

Wild meat trade targeted

Niem Chheng | Publication date 12 November 2020 | 21:41 ICT Share



ZooCov – a project aimed at devaluing the wildlife meat market – launched in April. ipc

Several research institutions, including the International Centre of Research in Agronomy for Development (CIRAD) and the Institut Pasteur du Cambodge (IPC), are cooperating with relevant ministries on ZooCov – a project aiming to provide insight into wild meat trade chains in Cambodia.

ZooCov will also document the diversity of beta-coronaviruses circulating through these chains, and develop a flexible and integrated early-detection system of transmission events, according to Dr Veronique Chevalier, the project coordinator with CIRAD and IPC.

She said the project, which started in April, will be conducted in Stung Treng and Mondulkiri provinces for 18 months. The two provinces were selected because wildlife trade and consumption has been reported there as well as the existence of bat colonies.

Project members have gathered an initial batch of human and animal samples. They have also interviewed people who have been exposed to wildlife meat as well as people who have not, Chevalier said.

The interviews carried out focused on people’s perception of disease risk since the emergence of H5N1, or “bird flu”.

The research team is currently working to improve the existing wildlife health surveillance network piloted by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

“The main benefits for people will be an assessment of potential or existing risks at the animal-human interface through wildlife meat markets and consumption in Cambodia. [Another] contribution will be defining effective surveillance and prevention measures in this country,” Chevalier said.

The project is being worked on by multiple parties including the ministries of Health; Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; Environment; the Forestry Administration and local authorities from the two

provinces.

The WCS, Flora and Fauna International, the French Institute of Research for Development and Hong Kong University are also partners, according to an IPC press release published on November 11.

The press release said over the last 20 years, three of the major epidemics – severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Covid-19 – shows that potential transmission of pathogens from animal to humans presents a serious threat to public health.

Environment ministry spokesperson Neth Pheaktra praised the research efforts and said the project would prevent wildlife crimes.

“The environment ministry is happy to cooperate on this project because this research is vital for public health, not just for Cambodia but for the whole world. The ministry called on people to stop touching and eating wildlife meat to avoid contracting diseases and to protect the wildlife resource,” he said.

Pheaktra said his ministry had presented several educational works to people to spread knowledge of the risks of consuming wildlife meat and the legal consequences connected to the wildlife meat markets.

He said when people stop eating wild meat, poaching would stop as well.

“Please don’t believe that eating wildlife makes you healthy or heals diseases. It instead causes health problems and can transmit diseases,” he said.