU's ban into Egyptian law to eliminate legal loopholes fueling clandestine trade.

2. Disrupt Criminal Networks

Unite ministries of agriculture, veterinary services, customs, environmental protection, and justice within a One Health framework to dismantle and prosecute the syndicates driving illegal donkey slaughter, inter-regional trafficking, and adulterated meat networks.

3. Strengthen Welfare & Surveillance

Roll out a national donkey ID and tracking system, backed by mobile veterinary clinics and regular welfare audits, to curb theft, improve animal health, and establish reliable population data.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

According to the WOAAH WAHIS interface, Egypt has not notified any equine disease outbreaks – such as African Horse Sickness, Equine Influenza or other OIE-listed equine diseases – between 2019 and 2023¹².

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TUNISIA

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN TUNISIA

Introduction

In Tunisia, donkeys have played a central role in agricultural and rural life since antiquity, particularly in olive cultivation, water transport, and smallholder farming. Their value peaked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but the introduction of motorized vehicles drastically reduced their use.

Between 1996 and 2006, the national donkey population declined by over 50%, leaving just 123,000 animals registered by the end of the decade¹. Today, donkeys are mostly employed in specialized rural tasks, yet economic hardship and fluctuating meat prices have altered patterns of use, prompting new concerns about animal welfare and regulatory gaps.

Strategic Action Points (2025 – 2027)

Year	Event	Source
1996–2006	Donkey population drops by over 50% due to motorization	ACAM ¹
2010	ACAM warns of risk of donkey extinction in Tunisia	ACAM ¹
2012–2013	Rise in red meat prices encourages informal donkey meat consumption	Ministry of Health ²
2017	Official confirmation that donkey meat is legal in Tunisia; two abattoirs authorized	Tunisian MoH ²
2024	Tunisia reiterates municipal controls in line with AU moratorium	National Public Health Reports

Trade Dynamics & Illegal Flow

Despite the legality of donkey meat in Tunisia, the informal and clandestine slaughter of donkeys remains an ongoing issue, particularly in urban centers such as Tunis and Fez. Donkey meat is often misrepresented as beef or lamb in processed dishes like merguez and shawarma. Reports from historic neighborhoods such as Bab El Khadra describe underground sales channels where butchers fraudulently substitute donkey for red

meat. In 2012, two officially licensed abattoirs processed an estimated 2,000 tonnes of donkey meat, but veterinary sources estimate that up to 30,000 animals may be slaughtered annually – far exceeding official figures². Tunisia does not currently export donkey hides or meat, yet unregulated trade creates opportunities for smuggling to neighboring countries, especially Libya and Algeria.

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Tunisia's Response	Gap
AU moratorium (Feb 2024)	Tunisia endorsed the ban; reiterated municipal-level control over slaughter.	No new national legislation transposing the moratorium has been passed.
National meat regulation laws (pre-2024)	Donkey meat must be clearly labeled and sold through Ministry-approved abattoirs.	Enforcement is irregular; illicit markets still operate in urban areas.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Tunisia's legal framework stipulates that donkey meat must be slaughtered in licensed abattoirs, labeled accordingly, and refrigerated. While these provisions meet public health standards in theory, implementation has proven inconsistent. Field visits to informal markets reveal that bush slaughter and meat fraud remain prevalent. Municipal inspectors lack sufficient personnel or equipment to monitor all vendors, and public awareness campaigns remain localized. Civil-society voices have called for increased transparency in meat labeling and stiffer penalties for offenders. Tunisia's Prevention of Cruelty to Animals law provides some recourse, but it is not widely applied to working equids or informal slaughter cases.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

Following the AU's 2024 moratorium, Tunisia has issued no new licences for donkey slaughter. Instead, the government reaffirmed its commitment to regulating sales via municipal health services. Despite this, economic pressures and consumer demand continue to drive underground slaughter. Local NGOs and veterinary associations report persistent meat fraud and the existence of informal abattoirs. Public engagement campaigns are now focusing on high-risk districts such as Bab El Khadra, and there is growing momentum to integrate donkey welfare into national livestock policy.

National Equine-Health Status

Tunisia has not reported any officially notified outbreaks of equine disease to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) between 2023 and 2025. However, veterinary experts caution that the continued presence of illegal bush slaughter and unregulated transport poses a risk for the spread of transboundary equine diseases. Surveillance remains limited, particularly in border regions near Algeria and Libya, where informal animal movement is common.

Strategic Action Points for Tunisia

1. Enact a national law that aligns directly with the AU moratorium, incorporating enforceable penalties for illicit slaughter.
2. Expand veterinary surveillance in border areas and urban markets to identify and contain unreported disease risks.
3. Scale up public awareness campaigns to educate both vendors and consumers on the importance of legal sourcing and food safety.
4. Introduce traceability systems for all donkey meat sold in public markets.
5. Incentivize rural donkey welfare programs, especially in governorates where working equids remain essential to smallholder economies.

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MOROCCO

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN MOROCCO

Introduction

Donkeys remain indispensable in Morocco's agrarian economy, particularly in the High Atlas and Saharan oasis belts, where they haul firewood, ferry produce, and navigate terrain inaccessible to motor vehicles. Although donkey meat consumption is culturally frowned upon, economic hardship and meat scarcity periodically fuel

clandestine sales. In January 2019 police in Fez arrested a butcher who had mixed donkey and mule meat with beef, underscoring persistent public-health and regulatory gaps despite formal bans on equine slaughter for human consumption¹.

Strategic Action Points (2025 – 2027)

Year	Event	Source
2019	Police in Fez arrest butcher selling donkey/mule meat	Morocco World News, 27 Jan 2019 ¹
2020–23	No new licences for donkey slaughter issued	Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture livestock statistics, 2022 ²
Feb 2024	AU adopts moratorium; Rabat re-affirms export ban	AU Decision AUC/EX.CL/Dec.1129 (XLII) ³
2024–25	Municipal health teams intensify butcher-shop inspections in Casablanca, Fez	Casablanca Public Health Directorate annual report, 2025 ⁴
2024	Tunisia reiterates municipal controls in line with AU moratorium	National Public Health Reports

Trade Dynamics & Illegal Flow

Morocco is not a major hide exporter, yet informal bush slaughter persists in peri-urban areas and remote market towns. Investigative journalists have traced small consignments of salted skins sold to middlemen with links to Mauritania and Algeria, although the absence of large-scale export infrastructure limits direct participation in the ejiao supply chain⁵.

Policy landscape

Rabat reiterated its export ban after the AU moratorium but has not yet codified the continental decision into domestic law. Public-health regulations require veterinary stamps on any equine meat, yet enforcement is strongest in major cities; rural prefectures often lack inspection staff².

Enforcement and welfare gaps

Health inspectors now target butcheries in immigrant-dense districts of Casablanca and Fez, but traceability of live-donkey movement remains weak, especially where mobile herders transport animals without permits. No central registry exists to monitor skin leakages to neighbouring states, and veterinary officers report sporadic bush-slaughter pits near Beni Mellal and Errachidia⁵.

Current trends (2024–2025)

No commercial donkey abattoirs have been relicensed, but civil-society groups such as SPANA Maroc have begun lobbying parliament for a donkey-protection bill aligned with AU standards. Political momentum, however, remains slow amid competing legislative priorities⁶.

Equine-disease profile

Morocco notified no African Horse Sickness or equine-influenza outbreaks to WOAAH between 2023 and 2025⁷. Veterinarians caution that weak donkey-movement tracking, especially from the interior to coastal markets, leaves biosecurity gaps.

Strategic action points

1. Transcribe the AU moratorium into national veterinary law with explicit penalties for donkey-hide export.
2. Extend rural meat-inspection coverage to curb bush slaughter outside major cities.
3. Launch a digital traceability platform for live-equid transport permits and hide certification.
4. Run consumer-awareness campaigns in migrant-rich neighbourhoods to reduce demand for illicit meat.
5. Tighten border checks with Algeria and Mauritania to intercept clandestine hide consignments.

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ALGERIA

POST-AU MORATORIUM TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN ALGERIA

Introduction

Smallholders and people living in mountainous regions in Algeria depend on donkeys for farming, getting water and moving goods short distances. In 2019, estimates put Algeria's donkey population between 320,000 and 350,000, making it one of the leading areas for donkeys in North Africa¹. Even though many cultures look unfavorably on eating donkeys, the African Union's 2024 moratorium led Algerian officials to take steps to prevent illegal trade and avoid uncontrolled slaughter of donkeys.

Timeline of Industrial Slaughter

Licensed industrial donkey slaughter has yet to be documented in Algeria. Earlier than 2024, some equine slaughterhouses had already been approved to process

all equids using domestic meat hygiene codes. There were no officially registered facilities for exporting donkey hides².

Trade Dynamics and Illegal flow

Even though Algeria does not directly export donkey-hide, its position along the borders with Tunisia and Morocco has opened the way for illegal exports. Many times, local enforcement agents report that the southern corridor near Tamanrasset is used for illegal animal transport. Those who traffic hides often present them as legal livestock bypassing strict checks used for animal products or under-report the hides, as coordinating agencies between countries has become poor².

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Algeria's Response	Gap
AU moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter (Feb 2024)	Algeria formally endorsed the AU decision and issued a circular banning donkey hide exports ² .	No specific donkey export regulations prior to 2024; surveillance capacity remains uneven.
Equine slaughter permits	All equine slaughter permits must comply with Algeria's Animal Welfare Act. No donkey-specific licences are active.	Lack of species-specific traceability systems limits monitoring.

Enforcement and welfare gaps

The Ministry asked the provincial veterinary offices to note down all facilities that process horses and ensure inspections are carried out. Still, because there are no specific laws for donkeys, the legal grounds for taking action are reduced. Donkeys moving between countries are hard to monitor since there is no live-animal traceability and intelligence is limited in large, thinly policed border areas². Occasional mislabeling of donkey meat for sale at informal markets is mentioned, but few such cases lead to prosecution.

Current trends (2024–2025)

Following the 2024 moratorium, Algeria chose not to issue any slaughter or hide-export licenses. Veterinary authorities are carrying out more abuse audits in slaughterhouses and raising awareness at the border. Informal slaughter and trafficking go on in some rural areas, mainly near the borders. These groups are requesting that national laws match AU standards and support programs that look after donkeys.

Strategic action points

1. **Enact Donkey-Specific Laws:** Introduce clear national legislation banning commercial donkey slaughter and hide exports, with defined penalties and enforcement mechanisms.
2. **Implement Tracking Systems:** Roll out mandatory donkey registration and RFID tagging to monitor movements and curb illegal trade.
3. **Enhance Border Controls:** Equip and train border posts – especially near Tamanrasset – to detect illicit donkey products and coordinate intelligence with neighboring countries.
4. **Boost Veterinary Oversight & Outreach:** Integrate donkeys into the national equine health system, deploy mobile veterinary clinics for regular welfare checks, and run community awareness programs on legal protections and sustainable livelihoods.

Equine-disease profile

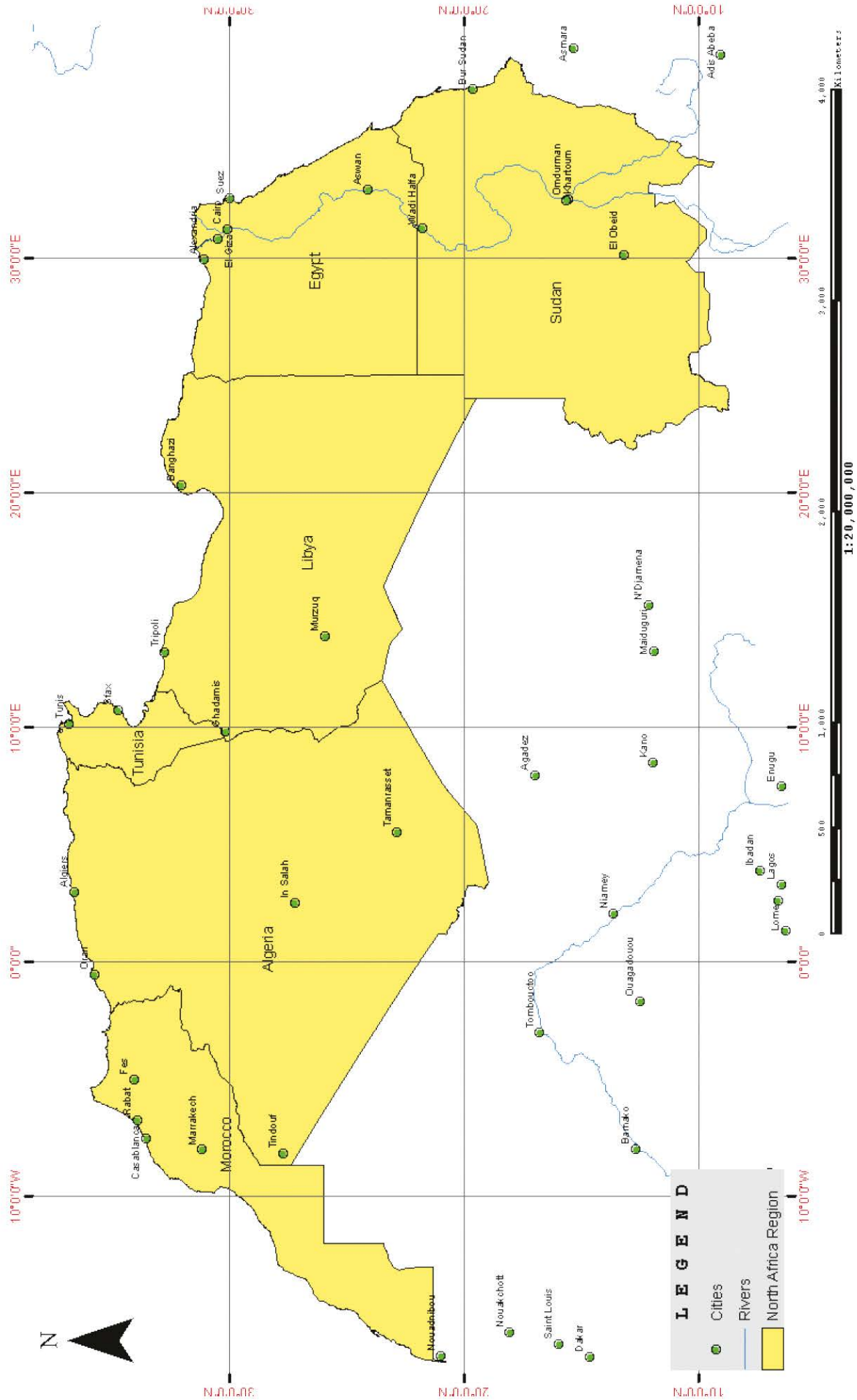
No equine disease outbreaks have been notified by Algeria to WOAAH since the beginning of 2023. Yet, the Ministry of Agriculture has promised to incorporate surveillance for donkeys into its national Equine Health Information System, as part of modernizing the veterinary sector¹.

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MAP OF AFRICA UNION REGION



Northern Africa



Southern Africa



SOUTHERN AFRICA

The donkey industry in Southern Africa shows great contrasts.

In the sub-region, only South Africa formally issues licences for export slaughter; only two plants process donkeys and they are not allowed to send more than 10,500 hides per year to China. Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Eswatini and have either put halts to new abattoirs or already banned them. However, illegal trading exists because the demand for pirated materials is so high.

Following 2020, syndicates have grown stronger and now operate along cross-border paths such as the Caprivi – Zambezi Strip, Kazungula Bridge or the tracks open in the Kalahari, sending livestock south for secret slaughter or labeling salted hides as bovine leather for export.

The combination of varying rules and wide-open borders in the region is very attractive to traffickers. They can stem stolen and smuggled donkeys from neighbouring

countries into South Africa for commercial use or benefit from a black market that likely surpasses the trade registered by the government. It has become very expensive and dangerous for people in communities to use donkeys, so owners in Botswana and Namibia have decided to form guard groups since half of their herds were stolen in less than five years.

Those who investigate wildlife crimes point out that trucks and shipping containers carrying salted skins in Walvis Bay, Durban and Beira ports have occasionally been found to be carrying elephant ivory and pangolin scales from other parts of the world.

While the African Union's 2024 moratorium strengthened existing bans in the region, implementation in Southern Africa is not uniform. As syndicates change their strategies at every roadblock, it is important for the region to have unified laws, well-trained officers and convincing alternatives for people living off equines if it hopes to preserve its working-equid culture and wildlife from the spread of clandestine hide troubles.

BOTSWANA

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN BOTSWANA

Introduction

In the past, commercial donkey slaughter was seen as a secondary outcome of Botswana's beef export business in the countryside. In 2016–17, Francistown, Ghanzi, Lentsweletau and Lobatse were recognised as licensed plants because China's desire for ejiao supported Zimbabwe's hide trade across Africa¹. As donkeys were

often treated badly, their environment suffered and the number of donkeys fell fast, the government decided to stop donkey slaughter in 2017². While wildlife killing is now illegal, sneaking or smuggling hides is still happening, harming animals and causing job losses for local populations.

Slaughter-house and Trade Dynamics

Slaughter site (licence 2017)	Status after 2017 ban	Key issues reported
Bo Chang (Pty) Ltd – Francistown	Licence withdrawn Aug 2017; re-issued Jan 2018; intermittent operation	500 carcasses dumped; effluent seepage into Tati River ³
Y2K Trading – Ghanzi	Licence withdrawn; plant idle	Community protests over donkey theft
Mai Di Abattoir – Lobatse	Licence withdrawn; never reopened	None
Development Advance Institute – Lentsweletau	Local-meat permit rescinded	Nil data

- After the ban, police found > 900 hides made for Zimbabwe and hides are also shipped through Mozambique and South Africa⁴.
- Remarks by the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food Security in 2018 showed plans to export live donkeys and hides again for financial reasons, opposing the suspension imposed.

Significance of Ramokgwebana and Kazungula Border Posts

Because Ramokgwebana and Kazungula link Botswana directly to Zimbabwe, these towns play a key role in the nation. Ramokgwebana which is found near Plumtree in Zimbabwe, is a major location for people moving between the two countries. Since a lot of animals and goods are transported inside the country, it becomes easy for illegal trading because veterinarians cannot closely monitor them and animal routes are not properly managed.

Close to the Zambezi River in the northwest, Kazungula acts as a junction for truck routes connecting Botswana,

Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia. Though the new bridge joins countries and helps with trading, it helps smugglers move donkey-related items over borders. The location of Mozambique next to Zimbabwe could make it a passage for hides smuggled south to central Africa.

Being located on key trade routes with Zimbabwe, most trade routes run through these towns, so they need extra border security and strict compliance with the ban on donkey skin activities.

Policy Landscape after the AU Moratorium (Feb 2024)

Instrument	Botswana position
2017 national suspension	Still in force, but enforcement uneven; abattoir lobbying continues.
AU continental ban	Endorsed, not yet transposed into national legislation.
Legal framework for hides	None – no statutes governing movement, storage or export of donkey skins.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

There are structural challenges in Botswana that make it hard for the country to provide and enforce policies. With borders open to Zimbabwe and South Africa, it is much easier for traffickers to move donkey hides out of the country without paying taxes. Inadequate treatment of effluent at licensed abattoirs, with Bo Chang as a main example, causes wastes from the pits to flow into the Tati River. This could be damaging both for human populations and other living creatures in its path². The responsibility of veterinary teams is so stretched that the results of the most recent donkey count are outdated and no fresh surveys have been done to oversee the use of resources or make updated policies. Those farmers still struggle in rural areas, as their donkeys and the earnings from their skins keep disappearing, though no official support is available to help them⁴.

Strategic Action Points for Tunisia

1. Promulgate into national law the AU moratorium on imports of wild or hidden animal parts; establish penalties for those convicted of trafficking in animal hides.
2. Hire or use on-the-ground personnel to count donkeys following the ban to see what has changed.

3. Improve controls at Ramokgwebana and Kazungula and train officers there to recognize donkey hides.
4. Reward people for participating in watch schemes to protect working animals.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

According to National Veterinary Laboratory data collected in 1994–98, the most common diagnoses were rabies (31%), babesiosis (18%), dourine (13%) and strongylosis (13%)⁶. Both *Babesia caballi* and *B. equi* exist which means there is a persistent threat to equine health and possible trade.

From the records of World Organisation for Animal Health, Botswana has not had any outbreaks of AHS, equine influenza or other WOAHL-listed equine diseases in the past five years. The absence of recent alerts suggest that Botswana is still free from African horse sickness. But findings from serological surveys performed between 1995 and 2004 verified that horses did have AHS antibodies, suggesting horses are still at risk should trading or movement start again without safety rules in place.

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NAMIBIA

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN NAMIBIA

Introduction

Donkeys – about 200,000 head – remain indispensable to Namibian subsistence farmers, supplying draught power, water transport, and school commuting in remote settlements, particularly in Kunene and the Zambezi

Strip¹. Namibia's long borders with five countries and its Atlantic outlet at Walvis Bay situate it on key wildlife-trafficking corridors, exposing rural herds to hide traders.

Slaughter-house and Trade Dynamics

Industrial-Slaughter Proposals and Community Push-back	Status after 2017 ban	Key issues reported
2017	Two Chinese firms (Ever-Lasting Iron Sheet Investment, Okahandja; Fu Hai Trading, Outjo) receive preliminary approvals for abattoirs (100-120 donkeys day ¹).	Outjo residents and the Namibia Animal Welfare Association (NAWA) petition; no Environmental Clearance Certificate issued, projects stalled ² .
2019	Customs traces Botswana hides moving via the Trans-Kalahari Highway to Walvis Bay for export.	Ad-hoc inspections launched; no successful prosecutions published ³ .
2020	Online adverts in Groot Aub offer fresh donkey meat, signalling informal slaughter near Windhoek.	SPCA investigation secures animal-cruelty convictions under the 1962 Act ⁴ .

Policy Landscape After the 2024 AU Moratorium

Instrument	Namibia's Response	Gap
AU moratorium (Feb 2024)	MAWLR circular (Apr 2024) instructs veterinary districts to refuse skin-export permits.	No donkey-specific clauses in the outdated Animal Protection Act 1962; limited penalties.
Environmental-Impact regime	Draft EIA guidelines for equine abattoirs (2022) still awaiting gazette.	Investors may still lodge new applications in the regulatory vacuum.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Veterinary officers lack legal authority to seize hides or prosecute traffickers; only the SPCA can bring cruelty cases^{2,4}. Bush-slaughter networks supply hides to Asian middlemen who operate front companies in Windhoek and northern towns³. Traffickers exploit the lightly patrolled Zambezi Strip, allowing hides to exit through four adjoining countries. Fines under the 1962 Act remain low, and magistrates rarely impose custodial sentences.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

MAWLR confirms no active donkey–abattoir licences, though foreign investors have renewed inquiries. The SPCA's Kunene office recorded three night-time theft incidents (Kamanjab, Khorixas, Tsumkwe) in Q1 2025. NAWA has broadcast community–radio alerts since October 2024, while Parliament is debating a draft Animal Welfare and Protection Bill that would ban hide exports and increase penalties ten-fold.

Strategic Gateway in the Donkey–Skin Corridor

Walvis Bay – the country's only deep–water port and site of the UNODC–WCO Port Control Unit – remains the final exit for illicit hides⁵. All skins travel via the Trans–Kalahari or Trans–Caprivi highways originating at Buitepos (Botswana) and Ngoma/Katima Mulilo (Zambia), border posts flagged for high volumes of un-inspected livestock freight^{6,7}. Equipping customs and police at these checkpoints with UV hide-scanners and training, while supporting community watch schemes in Kunene and Zambezi, would create a fence–to–port interception net.

Strategic Action Points

1. Legislate the AU moratorium in the forthcoming Animal Welfare Bill, criminalising hide trafficking with meaningful jail terms.
2. Mandate EIA plus Environmental Clearance Certificates for any equine–processing proposal, requiring proof of sustainable donkey supply.
3. Strengthen port and border controls – UV scanning at Walvis Bay, Buitepos and Katima Mulilo; cross-train customs and veterinary officers.
4. Community surveillance in Kunene and Zambezi with reward schemes funded by MAWLR to deter theft and report traffickers.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

Rabies is Namibia's principal notifiable equine disease, with sporadic donkey cases in Kunene (2023) and Otjozondjupa (2024). No African Horse Sickness or equine–influenza outbreaks have been reported to WOAHA in the past decade.

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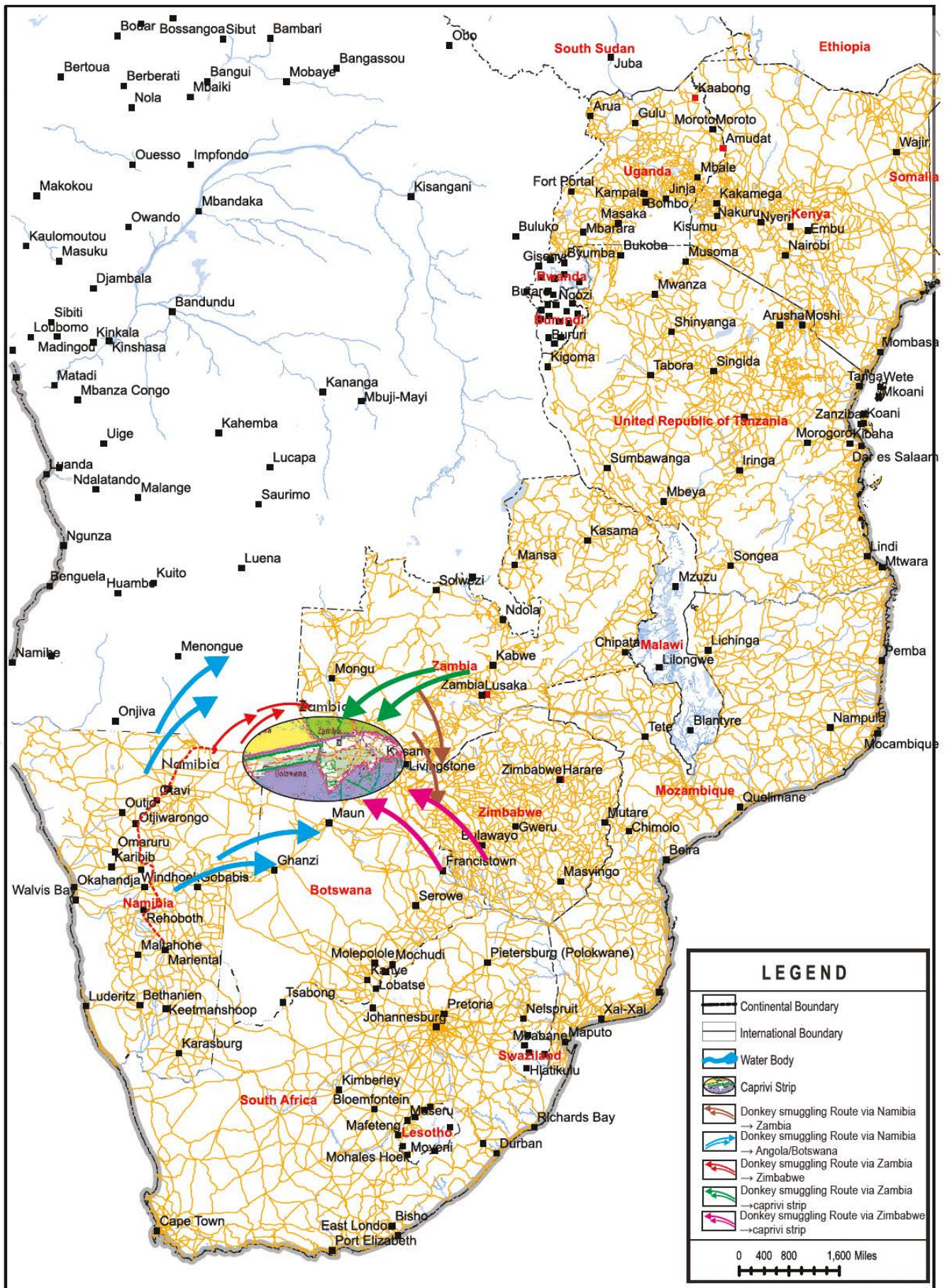


Figure xx: Donkey smuggling Route in southern Region of Africa

SOUTH AFRICA

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Introduction

Donkeys remain essential to small-scale agriculture and cart transport in South Africa's dry rural provinces, yet official population figures are uncertain (roughly 70,000 – 110,000 head). The National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA) has spear-headed investigations into the hide trade and prosecuted several cruelty cases since 2021, leading to a sharp drop in visible long-distance movements of live donkeys over the last three years.¹

Increase in Slaughter and Hide Demand

Although cross-country trucking has slowed, two registered equine abattoirs operate daily – one Chinese-owned plant in North-West and a mixed-equid facility in Gauteng.² Hides are the main commodity exported; meat is off-loaded cheaply in local wet-markets. Inspectors believe covert night convoys now ferry stock from Limpopo and Northern Cape to these plants to circumvent weighbridges and road-blocks.³ Captive-lion farms also buy donkeys directly as the lowest-cost feed, compounding welfare concerns.⁴

Recent field evidence indicates the re-establishment of a new Chinese-owned donkey abattoir in the town of Schweizer-Reneke, North-West Province. The facility is fully licensed, inspected, and – according to the NSPCA – complies with national regulations. Details on its processing capacity and the destination of the meat and skins remain unclear.

Market Dynamics

Province	Plant Name	Operating Days	Daily Throughput (head) ¹	Principal Catchment Areas ¹	Main Product Flow ²³
North-West	Tosca Equine Abattoir	Mon – Fri	40 – 609	Limpopo, North-West, Botswana ¹⁴	Hides → China (via Durban) ¹⁴
Gauteng	Randfontein Equine Abattoir	Mon – Fri	20 – 359	Limpopo, Free State, Mpumalanga ¹⁴	Hides → Asia; meat local ¹⁵

Given the high international demand for donkey hides used in ejiao production, obtaining accurate figures on slaughter quotas and export channels from the NSPCA should be a priority.

The North-West provincial government has long encouraged the commercial use of donkeys, supporting pilot farms, distributing carts, and seeking investors. A small abattoir in Schweizer-Reneke closed previously, but evidence suggests it has been reopened under Chinese ownership, reflecting the broader presence of Chinese enterprises in rural South Africa.

Policy Landscape after the AU Moratorium

- South Africa has not yet gazetted the AU moratorium (Feb 2024) that halts industrial hide exports.
- Enforcement still relies on the Animals Protection Act 71 of 1962, which targets cruelty—not conservation or trade volume.⁵
- No annual hide-export quota is published by Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD); an informal figure of 12,000 hides per year was cited in 2022 parliamentary replies but never formalised.⁶

Enforcement Gaps

- **Night transport & overloading** – multi-tier trucks depart after 22:00 to avoid spot-checks.³
- **Widespread theft & intimidation of owners**; many cases go unreported.¹
- **"Cruel slaughter" myth** – belief that skinning alive improves gelatin persists in some facilities.⁴
- **No census / traceability** – makes quota-setting and risk assessment impossible.⁷

Projected Population Risk

The Donkey Sanctuary projects that if current off-take (> 25 000 hides per year, declared and clandestine) continues, 50 % of the national herd could be lost within five years, mirroring Sahelian attrition curves.⁸

Strategic Action Points for South Africa

1. Gazette AU moratorium and list the donkey under TOPS regulations.
2. Hide-export cap \leq 1 % of standing herd until a census is completed.
3. E-permit and RFID traceability for every live-equid movement and abattoir off-take.
4. Stiffer penalties – align cruelty fines with CITES Schedule-I wildlife offences.
5. Community reward hotline for verifiable trafficking tips; roll-out NSPCA harness-exchange and welfare workshops nationally.

Recent Equine-Disease Trends and Outbreaks (2021 – 2024)

Over the past five years South Africa has confronted several notifiable equine-disease events, most prominently recurrent episodes of African horse sickness (AHS). In early 2021 the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) recorded an outbreak of AHS serotype 2 in Gauteng Province, affecting 466 equids and causing 72 fatalities.¹⁰ Further AHS activity was reported in April 2023 when **serotype 1** was confirmed on a holding in the Northern Cape, prompting movement restrictions and emergency vaccination in surrounding districts.¹¹

Beyond vector-borne AHS, an H3N8 equine-influenza cluster was documented in late-2022 among racing yards in the Western Cape, with molecular sequencing linking the virus to contemporary European lineage strains.¹² Donkeys have also featured in recent surveillance: a **2022 cross-sectional study in Limpopo Province** found seroprevalences of **18 % for *Theileria equi*** and **7 % for *Babesia caballi***, underscoring the ongoing risk of equine piroplasmiasis in working equids.¹³

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LESOTHO

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN LESOTHO

Introduction

Lesotho is widely regarded as a transit hub where donkey skins change hands before reaching buyers embedded in local Chinese communities¹. With the African Union's continent-wide moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter and skin export adopted in February 2024², the country's role has become more prominent.

Donkey Population

Although official statistics are scarce, the 2019/2020 Agricultural Census recorded **161 555** donkeys across Lesotho⁵. The continued demand for skins and live animals exported to neighbouring South Africa suggests growing pressure on this herd.

Trade Routes & Smuggling Networks

Evidence points to donkeys stolen in South Africa being driven into Lesotho for clandestine slaughter and skin removal. In 2021 the National Council of SPCAs stopped a truck carrying about 100 donkeys bound for Lesotho³, and in 2022 two additional loads were intercepted at the border⁴. Such syndicates often recruit local residents to move stock along informal livestock tracks.

Policy Environment after the AU Moratorium

The Lesotho Government has yet to issue a formal response to the AU decision, but meetings with South African counterparts indicate rising concern over stolen livestock and cross-border skin traffic.

Problems with Enforcement & Welfare

Lesotho has no specific ban on the killing or commercial trade of donkeys. International cooperation enabled the 2021–22 seizures, yet weak surveillance and limited animal-protection laws leave persistent gaps.

Current Trends (2024–2025)

Reports continue to link Lesotho with seized hides and unregulated slaughter sites. Despite the continental ban, minimal market oversight still allows donkeys to be exploited mainly for export skins.

Action Steps for Lesotho

1. Enact legislation prohibiting commercial slaughter and skin trade, aligning with the AU moratorium.
2. Define veterinary and livestock-officer mandates and introduce deterrent penalties (e.g. heavy fines and facility closures).
3. Establish Lesotho–South Africa livestock task-forces at key crossings, with routine joint inspections.
4. Integrate donkeys into the national animal-health information system by 2025, ensuring intercepted animals receive immediate veterinary care.

Recent Equine Health Trends and Outbreak

No WOAH-reported equine disease outbreaks have been notified for Lesotho during 2023–2025⁶. Nonetheless, informal animal movements pose ongoing biosecurity risks.

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ESWATINI

POST- AU CONTINENTAL BAN: TRENDS AND RESPONSES IN ESWATINI

Introduction

Eswatini's role in the donkey-skin trade remains low-profile, with no licensed slaughterhouses or recorded exports. Nevertheless, its proximity to South Africa and the absence of formal enforcement protocols leave the kingdom vulnerable to traffickers looking for alternative routes after the African Union's continent-wide moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter and skin export adopted in February 2024¹.

Donkey Populations

No recent national livestock census covers donkeys in Eswatini. Global reviews of FAOSTAT submissions show that several smaller southern-African states – including Eswatini – have not filed up-to-date figures, creating data gaps that hamper risk assessment².

Trade Dynamics & Smuggling Routes

As of mid-2025 no verified seizures of donkey skins have been traced to Eswatini, and open sources record no confirmed cases of trans-border smuggling through the country. Even so, its rural frontier with KwaZulu-Natal lies on established livestock corridors, making covert movements plausible if neighbouring routes are disrupted.

Policy Landscape after the 2024 AU Moratorium

The government has not issued a national statement endorsing the AU decision¹. This silence raises concerns about monitoring, enforcement and exposure to external syndicates.

Enforcement & Welfare Gaps

Eswatini has no specific legislation regulating donkey slaughter or skin export, and no enforcement operations linked to the trade have been reported. The absence of a legal framework hinders proactive control and welfare oversight.

Current Trends (2024-2025)

No confirmed activity has been reported in 2024-2025 regarding donkey slaughter or skin exports. Nonetheless, growth in underground trade in neighbouring South Africa and Lesotho suggests Eswatini could become a fallback zone if traffickers shift their routes.

Equine Disease Surveillance

Eswatini has reported no notifiable equine–disease events to WOAH's WAHIS platform during the post-moratorium period³. However, informal livestock movements across southern Africa highlight the need for continued vigilance.

Strategic Action Steps for Eswatini

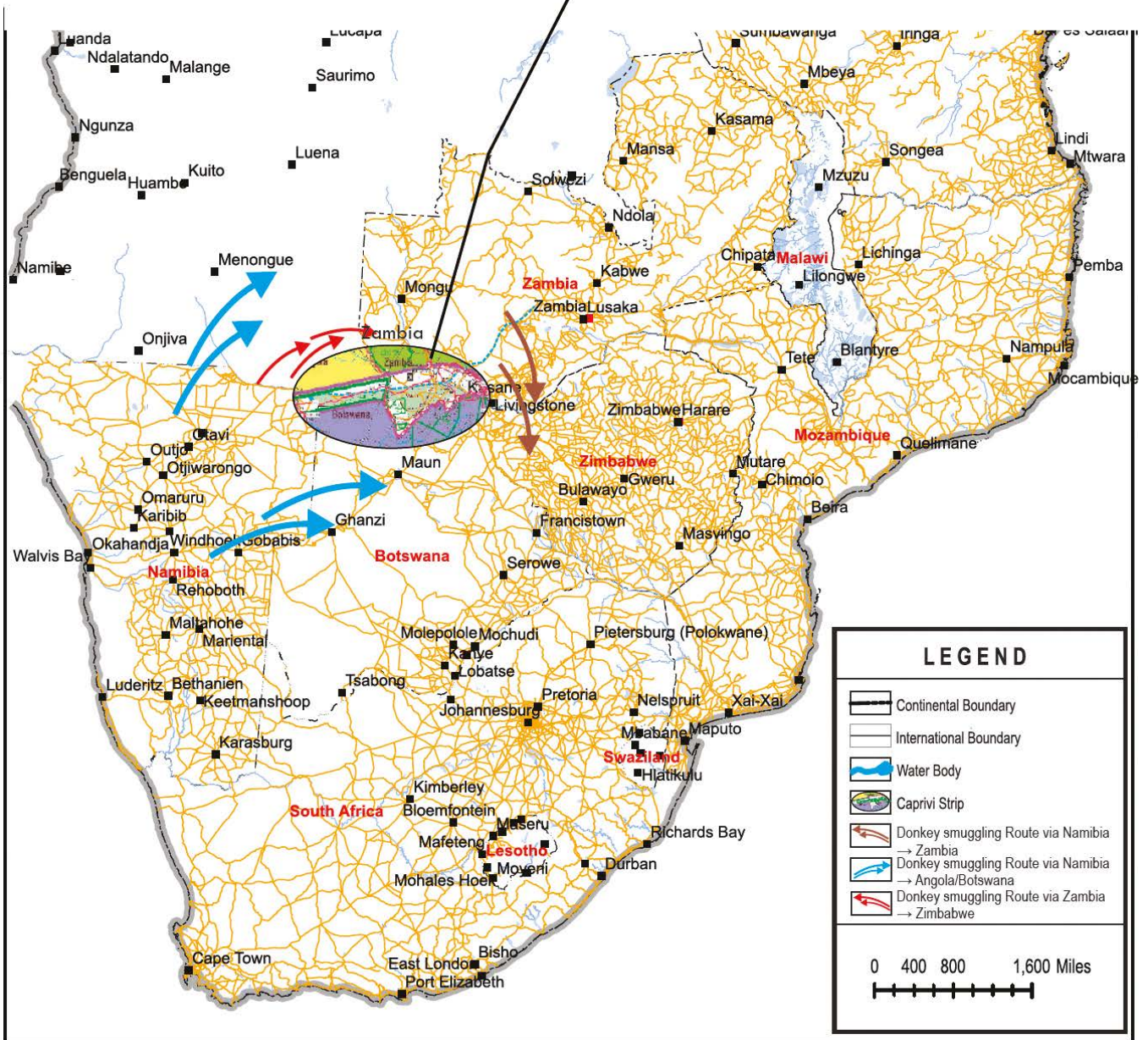
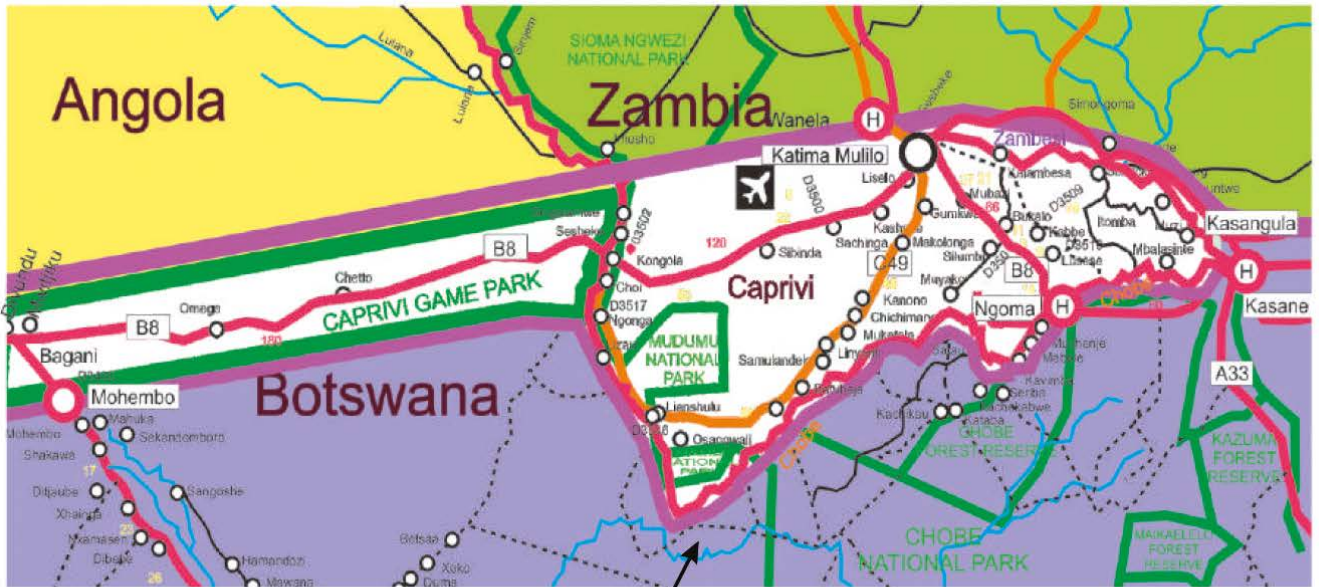
1. Enact a donkey-specific prohibition on commercial slaughter and skin export to align with the AU moratorium.
2. Define veterinary and livestock-officer mandates and introduce deterrent penalties (e.g., substantial fines and facility closures).
3. Strengthen border controls along key crossings with South Africa – especially in KwaZulu-Natal – and establish joint inspections.
4. Conduct a national donkey census and integrate equids into the veterinary information system by 2025, creating population baselines and enabling early welfare-abuse detection.
5. Build grassroots reporting networks through community engagement and cross-border coordination to ensure regional alignment with AU objectives.

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DISCUSSION

The African Union's moratorium of February 2024 (Decision AUC/EX.CL/Dec.1129[XLII]) on commercial donkey slaughter and skin export marked an important and unified action to protect Africa's working donkeys and the millions of people who rely on them¹. This policy highlights the AU's recognition of donkeys as essential for rural transport, farming, and community resilience across the continent. According to the most recent FAOSTAT data (Table X), Africa holds more than half of the world's donkey population, with an estimated 32 823 207 animals as of 2023². However, this valuable

rural resource remains under serious threat due to rising and poorly regulated demand for donkey skins, mainly driven by international trade in ejiao, a gelatin made from donkey hides. This decline is not only an environmental concern but also a major socioeconomic issue. As donkeys disappear, many poor households especially women – face reduced transport options, lower agricultural productivity, and increased labour burdens. Unless the moratorium is effectively enforced at the national level, the progress intended by this continental decision may not be fully achieved.

Regional Post-Moratorium Trends

Region	Post-moratorium reality
Central Africa	Chad remains the Lake-Chad hub: donkeys assembled at Dourbali, Guelendeng and Massenya are trekked through Fotokol and Kerawa into Cameroon and to Nigeria despite a 2017 national moratorium. Poor control over borders lets traffickers bypass checkpoints, undermining any deterrent ³ .
West Africa	Theft-driven flows now link Niger, Nigeria and Ghana. Hide shipments are relabelled as bovine leather and sent to coastal depots; prices have tripled since 2016, fuelling widespread bush slaughter ⁴ . Nigerian media investigations document collusion between smugglers and corrupt gatekeepers ⁵ .
East Africa	Ethiopia's lone export plant reopened in 2021 with capacity for 300 donkeys per day ⁶ . Kenya and Tanzania closed Naivasha (2020) and Shinyanga (2021) abattoirs after protests, yet clandestine slaughter persists around Naivasha and the Lake Zone ⁷ . IGAD-backed joint patrols and breeding-scheme commitments (Nairobi 2019) remain only partly implemented ⁸ .
Southern Africa	Namibia's Caprivi Strip and Botswana's Ramokgwebana crossing are now choke-points. Traffickers exploit weak customs codes and modest fines to continue business. ^{10,11}
North Africa	Egypt still allows an annual export quota of roughly 10,000 hides; customs officers confiscated 4.2 t of undeclared skins at Safaga in 2008 and continue to flag similar consignments ¹² . Algeria and Morocco issue circular bans, yet informal slaughter remains common around Tamanrasset and Fez ¹³ .

DISCUSSION

Persistent Enforcement Gaps

Even though the African Union has instituted a moratorium, there are still loopholes in enforcement witnessed in most regions. Among the most important are legal omissions, because numerous states still do not have a special clause on donkeys in their veterinary, customs, and trade legislation¹³. This loophole restrains authorities' capacity to pursue or prevent unlawful trade. Another challenge is border surveillance. For example, Nigeria has more than 3,400 informal border points, creating an extended grey zone that traffickers use to move donkey products across national borders without being stopped⁴. In addition, low penalties greatly devalue enforcement. In some countries fines are as little as US \$ 50–200, whereas a single black-market donkey hide is worth US \$ 35–50¹³. This economic disparity adds further incentive for illicit activity.

The gendered load of the trade effect is also intense. With declining donkey herds, women and children who usually fetch water and fuel must carry heavier burdens. The strain leads to poor health outcomes and disrupted education, a well-established effect when working animals are lost from rural livelihoods¹⁴.

Evolving Smuggling Tactics

Criminal networks involved in the donkey-skin trade continue to evolve tactics to bypass enforcement.

Concealment remains a primary strategy, with skins hidden beneath legitimate cargo to evade surface-level checks^{4 15}.

Another tactic is false labelling, where donkey hides are deliberately declared as "bovine leather" to avoid tariff flags and customs scrutiny¹³.

To further avoid detection, traffickers often employ shipment fragmentation, splitting consignments into smaller batches to reduce suspicion and facilitate easier passage through checkpoints¹⁶.

Bribery and collusion also play a significant role. Corrupt officials can fast-track paperwork or waive inspections in exchange for bribes, undermining border control and legal accountability⁵.

Donkey Population and Data Gaps in Africa

The latest FAOSTAT reporting shows nearly half of Africa's donkeys now concentrated in just three Sahel-Horn states, while many coastal and forest nations have stopped reporting their herds. This visibility gap hampers One-Health planning, disease surveillance, and anti-trafficking enforcement. Without district-level surveys and genetic biobanks, policy choices are undermined and resources squandered – a problem the Pan-African Donkey Strategy is meant to address.

DISCUSSION

Overview of 2023 Donkey Head-Counts for Key African Countries

Rank	Country	2023 Population (heads)	Notes
1	Ethiopia	10 668 986 ¹	Continent's largest herd
2	Sudan	7 666 017 ¹	Conflict-driven declines
3	Chad	4 676 320 ¹	Major skin-export source
4	Niger	1 989 153 ¹	Cross-border leakage risk
5	Burkina Faso	1 616 437 ¹	National export ban since 2020
6	Nigeria	1 357 245 ¹	North hardest-hit by skin trade
7	Mali	1 238 666 ¹	Slow post-loss recovery
8	Egypt	1 007 485 ¹	Urban traction demand
9	Morocco	891 440 ¹	Atlas-foothill draught use
10	Zimbabwe	668 489 ¹	SADC's fastest rise (2020–23)
11	Senegal	466 868 ¹	Smuggling corridor to Sahel
12	Tanzania	192 025 ¹	Revised downward after 2022 census
13	South Africa	142 934 ¹	Farm & tourism-use herds
14	Botswana	81 904 ¹	Kgalagadi & Chobe community herds
15	Algeria	58 276 ¹	Herd halved since 2015
16	Cameroon	40 086 ¹	Northward shift of skin pressure
17	Uganda	19 395 ¹	Steady growth since 2018
18	Cape Verde	16 598 ¹	Pack animals on Santo Antão
19	Djibouti	8 500 ¹	Port-linked cart use
20	Comoros	5 521 ¹	Island transport animals
21	Angola	4 471 ¹	Very small, scattered pockets
22	Togo	3 510 ¹	Reflects impact of 2025 decree
23	Zambia	2 246 ¹	Zambezi-valley concentration
24	Benin	635 ¹	Carry-forward estimate
Total (published)		32 823 207	Sum of the 24 reporting countries

¹FAOSTAT Live Animals, 2023 dataset (accessed 13 Jun 2025). Benin's low figure reflects a carry-forward of the 2019 value due to lack of updated national data.

DISCUSSION

Key 2023 Continental Takeaways

- Verified FAOSTAT head-count for the 24 reporting countries: ~32.8 million.
- Data holes remain: At least seven West, Central and East African countries known for active donkey trade have not submitted figures since 2019; the true continental total may be 3–4 million higher.
- Largest verified herds: Ethiopia (>10 million), Sudan (>7 million), Chad (~4.7 million).
- Sharpest statistical drops (2019–2023): Algeria (–43 %), Botswana (–35 %), Egypt (–30 %) all correlated with tighter hide-export controls.

Herd Numbers and Future Scenarios

Scenario	Policy Outlook	Key Assumptions	Estimated Population by 2040	Implication
Scenario A: Ban Enforced	AU moratorium fully implemented and domesticated by Member States	Strong legislation, veterinary enforcement, trade bans, community outreach	30 million	Herd stabilisation and recovery, supporting livelihoods
Scenario B: Trade Continues	Weak enforcement, porous borders, persistent illegal slaughter	No new national legislation, unchecked trade, limited surveillance	14 million	Loss of up to half the remaining donkeys; eco-system and livelihood shock

If the AU moratorium on commercial donkey-skin exports is widely enforced and integrated into national legislation, the herd could rebound to 30 million by 2040, supporting livelihoods, ecosystem functions, and rural economies. However, if current trade dynamics remain unchecked, the population may plummet to 14 million, representing the loss of half of the continent's donkeys within the next 16 years. This contrast underscores the critical need for sustained enforcement, regulatory alignment, and investment in welfare infrastructure across Africa.

Cross-Border Trafficking Routes and Enforcement Priorities

The traditional "Donkey Trail" of the Sahara – running from eastern Chad into northern Nigeria – has evolved into a major conduit for skins and live animals¹⁷. Yet the trade is truly pan-African:

- East Africa: Border posts at Moyale (Kenya–Ethiopia), Namanga (Kenya–Tanzania), Busia and Malaba (Kenya–Uganda) channel stock from Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania.
- West Africa: Despite national bans, the Diffa → Mai'adua, Maigatari → Illela and Niono → Banfora corridors remain active, funnelling donkeys from Niger and Burkina Faso toward coastal depots.
- Southern Africa: Namibia's Caprivi Strip, Zambia's Kazungula Bridge and Botswana's Ramokgwebana crossing are hotspots for hides misdeclared as bovine leather.
- North Africa: Informal slaughter clusters around Tamanrasset (Algeria) and Fez (Morocco) undermine national circular bans, while Egypt still permits a quota of 10 000 hides per year¹².

DISCUSSION

Equine-Health Outlook

Although WOAH lists no Somalia-to-Egypt notifiable outbreaks for 2023-2025¹⁹, case studies highlight persistent risk. African horse sickness (AHS) was confirmed in Lagos, Nigeria in 2023²⁰ and in multiple districts of Namibia that same year²¹. Reviews indicate that endemic *Culicoides* populations can trigger AHS resurgence whenever vaccination efforts lapse^{23 24}. Robust surveillance, updated vaccine strategies, and real-time data-sharing remain critical safeguards.

Meat-Fraud Trends across Africa

Post-moratorium, the illegal donkey-skin economy has spawned a parallel meat-fraud market. In Nigeria, donkey meat is often mislabelled and sold openly as beef or bush-meat⁵, while DNA bar-coding in South Africa confirmed donkey, buffalo and goat DNA in processed products advertised as beef²⁵. Similar incidents have surfaced elsewhere: Kenyan police seized thirty freshly slaughtered donkeys destined for Nairobi's Burma Market in 2024, with suspects admitting they would sell the meat as beef²⁷; veterinary officers in Ghana reported large consignments of donkey meat relabelled as "bush-meat" despite a national ban²⁸; and a 2013 Stellenbosch University survey found 99 of 139 meat samples mislabelled, often containing donkey DNA³⁰.

These cases highlight the urgent need for rigorous traceability systems and enforcement of food-safety statutes such as Nigeria's Meat Edict 1968 and Animal Disease Control Act 2004²⁶. Effective DNA spot-checks, species-specific labelling, and cross-border information-sharing would deter substitution and protect public health.

Positive Developments

Carrier bans are reshaping the trade landscape, with leading shipper Swire now refusing donkey-skin cargo, thereby shrinking maritime transport options³¹. Regional coordination is also improving, as IGAD and several ECOWAS and SADC forums have begun exchanging seizure data and piloting electronic permit systems^{8 10}. Meanwhile, community outreach efforts are expanding, with mobile veterinary clinics and "breeding-for-resilience" schemes delivering services in high-risk zones¹⁷.

Eighteen months after the AU moratorium, Africa's donkey-skin economy has contracted but not vanished. Weak laws, porous borders and attractive black-market prices still drive illegal slaughter and cross-border smuggling. Where enforcement is sustained, Naivasha, Shinyanga, Caprivi – herds stabilise and rural incomes recover. Conversely, regions that remain policy- or data-blind see ongoing decline, with disproportionate costs falling on women and youth.

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CONCLUSION

Africa's donkeys stand at a decisive crossroads. The continent-wide moratorium adopted by African Union Heads of State in February 2024 marked a historic step toward halting the commercial slaughter and export of donkeys for their skins.

Yet, as this report has shown – from the Sahel to the Zambezi, the Maghreb to the Horn – policy declarations alone are insufficient. Where abattoir licenses have been revoked (e.g., Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, Zimbabwe) or never issued (e.g., Côte d'Ivoire, Namibia, Uganda), slaughter operations have merely shifted underground into bush slaughter sites and informal depots.

In countries retaining legal quotas (e.g., Egypt, South Africa, Ethiopia), laundering channels for cross-border skins continue to flourish. Meanwhile, weak enforcement in transit corridors such as Central Africa, Zambia, and Mozambique enables traffickers to exploit porous borders, falsely declare donkey skins as bovine leather, and smuggle them alongside high-value contraband, including pangolin scales and ivory.

The consequences are grave. Donkey herds have collapsed in critical hotspots – northern Ghana, southern Kenya, Burkina Faso, and Namibia's Caprivi Strip. Theft and violent rustling now threaten rural safety across West Africa and the Rift Valley.

The erosion of draught power has increased transport costs, forced labor burdens onto women and children, and compromised progress on key Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the unchecked movement of live equids has intensified disease risk. Serological studies in Kenya's Baringo County, Uganda's Karamoja region, and Ethiopia's highlands confirm silent circulation of equine influenza, African Horse Sickness, and encephalosis viruses – all of which pose a serious threat of transboundary outbreaks.

Despite these challenges, notable progress provides hope. Burkina Faso's early export ban (2016), Côte d'Ivoire's 2022 decree, Nigeria's multimillion-naira seizures, Mauritania's rejection of a Chinese abattoir proposal, Namibia's updated Animal Welfare Bill, and Zimbabwe's refusal to license donkey export slaughter signal emerging resistance. Civil society groups – such as Tikobane Trust (Zimbabwe), Brooke West Africa and East Africa, and TAWESO (Tanzania) – continue to expose abuses, engage communities, and pressure governments.

Regional blocs are responding: IGAD has proposed breeding-programme guidelines; ECOWAS veterinary officials remain committed to their 2016 Abuja resolution; and SADC's police-chiefs forum is finalizing a protocol on livestock theft.

To convert this momentum into lasting protection, five continent-wide priorities must be urgently pursued:

1. Legal domestication of the AU moratorium in all member states, incorporating explicit penalties, including imprisonment and asset forfeiture for hide trafficking.
2. Harmonized customs classification and deployment of rapid test technology to prevent mislabeling of donkey skins at borders and ports.

3. It has been scientifically proven that breeding to meet the demand in donkey skins for trade is not feasible nor economically viable. It is also not welfare-friendly and goes ahead to commodify an animal species, which is unethical. However, community-based small scale breeding, and conservation programs which meet good welfare standards, are possible to help rebuild herds.

CONCLUSION

4. Regional rapid-response task forces, integrating police, veterinary, and wildlife authorities to patrol and secure high-risk corridors such as Diffa–Geidam, Kazungula Bridge, the Caprivi Strip, and the Chad – Cameroon – Nigeria tri-border region.
5. Strengthened disease surveillance and integrated data sharing, bringing donkey health monitoring under existing One Health frameworks to detect and contain viral threats.

If implemented side by side, these actions can transform the AU moratorium from a symbolic gesture into a robust safeguard – preserving donkeys as vital engines of agricultural resilience and transport across rural Africa. The continent now possesses the legislation, technical knowledge, and growing political alignment to act. What remains is cross-border coordination, sustained investment, and public vigilance.

Time is of the essence: current modelling warns that several donkey populations may face irreversible collapse within a decade. Strategic, unified action today will prevent that future—protecting Africa's natural heritage and securing the livelihoods that depend on it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Recommendations for Protecting Donkey Populations and Curbing the Illegal Skin Trade

The continued decline in Africa's donkey population — estimated at between 23 and 29 million — is driven largely by illicit slaughter and the global demand for skins, primarily exported to Asia for use in traditional medicine. This trend, despite the African Union's 2024 continental moratorium on commercial donkey slaughter and skin export, persists due to economic vulnerabilities, regulatory loopholes, porous borders, and a lack of viable alternatives for communities reliant on donkey labor. In response, a coordinated, multi-pronged policy approach is urgently needed to protect this critical species and the livelihoods it sustains.

A comprehensive policy framework must go beyond bans and border patrols. It must blend strict legal enforcement with socioeconomic development, veterinary investment, regional coordination, and strong community engagement. The following recommendations aim to restore control over donkey populations and promote long-term sustainability by aligning national and regional efforts with the AU moratorium's goals.

1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Enforcement Mechanisms

Countries must translate the AU moratorium into enforceable national legislation. This includes the designation of protected zones for donkeys (e.g. semi-arid Sahelian corridors), deployment of anti-poaching task forces, and enhancement of legal penalties for trafficking offenses. Nigeria's Agricultural Quarantine Service (NAQS) regulations, for example, offer a model for export prohibition and product seizure. Further, regional intelligence-sharing platforms and joint enforcement task forces should be established along high-traffic borders such as Niger-Nigeria and Chad-Cameroon to intercept illegal consignments and dismantle trafficking networks.

Advanced traceability mechanisms, including digital tagging and centralized databases, will help track donkey movements and prevent fraudulent slaughter. Upgraded border facilities and training for customs officers are essential for detecting hidden consignments of skins often mislabeled as bovine leather or bush meat.

2. Advancing Community-Based and Economic Alternatives

Long-term success hinges on reducing communities' economic dependence on donkey skin sales. National governments and development agencies should invest in income-diversification programs such as sustainable agriculture, leather processing from alternative species, and agro-based microenterprises.

Equally important is participatory governance. Policies must reflect local knowledge systems and cultural contexts, engaging community leaders, livestock keepers, and civil society groups. Public education campaigns should emphasize the ecological and economic roles donkeys play—shifting narratives from commercial commodity to community asset.

3. Enhancing Veterinary Infrastructure and Welfare Standards

The widespread lack of donkey-specific veterinary services worsens the impact of overuse and neglect. Governments should expand rural veterinary outreach through mobile clinics, while training a new cadre of veterinarians and paraprofessionals in equid-specific care.

National livestock policies must also integrate comprehensive welfare guidelines — from humane handling during transport and market procedures to proper slaughter practices where permitted. Rescue networks and shelters for confiscated donkeys can ensure rehabilitation and reintegration into local economies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Fostering Regional and International Cooperation

A continental challenge demands harmonized regional responses. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) like ECOWAS, IGAD, and SADC should coordinate donkey protection policies across member states, ensuring uniform trade bans, border controls, and animal health standards. Regional monitoring systems and a five-year census should track population trends and trafficking patterns.

Simultaneously, diplomatic engagement with major importers – especially China – should aim to curtail demand and promote ethical alternatives to ejiao. Multilateral platforms such as the African Union-Asia Policy Dialogue can foster transparency and mutual accountability.

5. Establishing Clear Accountability and Measurable Goals

Monitoring and evaluation frameworks must define performance indicators, including trends in donkey population, enforcement actions, and community income diversification. These should be regularly reviewed through national reports and regional peer assessments.

To ensure transparency, enforcement data – including seizures, prosecutions, and policy compliance – should be made publicly available. Anonymous reporting channels will also empower citizens to alert authorities to illegal activity without fear of retribution.

6. AU-IBAR and FAO should integrate an annual equid data-pull from Member States into the African Continental Surveillance System (ACSS) so that the 2026 FAOSTAT cycle no longer shows "not .available" entries for major skin-trade corridors.

