

# THE DONKEY SKIN TRADE: THE WORLDWIDE IMPACT

A high demand for ejiao – a gelatin produced from boiling donkey skins and used in traditional Chinese medicine and beauty products – is putting global donkey populations in crisis and threatening the livelihoods of millions of people that depend on them. While Africa remains the primary source of both legally and illegally-sourced donkey skins to China, the trade has spread across the globe.



## IMPACTS OF THE DONKEY SKIN TRADE

### Increased risk of transboundary diseases threaten human and animal health. There are multiple reports of disease outbreaks attributed to the trade:

- 62,000 animals were killed in Niger in 2019 as part of an outbreak of equine influenza which was widespread across West Africa. WOAHP has highlighted the donkey skin trade as a likely cause.
- Outbreaks in farmed donkeys, such as the highly contagious strangles, cause needless and debilitating sickness.
- Outbreaks can also threaten human health, for example glanders, which can be fatal to humans or result in chronic infection.
- Long distance transport of donkeys for slaughter and unregulated trade routes risks the spread of zoonotic diseases.
- Public health is also put at risk by the trade – lack of proper hygiene methods for disposal of carcasses pollutes groundwater and drinking water supplies.
- These risks are all exacerbated by poor health systems which mean healthcare for both animals and humans is difficult to access (especially in rural locations) or too expensive for those living in poverty.

### Minimum animal welfare standards are not met:

- Farming and breeding donkeys commercially is incompatible with good welfare and results in significant welfare consequences, as donkeys are prone to masking signs of pain and distress in high-stress environments.
- Across the world, donkeys are moved hundreds of miles for slaughter. Many are crammed into overcrowded transportation and arrive injured, with kick and bite wounds, or in some cases dying in transit.
- Other donkeys must travel on foot for hundreds of miles with no rest, risking exhaustion.
- This includes land border crossings which may be illegal and contravene quarantine regulations.
- Slaughter is often inhumane, at illegal slaughter points in the bush or in ill-equipped slaughterhouses.
- The donkey skin trade contravenes international animal welfare standards at every stage.

### People's livelihoods are at risk:

- Donkeys are working livestock. They are critical to the livelihoods of millions of people, making vital contributions to the realisation of the UN SDGs.
- Donkeys create security against financial hardship via direct and indirect income generation. Donkey ownership generates a higher socio-economic and social status.
- Millions of women depend on donkeys to support them in crucial domestic tasks, such as fetching water and firewood each day.
- Without donkeys, many women have no choice but to walk long distances to fetch water and firewood for their household, which they must carry home themselves.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICYMAKERS

**Policymakers in affected countries must introduce legislation to ban the slaughter of donkeys and all trade in their skins for the production of ejiao.**

### Policy makers must also:

- Take measures to uphold and enforce bans and other legal sanctions including for illegal cross border trade.
- Safeguard the future of donkeys by:
  - acknowledging the life-long value of working donkeys as a livelihood asset by explicitly including them in national livestock surveys and policies.
  - supporting community driven, politically backed donkey protection initiatives.
- Recognise that breeding and farming donkeys to supply the skin trade is not a commercially viable solution and that donkeys are not a suitable species for intensive farming.
- Prioritise and improve reporting at country level of working equid populations, including donkeys, so as to better evidence the impact of the donkey skin trade and map trends.