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**Seminar for Spiritual Leaders
To Reduce Demand for Wildlife Products**
Via Zoom and Facebook Live
July 16, 2021 (08:45 – 11:15 AM) in Thailand

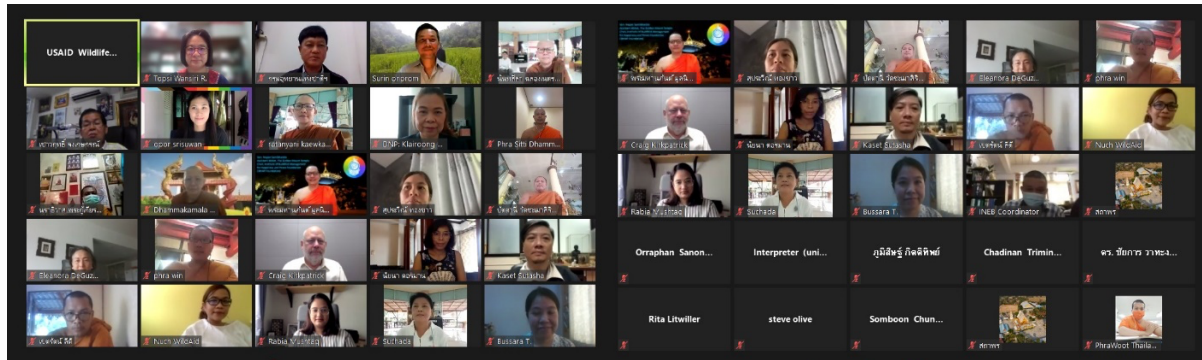


Photo of Zoom participants

USAID collaborated with the International Network of Engaged Buddhist (INEB) to increase spiritual leaders', in this case Buddhist monks, nuns, and interested laypersons, awareness and activities supporting reducing the demand for wildlife products. They initially proposed to offer three workshops conducted in person. However, due to the COVID-19 situation the first 2 workshops were conducted in person, and the final seminar took place online via Zoom and Facebook Live. The first workshop took place at Wat Chakdaeng in Bangkok on October 21, 2020, followed by the second workshop at the Psychiatric Hospital in Phitsanulok province on March 13, 2021, with the final seminar taking place on July 16, 2021. This report is of the final seminar on July 16, 2020, which was a collaboration between USAID Wild Asia, INEB, Sekhiya Dhamma Group, IBHAP, Wat Saket Ratcha Wora Maha Wihan in Bangkok, WildAid Thailand, and the Thai Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP).

Following the October 21, 2020, workshop USAID and INEB agreed that conducting two more workshops for spiritual leaders was needed to increase awareness and build momentum regarding reducing the demand for wildlife products. The workshops' objectives aimed to strengthen the capacity and commitment of Buddhist monks and nuns in key selected temples in Thailand.

Due to the Thai government's restrictions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the third workshop was presented as an online seminar for two and a half hours on the morning of July 16, 2021. Live translation was available to the participants in both English and Thai languages.

Zoom and Facebook Participants

The total number of participants was 39 with: 9 male monks (8 temples, 6 provinces), 3 female monks (1 temple, 1 province), and 27 laypeople that were either from temples or the organizers. Additionally, 245 persons watched the Facebook event live, as well as the video recording (as of July 30, 2021).

Opening Remarks

Ven. Win Siri wattano Mektripop, an INEB executive committee member from Wat Rakang in Bangkok, mentioned that nowadays conservation efforts amongst monastics could be widely promoted internationally via digital platforms to support future collaborations through networks across the region. Craig Kirkpatrick, Ph.D., Regional Wildlife Conservation Advisor from USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA), emphasized the importance of including monks and nuns when reducing the demand for wildlife products. Mr. Surapong Chaweepak, Director of International Trade Permission Sub-Division from DNP, added that there is no scientific evidence supporting the false or superstitious beliefs that human beings benefit from consuming wildlife parts. The DNP fully supported this workshop, especially since monks and nuns can play major roles in stopping forest destruction and illegal wildlife trade. Ven. Sitti Dhammawit, Deputy Abbot of Wat



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Saket Ratcha Wora Maha Wihan, gave blessings and officially opened the workshop. The online seminar was moderated by Dr. Surin On-prom from INEB.

Presentations

Representatives from each coordinating organization gave the following presentations:

Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation – DNP

Dr. Klairoong Poonpon, Director of CITES Implementation and Monitoring Sub-Division of Wild Fauna and Flora Protection

- Described the current situation of illegal ivory trade from Africa
- Gave examples of how wildlife products from animals such a pangolins, tigers, and elephants are used
- Significant seizures made in 2019 and from the exporting countries
- Information about national laws and penalties

Dr. Poonpon concluded by reminding the participants that Thailand is still a transit country for wildlife trade. The major challenges that need to be addressed are the shift from the physical market to the online commercial platform and changes in the trafficking route of illegal wildlife products to more neighboring countries that are involved. Public participation is critical to address these challenges together with the coordination of law enforcement agencies throughout the region.

WildAid

Ms. Rabia Mushtaq, Communications Specialist (Thailand)

USAID Wildlife Asia

Ms. Eleanora De Guzman, Lead, Demand Reduction, USAID Wildlife Asia

- Introduced USAID Wildlife Asia through its purpose to improve regional actions to end transnational wildlife crime in Southeast Asia and China with a particular focus on 4 species: tigers, elephants, pangolins, and rhinoceros.
- Objectives include:
 - ✓ Reduce consumer demand for wildlife products in Thailand, Vietnam and China
 - ✓ Strengthen regional law enforcement capacity and coordination
 - ✓ Increase national and regional commitment to counter wildlife trafficking (CWT)
 - ✓ Support RDMA's regional coordination efforts to strengthen USG's CWT

Ms. Deguzman suggested how campaign messages can be adapted in dhamma talks to communities through questioning false beliefs about wildlife products, such as providing spiritual protection or enhancing value or the quality of life through killing another living being. Ultimately the message is "One Action" to stop buying, stop using products from tigers and elephant ivory.

Each presenter shared information about their organization's specific campaigns to end using wildlife products from tigers, elephants and sharks.

Discussion

Ven. Nunthasila from Thippaya Dhamma Sathan in Songkhla talked about the difficulties faced when attempting to change societal and individual attitudes and beliefs. Dr. Klairoong Poonpon (DNP) added that communicating messages to the public is challenging as their interest on using wildlife product is not explicit. Ms. Suchada Thongpoon from the Dwarf Elephant Lover Alliance in Songkhla suggested using the past documented experiences when species have become extinct to promote future conservation efforts. She also emphasized the significance of developing local curriculum and media regarding wildlife conservation that is designed to increase the awareness of youth.

Discussion on the Role of Buddhist Monks

Ven. Sompong Ratanawangso, Ph.D. highlighted the gap between dhamma teaching and the people's practice in daily life. He specifically noted that Thais have deep-rooted beliefs regarding using ivory and tiger fangs as auspicious or holy objects, which directly contradicts the Buddha's teachings. Some



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Buddhists use the rationale that animals are categorized lower than or beneath human beings, implying that humans can use animals as they chose. Venerable suggested supporting educating the public about how to protect animal life and end killing of animals by people. In his view, any objects that don't involve killing are considered to be auspicious.

Ven. Napan Santibhaddo, Institute of Buddhist Management for Happiness and Peace Foundation (IBHAP), explained that the Buddha taught not to encroach other lives, while he allowed using parts of dead animals. Monks need to clearly state that laypeople cannot take any animal's life for offering. The younger generation can play a key role in communication and raising awareness that supports protecting wildlife and preventing unnecessary killing. Mass media, especially television, is also helpful to reach wider audiences.

Ven. Dhammakamala from Thippaya Dhamma Sathan in Songkhla has worked with young people and supports developing local curriculum and media to educate them. Venerable believes that this group is slowly changing their understanding regarding the use of amulets and auspicious objects.

Ven. Woot from Nakhon Sawan Royal Temple has experience distributing various kinds of amulets other than those from wildlife products. He has observed that youth can produce digital media and distribute them to their groups once the issue is better understood. Senior monks can be approached as they influence temple policies and practices in their local communities.

Participants' Commitment Moving Forward

Ven. Win Siriawattano asked the participants to agree to support the demand reduction activities through their temples and communities. The participants verbally expressed their agreement to support activities and believe that the role of Buddhist spiritual leaders as critical to moving forward with reducing the demand for wildlife products.

Closing Comments

Closing comments were made by Ven. Win Siriawattano, Ms. Eleanora De Guzman, and Ven. Napan Santibhaddo. They responded to the questions: What is your take away message today? As a spiritual leader, what do you think of doing to stop using wildlife products? All emphasized the need for increasing awareness and taking collective action that reaches different audiences through online and offline media. Ven. Napan said that Wat Saket is committed to continue activities raising awareness about not killing wildlife and will continue integrating the Buddha's teaching into the strategy.

Dr. Poonpon, Director, CITES with DNP, said that working with spiritual leaders such as Buddhist monks and nuns was a new approach to the work and believes there is a definite advantage to collaborating with these spiritual leaders. Her comments further highlighted the need for a strategy coordinating a response through spiritual leaders and their networks, in addition to other partner organizations such as INEB. One suggestion for reaching wider groups and communities in the future is through conducting interfaith dialogue sessions which will include the messages to stop killing, buying and using wildlife products.

"Peace in One's Heart Starts with One's Hands" – quote from a participant