

Without evaluation, there is no way to distinguish the worthwhile from the worthless

The *International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade* envisions a world in which evaluative thinking and evaluation practice empowers effective and equitable decisions and actions that make the world safer for wildlife, domestic animals, and people.

What is Evaluation?

Do you know the best way to design and deliver a risk reduction program in the wildlife trade; the optimal use of time and resources; whether your program is meeting the needs of participants; ways of improving the program; and how to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program to funders and other stakeholder groups? Can you explain the program's positive, negative, significant, insignificant, or unexpected results? Program evaluations help you answer these questions.

Evaluation is a systematic yet flexible approach to learning about and improving the value of programs, policies, and interventions. It is critical to enhancing the quality and delivery of interventions intended to increase the safety of the wildlife trade and to increase accountability to stakeholders, funders, and the public. Program evaluations inform decisions and identify options for program improvement.

Evaluations are systematic investigations into the effectiveness, acceptability, usefulness, fairness, and sustainability of interventions in ways that are adapted to their political and community environments. Program evaluations can determine the impact and quality of the risk management programs, and whether they are having the desired health-related outcomes for individuals, communities, and wildlife.

Evaluations can be conducted on any group of related, complementary activities intended to improve safety in the wildlife trade. They are an integral part of any risk management program. Evaluation is not something added at the end of a program, but rather is a part of it from the beginning. Planning, implementation, and evaluation are all parts of a whole, and they work best when they work together.

Good evaluation is more than just an activity to complete periodically. It is a way of embedding curiosity and learning to improve the impact of your activities. A good evaluation

generates credible, defensible, and usable findings to inform future program or policy decisions. Evaluations, therefore, rely on multiple and varied sources of information to improve program implementation and attribute observed outcomes to the program.

In wildlife trade, with ever-changing social and environmental conditions and competition for resources, decision-makers need to understand why the intended impacts of their interventions did or did not occur. Funders and managers are often interested in identifying opportunities for advancing program improvement that can be identified through program evaluation activities. An evaluation process can help understand the contribution of a program to the observed outcomes. Proper evaluations help security of funding for risk reduction projects and programs.

Why is this an important issue for the health risk reduction programs in the wildlife trade?

Existing studies and experiences make it clear that something must be done to reduce and eliminate health risks in the wildlife trade but are less clear on how to get it done. It is a quite different task to accumulate evidence on the presence (or absence) of pathogens, their locations in the supply chain and their spillover to new hosts, or on risky human behaviours, than it is to identify effective ways to prevent and mitigate health risks under real-world conditions.

Program evaluation and implementation sciences are generally under-funded and under-utilized tools in many animal health situations. A 2021 report to the World Organization for Animal Health¹ noted the lack of standards for evaluating whether a wildlife trade intervention resulted in reduced health risks. There are few studies on the social, epidemiological, and ecological effectiveness of interventions to enhance safety throughout the wildlife trade supply chain, including on trade suspensions or bans. The significant contribution of the illegal activities to the wildlife trade add a further complication to evaluating interventions. The lack of systematic program evaluations or implementation studies leaves decision makers with insufficient evidence to select interventions most likely to be acceptable, effective, and sustainable within and across the disparate context of the wildlife trade.

Benefits of Evaluation

Evaluations of programs, policies, and services strengthen interventions help to adapt and improve the design and delivery of an intervention, improve resource allocation, and demonstrate accountability by:

1. Measuring change created by an intervention, including unintended consequences.
2. Understanding how the context surrounding an intervention influenced the program's outcomes for different stakeholders.
3. Contribute to the evidence-base about what works and how resources should be allocated to maximise benefits.

¹ <https://www.woah.org/app/uploads/2022/08/a-oie-review-wildlife-trade-march2021.pdf>

4. Create a culture of critical thinking to better understand safety threats and test solutions.

Are You Ready to Undertake an Evaluation?

Evaluations take time, expertise, and resources. Your organization needs the capacity and willingness to plan and conduct an evaluation. That capacity can be within your organization or provided by partners or consultants. The Alliance can play a role in connecting different organizations and individuals to facilitate reliable program evaluations.

As important as evaluation is, there are instances in which an evaluation should not be done. For example, a program is not ready to be evaluated if it has been implemented for insufficient time. The usefulness of an evaluation can be affected if there is not genuine commitment from stakeholders to use the findings to inform decision making. Evaluations can be challenging to conduct when a program has no clear goals, when stakeholders cannot agree on the program objectives and when there are not enough resources to conduct a sound evaluation. The necessary resources for a reliable evaluation may not be provided if the program or project does not have an evaluation mandate as part of its plans or authority.

Are There Evaluation Standards for Wildlife Trade Risk Reduction Interventions?

A major challenge to creating evaluation standards that can work across all aspects of the wildlife trade is that the trade is complex, dynamic, highly variable and often inaccessible. Stakeholders drive the purpose and use of an evaluation; therefore, the design and implementation of an evaluation can vary significantly from one setting to another. Many of the safety issues in the wildlife trade are very context specific, involve multiple stakeholders with conflicting values, are plagued with insufficient or uncertain information and defy permanent solutions.

There is, however, a growing cadre of people who are adopting and applying health and conservation program evaluation tools to wildlife health issues. Many of these initiatives emphasize seven categories for consideration in an evaluation program. These categories ask if the program is:

1. serving the information needs of intended users and adapted to local conditions,
2. realistic, acting with care and thought for the future, inclusive, unbiased, and frugal,
3. legal, ethical, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in, as well as those affected by the program,
4. producing technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated,
5. experiencing problems in implementation or sustainability,
6. having impacts that are efficient and effective in terms of intended and unintended outcome, and,
7. offsetting costs of interventions by the health, social and/or ecological costs of non-intervention.

None of these seven categories are sufficient on their own to answer all the relevant questions in program evaluations. And none are as simple as it might initially seem. For

example, simply measuring participants' implementation of a risk reduction measure (such as better butchering hygiene) before and after the program does not necessarily measure the programs impact on health outcomes, because nothing happens in a vacuum. Many factors affect health risks throughout a wildlife trade supply chain from seasonal variations to social pressures, to environmental changes. However, with due consideration of how local social and ecological context affect a wildlife trade risk reduction programs' performance, tools available from other sectors can serve as adaptable foundations for evaluations.

The complexity of risk management in the wildlife trade and lack of significant history of program evaluation necessitates investment in research and development of appropriate metrics, methods, and thresholds for program evaluation. While research is ongoing, existing evaluations should be shared to allow for peer-to-peer learning and adaptive changes in the methods and standards tailored to the wildlife trade.

Example Evaluation Tools and Resources

In the absence of evaluation tools tailored to health risk reduction programs in the wildlife trade, evaluators can look to frameworks, models and practices from other sectors, such as the public health, One Health and conservation. Insights from these sectors can inform the design of evaluations of health risk management projects and programs in the wildlife trade.

The *International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade* provides the following only as examples of existing evaluation tools but does not endorse nor recommend them as evaluation standards. Each must be adapted to local needs, context, and knowledge before being used.

One Health Program Evaluation

- The Network for Evaluation of One Health offers several resources to inform health program evaluation at the human-animal-environment interface.
<https://conservationstandards.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/10/CMP-Open-Standards-for-the-Practice-of-Conservation-v4.0.pdf>

Health Evaluation Workbook

- Public Health Ontario provides a workbook for evaluating health promotion programs that can serve as useful guidance for designing evaluations in the wildlife trade.
https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/E/2016/evaluating-hp-programs-workbook.pdf?rev=7e94b1238c8d431e84c4cb27f2ca2ac4&sc_lang=en

Overview of Public Health Program Evaluation Tools

- This website provide by the United States Centers for Disease Control introduces several evaluation tools and tips for evaluation processes specifically for public health interventions.
<https://www.cdc.gov/evaluation/tools/developmenttools/index.html>

PRECEDE-PROCEED Model

- This webpage is provided by the Rural Health Information Hub. It describes the PRECEDE-PROCEED model, which is a comprehensive structure for assessing health needs, for designing, implementing, and evaluating health promotion and other public health programs to meet those needs.
<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/health-promotion/2/program-models/precede-proceed#:~:text=The%20PRECEDE%2DPROCEED%20model%20is,and%20focused%20public%20health%20program>

Conservation Standards of Practice

- The Conservation Measures Partnerships provides guidance on the design, monitoring and assessment of conservation programs that is adaptable to health risk reduction interventions.
<https://conservationstandards.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/10/CMP-Open-Standards-for-the-Practice-of-Conservation-v4.0.pdf>