



TECHNICAL BRIEF

**SWM SUSTAINABLE
WILDLIFE
MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMME**

What do we mean by community-based sustainable wildlife management?

Community-based sustainable wildlife management is a collective social process by which rights holders agree to hunt or fish in a defined geographic area in ways that maintain animal populations at stable levels over many decades.

For the purposes of this Technical Brief, “communities” refers to resident rights holders. The structure of rights holder groups will vary from place to place, and these might be individual families, clans, villages, wards or other structures.

Background

Remote rural communities (including Indigenous Peoples) use wildlife for a proportion of their food and income, and as part of their culture. However, human population growth, increasing interconnectedness with urban areas and regional markets, and reduction of natural habitats have threatened the sustainability of wild meat offtake. Concurrently, a weakening of rural governance systems has undermined the ability of local communities to sustainably manage their natural resources, including wildlife.

In the absence of people, wildlife populations fluctuate naturally with changes in food supply, predation pressure and disease prevalence. Hunting offtakes reduce wildlife populations below their carrying capacity, but wildlife can persist while being hunted, as long as populations are not reduced below the level at which a random event (such as a disease outbreak or a climatic event) can wipe it out completely.

Hunting is only one driver of population declines. If populations are also impacted by other human activities (such as agriculture, resource extraction or urbanization), previously sustainable hunting may become unsustainable.

Six key points for sustainable wildlife management systems

In order to achieve robust community-based sustainable wildlife management, six key components are needed. These focus on understanding the environments and the resources they contain, community rights, governance, management, and reducing rural dependency on unsustainable natural resource use. These components represent the minimum prerequisites for SWM action. If one of these is missing, sustainable use is unlikely to be achieved. These components are as follows:

1 UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENT AND ITS USE: **“Communities need to know the abundance of wildlife, including fish, in their environment, if these animal populations are stable or declining, and how they are currently used by the community”**

Knowing how many animals there are, how fast they can reproduce, and what factors control their rate of reproduction (abundance and density) is the foundation for determining the level of sustainable wildlife use, and is a key component of adaptive management. However, determining numbers and distribution of exploited wildlife species can be complicated. Without an accurate understanding of how many animals are in the habitat, sustainable management regulations usually fail. Community-based methods do exist and are continually being refined to gain insight into actual offtake levels (for example, based on hunter returns) and relative abundance

of wildlife (based on wildlife encounter rates), but both are necessarily very crude and fraught with unavoidable bias. Solid sustainable wildlife management systems are needed when ecological balances are delicate and there is a real risk of over-exploitation.

Communities use wildlife in different ways and for different purposes. The use of wildlife and its importance for local livelihoods and wellbeing need to be fully understood to ensure that wildlife is managed in a way that fulfills community needs in a sustainable manner.

2 DEVOLUTION OF EXCLUSIONARY RIGHTS: **“Stewardship is predicated on the recognition and respect of communities’ rights to their resources”**

Resident rights-holding communities must have legal authority and resource rights/tenure to use resources in their customary lands, as legitimate owners recognized by stakeholders (including the state), if community-based management is to work. Free-roaming wildlife (including fish) will then go from being Common Goods (owned

by no one but accessible by all) to being Private Goods (owned by someone and thus excludable). Besides having the rights to manage their resources exclusively, communities must also have the authority to exclude non-rights holders from hunting and fishing within their territories.

3 LOCAL-LEVEL MANAGEMENT BY A COMPETENT AUTHORITY: **“Empowered communities are the most appropriate level of organization for managing wildlife”**

A well-known principle of social organization, known as subsidiarity, holds that most social and political decisions should be handled at a level of organization consistent with their resolution. As wildlife populations are typically confined to a specific place and are hunted or fished within that area, communities resident within that area should have the authority to manage the wildlife found within it. The lowest authority for managing wildlife must

have the competence and capacity to do so effectively. Often, co-management by communities and government or civil society ensures that governance decisions are made by the lowest and most competent authorities. This is particularly true for migratory and nomadic animal species, which tend to take up large areas of land covering multiple communities.

4 SOCIAL COHESION TO MANAGE AS A COMMUNITY: **“Working together is critical”**

For sustainable community wildlife management to succeed, individuals, families and communities must share a common purpose to manage wildlife and to take collective action together. Communities of practice (those communities that have shared practices) may have strong social cohesion, trust and shared values. Communities of interest (communities that are drawn to work together through mutual interest, for example a fishing

or hunting cooperative) may be based on trust without necessarily sharing values or having social cohesion. Such trust needs to exist within and between communities to manage wildlife. In places disrupted by war, famine and droughts, trust may have been broken and it may be difficult or impossible to enact community-based wildlife management.

5 EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS: “Communities need recognized governance groups”

Rights-holding communities with the legitimate and appropriate authority to manage their wildlife resources sustainably must also have effective governance systems to exercise that authority. Governance groups must be legitimate (i.e. recognized by both communities and other stakeholders) in order to be effective in establishing rules that define who can use resources and the rules that must be followed. These groups need the technical know-how to decide how to sustainably manage their wildlife (i.e. governance capacity) and the staff and oper-

ational resources (i.e. management capacity) to ensure that both community members and outsiders comply with their rules, regulating access to, and level of use of, their wildlife resources. Where necessary, communities can work hand in hand with technical practitioners. By continually adjusting wildlife offtake levels with the animal populations that remain in their resource areas, local communities can ensure that animal numbers stabilize or increase as appropriate.

6 SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR GROWTH AND INCREASING ASPIRATIONS: “Producing alternative sources of food and income”

As human populations grow in size, and individuals’ and families’ aspirations change, the ability of wildlife to meet dietary and economic needs will decline. Unless households produce alternative sources of food and income, there is a real risk that, to meet basic needs and evolving aspirations, communities may increasingly hunt and fish at levels that are no longer sustainable. This will drive

down wildlife populations and diminish their value ever more quickly. Taking action now to support communities to prepare for the future is essential if wildlife populations are to persist at ecologically functional densities, and to continue to play a role in the wellbeing and cultural identity of local communities where desired.

Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) Programme

Around the world, overhunting for wild meat is threatening hundreds of wildlife species with extinction. As wildlife populations decline, many rural communities and Indigenous Peoples are being left without food and an income. This situation is becoming more critical as the demand for wild meat grows in towns and cities.

The SWM Programme is developing innovative solutions based on field projects in 15 countries. It is a seven-year (2018–2024) Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) initiative, which is being funded by the European Union with co-funding from the French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM) and the French Development Agency (AFD). It is being implemented by a dynamic consortium of four partners with expertise in wildlife conservation and food security:

- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)
- French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD)
- Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).



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