

Reducing demand for rhino horn, with 'Mr T'

International trade in rhino products is illegal under CITES – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species – and enforcing that law will always be an important part of tackling the illegal wildlife trade. But during the past decade or more, it has become increasingly recognised that reducing demand for wildlife products in 'consumer countries' is just as important.

Jon Taylor | Managing Director



In 2014, Save the Rhino worked with TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, and others in Viet Nam, to launch the Chi campaign, one of the first examples of a successful demand-reduction campaign. These campaigns require conservationists to learn the skills of advertisers and marketing specialists, using market research to identify an 'archetypal' customer, and then developing a campaign that will appeal to that customer. In the case of the Chi campaign, the archetype was 'Mr L', an imagined

successful businessman who saw rhino horn as a status symbol. The campaign targeted business conferences, golf clubs, and other places popular with businessmen in Viet Nam, and focused on Chi – inner strength – rather than animal parts, being the route to real success.

More recently, thanks to very generous support from a major donor, we were once again able to work with TRAFFIC, along with the Vietnamese Government's Central Committee for Propaganda and Education, and Intelligentmedia, a Vietnamese social enterprise focusing on behaviour change communications,

on a similar campaign that targeted a very important group of people, government officials.

The project started by conducting research to better understand officials' attitudes to the use of rhino horn products. A combination of a survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions helped to form a picture of an archetypal official: 'Mr T', a middle-aged manager within the Vietnamese Government who claims not to use rhino horn himself but thinks it is used by rich and/or high-ranking people, who is sceptical about the medicinal properties of rhino horn, but who has little experience of CITES or local wildlife protection activities.

Three sets of messaging were designed that might appeal to the hypothetical 'Mr T', focusing on the concepts of leadership, national pride and gifting. These were tested on focus groups of officials, and national pride was selected as the most impactful messaging. A behaviour-change campaign was then developed around this messaging.

The campaign was displayed at key sites and events, including on the Parliamentary website, in the Library of the National Assembly and in National Assembly meetings. The messaging was available to 494 Parliamentarians, 600 government leaders and officials and more than three million online viewers. A one-page featured editorial on behaviour change and demand reduction distributed via the National Assembly's website potentially reached 10,000 people.

Finally, in November 2020, despite delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and thanks to significant funding from USAID, a high-level dialogue aimed at driving down consumption of illegal wildlife products in Viet Nam was organised in coordination with the National Assembly of Viet Nam through the National Assembly's Elected Representatives Training Centre. The 50 participants came up with a list of recommendations that have been shared with a wide range of Party and state-led organisations. After the event, eight government leaders became 'Agents of Change' or Key Opinion Leaders, championing the wider dissemination of behaviour change and demand reduction.

This is important work that will help to change attitudes to the use of wildlife products in Viet Nam and hopefully reduce the demand for rhino horn. We are incredibly grateful to the generous donor who enabled this project to happen.

Now, as the Covid-19 pandemic re-frames the consumption of wildlife as a public health issue as well as a conservation issue, we look hopefully to see how this will further shift public attitudes and reduce even more the demand for illegal wildlife products.