

Empowering Cambodian Youth to Reduce Bushmeat Demand

USAID CAMBODIA GREEN FUTURE

Photo credit: Robert Axel/Unsplash

Activity Summary

Land use change, increased market demand for wildlife and other natural resources, and climate change threaten the rich landscapes and biodiversity in Cambodia. Raising environmental awareness among conservation and civil society organizations requires coordination and strategic communication. These groups in turn promote behavior change that supports biodiversity conservation, forest protection, and sustainable natural resource management.

This case study describes how USAID Cambodia Green Future, implemented by ECODIT and FHI 360, uses a **social and behavior change communications approach (SBCC)** to empower Cambodian citizens and civil society, especially the youth population, to promote the conservation of the country's natural resources. Focus areas for conservation campaigns include reducing demand for luxury wood furniture, littering, and reducing the buying and eating of wild meat, referred to as bushmeat by the project team.

Approach and Implementation

Youth Empowerment

The youth population in Cambodia makes up more than half of the country's overall population. Youth, therefore, are well-positioned to disseminate messages effectively and model positive social norms and behaviors among their families and communities. As key influencers and agents of change, Cambodia's youth drive future prosperity, security, and democracy—and can help promote and engage in dialogues on biodiversity and forest protection policies. By empowering youth, USAID Cambodia Green Future is aiming for long-term sustainability of conservation efforts by targeting a broad audience across the country.

SBCC Strategy

USAID Cambodia Green Future developed an [SBCC Strategy](#) to guide the implementation of the activity. Evidence from studies conducted during the first two years of activity implementation informed the strategy.

Activity Highlights



IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS
ECODIT LLC,
FHI 360



LOCATION
Prey Lang Extended Landscape (PLEL) and the Eastern Plains Landscape (EPL) in Cambodia



FUNDING AMOUNT
\$4.9 million



PERFORMANCE PERIOD
October 2019–
September 2024



STRATEGIC APPROACHES
Social and Behavior Change Communications, Demand Reduction

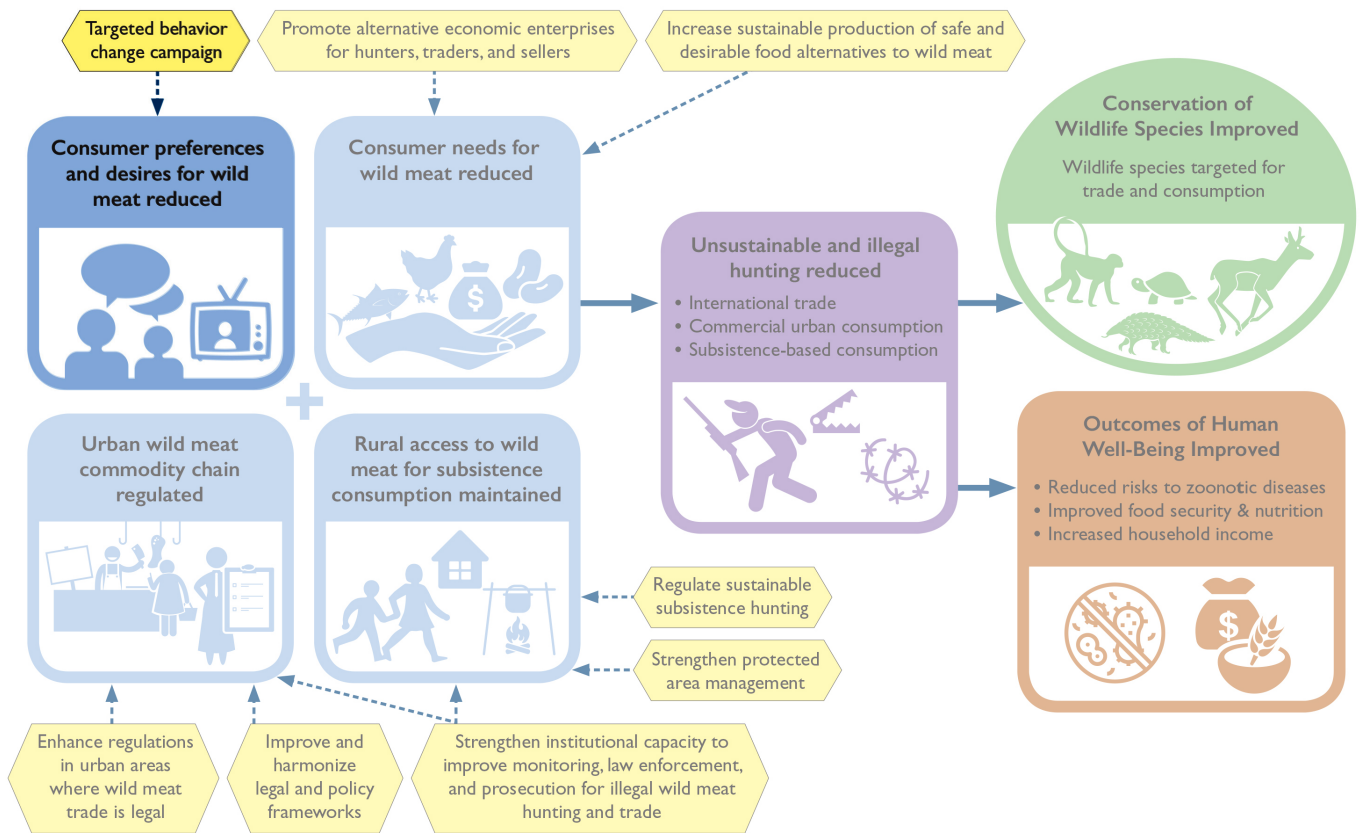


Figure 1: Theory of Change, Consumer Preferences

Table 1: SBCC Strategy

The team used **media consumption analysis** to identify and analyze media channels and outlets that have effectively delivered environment-related messages to Cambodian youth. The analysis revealed that targeted media campaigns are the most effective communication and outreach initiatives, followed by celebrations of special events.

Using **social network analysis**, the team analyzed and identified the prominent actors and relationships in Cambodia's biodiversity conservation and natural resource management sector. The social network analysis report identified key potential partners such as the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Tourism, NGO Forum, USAID, and others that could help the activity achieve its objectives and create a more inclusive information ecosystem.

The team organized **Youth Group Idea Sprint and Stakeholder Validation workshops** to identify key behaviors and their drivers for the SBCC strategy to address. Through the workshops, youth participants identified and prioritized key SBCC conservation campaign themes:

Theme 1: Reducing demand for luxury wood furniture

Theme 2: Reducing buying and eating bushmeat

Theme 3: Reducing littering

SBCC Campaign Theme 2: Reducing Buying and Eating Bushmeat

During the Youth Idea Sprint workshop, participants identified bushmeat consumption as a major threat to their environment. Bushmeat consumption in Cambodia is relatively widespread and socially accepted—it is a traditional practice in communities due to its perceived health benefits and luxury status (see Box 1).

USAID Cambodia Green Future worked with the Ministry of the Environment and WWF/Cambodia to launch the “**Protect Our Wildlife: Reduce Buying and Eating Bushmeat**” campaign in June 2022. The demand reduction plan focuses on educating and raising awareness of the health risks associated with bushmeat consumption and its environmental damage, and promoting locally accessible alternative food options.

The campaign promotes key messages (see Box 2) through social media posts on popular platforms such as [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [Twitter](#). USAID Cambodia Green Future develops digital content (e.g., videos, memes, web drama, and youth talk shows) that attracts and engages the youth population. By the end of the campaign’s second year, 66 percent of the target audience reported recalling the messages produced by USAID Cambodia Green Future on social media platforms.

Youth mobilization is a key strategic approach in the demand reduction plan, acknowledging youth’s influence on their families and social networks to discourage the buying and eating of wildlife products. To support youth in their role as influencers and change agents, USAID Cambodia Green Future is forming local, action-oriented “Green Groups” in communities and in schools. The purpose of these groups is to model successful behaviors and practices, and work with other local groups to conduct community mobilization activities aimed at supporting youth.

As of March 2023, the “**Protect Our Wildlife: Reduce Buying and Eating Bushmeat**” campaign is ongoing and aims to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Campaign activities engage people through social media and community-based interpersonal communications.
2. People recall key messages from the campaign and commit to reducing or refraining from buying and eating bushmeat.
3. People reduce or refrain from buying and eating bushmeat.

BOX 1: BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

Youth participants identified the following beliefs and attitudes that motivate bushmeat consumption in Cambodia:

- “Traditional practice for some ethnic groups”
- “Belief that consumption of bushmeat is healthy”
- “Curiosity to try a new taste”
- “Belief that purchasing bushmeat demonstrates high-class status”
- “Socially expected in certain circumstances”

BOX 2: KEY MESSAGING

The SBCC campaign promoted the following demand reduction messages:

- “Avoiding bushmeat is a healthy way to protect my family and my country”
- “Avoiding bushmeat is a huge contribution in protecting wildlife in my community and country”
- “Protecting wildlife improves economic well-being by supporting local ecotourism”
- “I can speak up and support my friends and family to become bushmeat free”

This SBCC Facebook campaign focused on how wild herbivores reduce wildfires caused by dry grass that grows in the forest, which is often a factor in accelerating forest fires.

Additional efforts underway include developing a bushmeat reduction SBCC toolkit and various communication materials (e.g., animated videos about bushmeat consumption). USAID Cambodia Green Future is also organizing a series of policy forums to engage policymakers and decision-makers in using the SBCC Strategy, toolkits, and message delivery systems to strengthen existing policies and develop new policies specific to the three campaign themes.

Indicators and Results

USAID Cambodia Green Future uses a robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework which collects data from a variety of sources, including the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Survey and social media and technology-based sources. Table 2 shares a selection of indicators related to the high-level goals of the activity not specific to bushmeat demand and consumption.

Table 2: Cambodia Green Future Goals and Indicators

Goals and Objectives	Indicators
<p>Goal: Empower Cambodian citizens and civil society with the knowledge and skills to use evidence-based communications systems to influence positive actions supporting biodiversity conservation, forest protection, and sustainable natural resource management.</p>	<p>Percentage of target population reporting strong commitment for Cambodia’s unique biodiversity and ecosystem.</p>
<p>Objective 1: Increase the target population’s knowledge and positive attitudes about the benefits of Cambodia’s unique and endangered biodiversity and the critical importance of Cambodia’s forest ecosystems.</p>	<p>Number of posts and engagements related to Green Future-produced key messages on biodiversity and forest protection.</p> <p>Number of biodiversity and forest protection-related media articles developed or supported as a result of USG assistance.</p> <p>Percentage of target population reporting moderate to significant personal commitment in valuing or protecting Cambodia’s unique biodiversity and ecosystems.</p>
<p>Objective 2: Increase citizen-led efforts to advocate for and protect biodiversity and forest ecosystems in target areas.</p>	<p>Percentage of mass-messaging network recipients who report using the messages to inform their actions.</p> <p>Number of environmental friendly outreach initiatives developed and improved with facilitation from USAID Cambodia Green Future.</p>



SBCC Stop Littering Campaign trash collection activity with Banteay Srey district, Cambodia. Photo credit: Cambodia Green Future.



Lessons Learned

Learning Question: What behavior change approaches are effective in overcoming barriers or leveraging incentives for changing wild meat demand and consumption behavior?

BEHAVIOR CHANGE CAMPAIGNS ARE EFFECTIVE AT TARGETING YOUTH INFLUENCERS OVER OTHER CONSUMER GROUPS

Placing the youth in the driver's seat is paying off with high engagement and involvement in Green Groups. The SBCC strategy was developed to mobilize environmentally aware and motivated youth as key influencers who could impact decision-making within their immediate social and family networks. However, targeting the adults who buy and eat bushmeat may have a more direct and near-term effect than targeting potential future buyers. Protecting Cambodia's biodiversity requires addressing consumers and stakeholders such as national-level policymakers. Thus, the activities conducted under this strategy reflect one component of a larger effort to address the practices and behaviors, such as the demand for products, that threaten Cambodia's wildlife and forest ecosystems.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS AN EFFECTIVE BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION TOOL IN CAMBODIA

Out of Cambodia's total population of 16.4 million, 76 percent are active internet users and more than 50 percent are active on social media. Social media proved to be an effective behavior change communication tool in Cambodia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The USAID Cambodia Green Future team created and disseminated digital products and materials on social media, mainly through the activity's Facebook page and public group, Twitter, YouTube, and Telegram. Social media played a key role in reaching the target audience and implementing the SBCC campaign—66 percent of the target audience recalled the messages produced by USAID Cambodia Green Future on social media platforms after the second year of the campaign. Facebook posts and articles garnered more than 50,000 engagements. Additionally, the involvement of two key influencers increased engagement around five top posts. Through this,

USAID Cambodia Green Future learned that engaging key influencers on social media helps increase public engagement and reach a wider audience.

CONSUMERS ARE UNAWARE OF THE LEGAL REPERCUSSIONS OF CONSUMING BUSHMEAT

The Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Survey assesses how youth understand and prioritize biodiversity conservation, forest protection, and sustainable natural resource management in Cambodia. This survey found that although most respondents know bushmeat consumption negatively impacts the environment, their consumption habits remain unchanged due to its availability, implying that the level of awareness does not strongly affect whether they eat bushmeat. Additionally, participants perceived that poachers, sellers, and restaurant owners were engaged in illegal activities, while consumers were not. Understanding these perceptions helped USAID Cambodia Green Future determine that ineffective law enforcement is a barrier to reducing the buying and eating of bushmeat.



SBCC training

Photo credit: Cambodia Green Future

About this series: In 2022, USAID collected case studies addressing the questions posed in the Wild Meat Learning Agenda. The series looks at USAID-funded activities from around the world. For more information and resources on USAID's Wild Meat Collaborative Learning Group, please visit <https://biodiversitylinks.org/learning-evidence/wild-meat-collaborative-learning-group>. The information provided in the case study series does not necessarily represent the views or positions of USAID or the U.S. government.