The rampant killing of donkeys for the skin trade leads to the impoverishment of local communities, loss of opportunities for women, and impairs access to education for children, water provision and agricultural sustainability (SDGs 2, 3, 4 and 5).

Donkeys play a vital role in the survival of many communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. However, due to the increased value placed on donkeys, many people now feel pushed to sell their donkeys for an elevated price while making it impossible to afford replacements, where others get their donkeys stolen.

Legal and illegal donkey skin trading critically compromises animal welfare due to inappropriate/unsupervised sourcing, handling, transportation, and slaughter. Many animals are forced to march for days without adequate food or water, to poorly supervised abattoirs, where animals are held and then killed under horrific conditions.

It also contributes to environmental pollution and biohazardous waste from abandoned carcasses, due to inappropriate waste disposal at legal and illegal slaughterhouses as only the skin is of real value to traders.

Rising demand risks outstripping supply and districts in West Africa are reporting localized ‘extinctions’ of donkeys.

Even legally traded and shipped donkey skins are thought to act as vehicles for infectious disease spread and for illegal wildlife trade, drugs and arms trafficking, as traders hide illicit materials in bundles of dried donkey skins.
Legal and illegal trade in donkey skins for TCM production must be halted. Governments and local authorities should support affected communities, by preventing the decimation of donkey populations through protection from legal and illegal trade.

Consumers of ejiao should be better informed about the source of raw material and impact of the product on both equine welfare and human livelihoods.

Alternatives should be promoted that do not have negative effects on animal welfare, human development, or public health. Examples include herbal alternatives to the finished product and ejiao raw materials from donkey skin/collagen grown in vitro.

Support campaigns geared toward halting the slaughter of donkeys for their skins and the subsequent trade in donkey skins.

Lobby shipping companies to cease transporting consignments of donkey skins and internet platforms not to provide channels for the trade either in skins or in ejiao product.

Create awareness of the impact of ejiao, the links to the illegal trade in wildlife parts, and alternatives, e.g., cellular agriculture derived collagen as a raw material.

Support animal welfare organizations, veterinary associations and services, and local authorities who are working to keep donkeys safe.

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1. FAO (2021) FAOSTAT database.
3. The Donkey Sanctuary Reports