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ILLEGAL HUNTING AND TRADE: IMPLICATIONS FOR LIVELIHOODS, SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT AND WILDLIFE

I. An overview of the current situation regarding illegal hunting and trade

1. The illegal hunting and bushmeat trade has been recognized as a serious concern for wildlife conservation in the forests of Central and Western Africa since a long time (Barnes 2002, Fa et al. 2003, Fa and Brown 2009, Abernethy et al. 2013, McNamara et al. 2015). More recently attention has been focused also on Southern and East Africa savannahs ecosystems where the impact of illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade on ecological, economic and social aspects has become an issue (Lindsey et al. 2011, Lindsey et al. 2013, Wilfred and Maccoll 2015).

2. Growing demand for bushmeat, not only in rural areas (due to rapid human population growth) but increasingly also in urban areas (with increasing urbanization and wealth), is driving increasing commercialization of illegal hunting, which is pushing for discarding of traditional taboos on the use of bushmeat or killing of particular species and disregarding of traditional hunting seasons and hunting methods in favour of more efficient techniques. This, combined with increasing human encroachment into wildlife areas due to the demographic growth, forestry logging operations and mining providing easier access to wilderness and stimulating influx of large number of people, also encourages illegal hunting. Moreover, logging and mining companies often regard bushmeat as a free food supply for their labourers and logging/mining trucks are used for transporting bushmeat to external markets. Illegal hunting and trade is also flourishing due mostly to inadequate penal systems and lack of enforcement. Political instability, corruption and poor governance further aggravate the situation (Kabiri and Child 2014).

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3. However, bushmeat consumption is often firmly rooted in local cultures, is sometimes of major importance for food security in rural areas, and bushmeat trade often represents an important source of income for rural people, thus contributing to local livelihoods. Livestock are rare in tropical forest ecosystems due technical and economic output factors. In savannah ecosystems, livestock are considered more as capital and contribute little to the daily diets of rural communities. In urban areas, bushmeat is consumed to diversify diets; it can be sought out for reasons involving culture, price, taste or the perception of bushmeat as healthy and natural (Fa et al. 2003, Shackleton and Shackleton 2004, van Vliet et al. 2011, Herrero et al. 2014, Cawthorn and Hoffman 2015).

II. Some ecological, economic and social implications

4. Data on the scale and economic value of illegal hunting and trade are scarce (due to the cover nature of trade) therefore it is not easy to assess all ecological, economic and social implications (Taylor et al. 2015).

5. It is clear that illegally sourced bushmeat contributes significantly to economies and to food security in many countries (Nasi et al. 2011). However, due to the unsustainable nature of illegal hunting, those social and economic benefits are unlikely to be sustainable. Furthermore, most forms of illegal hunting for bushmeat represent an extremely wasteful and inefficient form of wildlife use which captures only a small fraction of the value of the resource it destroys.

6. If not properly addressed in near future, unsustainable hunting will not only create empty forests and savannahs and cause the loss of the vital ecological roles wildlife play in the functioning and productivity of these ecosystems, it will at the same time jeopardizes the health and wellbeing of indigenous groups and poor rural families through the loss of an important source of dietary protein and income from wildlife related activities (Cawthorn and Hoffman 2015).

7. Already today, ecological implications of illegal hunting and trade are indeed severe and include overall wildlife population declines, deduction of biodiversity, local disappearance of many species associated with loss of ecosystem functionality and in some cases complete collapse and disappearance of wildlife populations (Effiom et al. 2013).

8. In addition to severe ecological impact, illegal hunting can have serious negative economic and social impacts. Economic implications include, for example, major negative impact on wildlife industries which can preclude the option to develop sustainable wildlife-based land uses. Social implications include negative impact on food security in the long term through the loss of a potentially sustainable supply of meat protein through legal hunting, the loss of tourism-based employment and the loss of wildlife heritage.

III. Challenges in dealing with the situation

9. Illegal hunting and trade is a complex issue and requires strong political commitment, adequate resources and new multi-sectoral and unified approach to deal with it effectively.

10. There are many challenges that need to be addressed to control and reduce all forms of illegal and unsustainable use and trade of bushmeat while maximizing the scope for legal and sustainable use and trade of wild meat to improve food security, economic development and natural ecosystem functioning for the benefit of the people in Africa.

11. Some of these challenges are listed below:

- Document the real and complete values of wildlife to local and national economies and food security – both actual and potential – which should be then recognized and reflected in political commitment, decision making, policy and increased budget allocations;

- The food and livelihood needs of communities being major determinants of bushmeat use, these needs have to be effectively met through innovative mechanisms and public and private sector partnerships;
- Ensure that people and communities who bear the costs of living with wildlife gain benefits from wildlife wherever possible, including through innovative mechanisms and public and private sector partnerships;
- Ensure that the sense of community ownership of wildlife is encouraged, by devolving rights and benefits right down to community and household level;
- Ensure cross-sectoral coordination and engagement in illegal use and trade of bushmeat and promotion of legal use of wild meat;
- Harmonize policies and regulations on legal and illegal use and trade of wild meat/bushmeat at sub-regional and regional levels to enhance transboundary cooperation and enforcement;
- Expend legal options and create favourable policy and taxation environment for production of legal wild meat to meet demand for wild meat and increase benefits from wildlife;
- Ensure effective land use planning for the protection of wildlife and promotion of compatible land uses and infrastructure to reduce illegal use and trade of bushmeat;
- Ensure proper awareness raising and sensitization on the impacts of illegal use of bushmeat, and the benefits of legal use;
- Ensure that the legal deterrents to illegal bushmeat use and trade are meaningful in the context they occur;
- Understand varying underlying causes of illegal use and trade of bushmeat in different national and local contexts, including the relevant socio-economic drivers and value chains;
- Create mechanisms to monitor the patterns and drivers of illegal use and trade of bushmeat to provide early warning of problems, fill critical information gaps, and collate and share information and research, to inform and guide management action;
- Develop effective adaptive management approaches to address the use and trade of bushmeat/wild meat to ensure sustainability, based on most recent research and including effective monitoring and evaluation
- There might be other challenges depending on national and local context and the efforts to address them would depend on the willingness and the capacity of national and local institutions.

IV. Recommendations for the attention of the Commission

12. The Commission might consider the following recommendations:

- Urge its member states to analyse the scale and impact of illegal hunting and trade in national context and to collaborate with FAO and its partners in developing and testing innovative mechanisms to control and reduce illegal hunting and trade and promote legal wild meat production for increased food security and improved livelihoods;
- Encourage its members to recognize the severity of the issue and to hold Governments primarily responsible for ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife resources.

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