

African Forestry and Wildlife Commission

**XIVth Session of the Working Party on the
Management of Wildlife and Protected Areas**

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REPORT

In-Session Seminar on the Theme

Sustainable Use of Wildlife Resources – The Bushmeat Crisis

Introduction

The theme of the seminar was "*Sustainable use of Wildlife - the Bushmeat Crisis.*"

The meeting opened with a plenary session in which the theme of the meeting was introduced by two presentations. The first presentation was a detailed, highly informative and stimulating review of the bushmeat issue in Ghana, made by the National Director of Conservation International Ghana.

The second presentation was a general overview of the bushmeat issue in Africa by FAO.

Following initial discussions based on these presentations, the meeting broke up into three working groups, each addressing a particular aspect of the theme of the seminar. The results of the working group deliberations, which are concisely summarized below, were presented and discussed at a concluding plenary session.

Working Group 1

Theme: *Economic and socio-cultural dimensions of bushmeat*

Participants recognized that wildlife provides a range of economic and socio-cultural benefits and values, which include:

- Contributions to nutrition and food security;
- Income generation through the sale of meat;
- Income generation through sale of trophies and hides;
- Uses in traditional medical practice;
- Socio-cultural significance, as in ritual hunts associated with rites of passage;
- Spiritual significance, such as in the case of taboos.

It was recognized that all these benefits and values are threatened by the rapidly expanding commercial trade in bushmeat that has emerged over recent decades, and it was noted that there are well documented economic and socio-cultural reasons for the increased offtake of bushmeat, which are as follows:

- Policy and market failures which have lead to under-valuation of the resource and disincentives for its management;
- Entry into the cash economy by many rural people;
- Increasing rates of urbanisation;
- Opening up of isolated forest areas through logging activity and infrastructure development;
- Changes in hunting technology;
- Militarisation of forest areas;
- Changes in the macro-economic environment, especially the devaluation of the CFA franc;
- Population growth.

It was noted that the negative consequences of the bushmeat trade fall most heavily on the rural poor. As a result, their future ability to benefit from the resource is at risk, which has important livelihood and social safety net implications.

The bushmeat trade is also a severe threat to the conservation of biodiversity.

Finding solutions to the problem

Because the bushmeat trade is largely illegal, is extremely widespread and operates at local, national, regional and international scales, solutions to the bushmeat crisis are proving difficult to find.

To date the search for solutions has been mainly by conservation agencies, which have not paid sufficient attention to human interests.

When the proposed solutions have been ineffective, this has often been for socio-economic reasons. Insufficient consideration is given to the social character of the production and trade in bushmeat, its role in livelihoods and food security, and proposed management options are not realistic.

In order to find solutions to the bushmeat issue, new approaches to reconciling human needs with those of conservation are required.

Working Group 2

Theme: *Negative practices relating to the exploitation and use of wildlife resources*

The participants used three categories to approach the theme:

1. Means Used

1.1 Modern means

- hunting rifles
- military weapons
- chemicals
- spot lights
- modern snares
- modern means of transport

1.2 Traditional means

- snares [all forms]
- hunting with packs of dogs
- fire
- poisoned baits
- poisoned arrows etc...

2. Methods or practices

2.1 Modern methods

- hunting with spotlights
- chasing with boats, wheeled vehicles or aircraft
- use of inappropriate arms and ammunition

2.2 Traditional methods

- hunting on foot
- beating
- collective hunting
- hunting with bush fires
- using imitation for hunting

3. Use of Wildlife Resources

This category includes four types of use:

3.1 Commercial use

The commercial use of wildlife resources is mostly illegal. But this informal activity is on a very large scale and threatens the equilibrium of wildlife resources.

In consideration of this, the working group recommends that every country should organize the production chain of bushmeat by elaborating or applying regulatory laws for this sector.

3.2 Use for tourism

The Working Group recognized that non-consumptive tourism may not have a serious impact on wildlife resources, but hunting tourism poses a serious threat through excessive harvesting of wildlife resources due to:

- Easy access to animals
- The development of artisanal activities based on commerce of wildlife products

Accordingly the working group recommends to states:

- The design of a tourist road network which respects the habitat and tranquility of the wildlife
- The prohibition of the killing of wildlife for the sole purpose of harvesting trophies
- Rigorous respect of limits on killing

3.3 Cultural use

The working group recognized the importance of wildlife use for cultural reasons, but such use becomes a negative practice when it assumes a commercial dimension, in other words the development of networks of hunters, sellers and buyers etc.

Given this tendency in the cultural use of wildlife resources, the working group recommends research and studies on wildlife resources to find some alternative standards.

3.4 Subsistence use

The working group recognizes the right of people to harvest wildlife resources for their survival, but galloping demography, poverty and economic crisis oblige people to exert pressure on wildlife resources, which constitutes a serious menace to it.

In view of this, the working group recommends States to develop game management to compensate for the losses caused by the harvesting of wildlife in nature.

Taking account of all these recommendations in policy formulation and development practices, will limit negative practices linked to the use of wildlife resources in Africa.

Working Group 3

Theme: *Policy, legal, institutional and other options for addressing the bushmeat issue.*

The working group identified many options for addressing the bushmeat issue, including policy, legal, institutional, information gathering and research option, as well as options for practical action.

1. Policy principles

- devolve power to local government and communities
- involve all stakeholders in decision making processes
- promote intersectoral approaches, for example through Memoranda of Understanding
- require post extraction restoration, for example through reclamation bonds
- establish operational codes of practice
- facilitate private sector investment
- support certification
- require Environmental Impact Assessments for all development activities
- establish veterinary hygiene standards for the bushmeat trade

2. Legal issues

- review and revise existing laws and regulations to remove outdated provisions and implement all necessary new principles of policy
- draft new laws to fill gaps in capacity to implement important policy principles that cannot appropriately be enabled by revising existing laws

3. Institutional issues

- actual devolution of power
- local government effectively enabled
- communities effectively enabled
- communities organized, for example through village natural resource committees
- necessary operational budgetary support provided

4. Information gathering and research

- document all uses of bushmeat, for example for nutrition, income, medicinal, cultural
- document who uses bushmeat for which purposes
- document hunting methods
- document supply chains
- document supply routes
- document marketing systems
- investigate how demand is generated
- investigate history of traditional resource management
- investigate the influence of colonial government
- investigate the role of animals in ecosystem function
- research and monitoring on wildlife resource and its use
- investigate the positive and negative influences of the local economy

5. Practical measures

- forge partnerships at all levels
- enforce veterinary standards throughout the supply chain
- establish an African Bushmeat Task Force
- prioritize bushmeat at regional and international level
- monitor quality of marketed bushmeat
- awareness raising at all levels - politicians & government, civil society, private sector
- generate alternative sources of income - e.g. ecotourism, artisanal logging
- training and capacity building for all stakeholders and leaders
- develop alternative sources of protein - e.g. fish farming
- identify supportive religious/cultural beliefs and practices
- recognize cultural sensitivities - e.g. by allowing ceremonial hunts
- recognize and work with existing government structures
- promote recognition of the economic contribution of wildlife
- develop sustainable financial mechanism for regulating the bushmeat trade
- promote compliance with international conventions
- strongly build on traditional values with relating resource management applications

The working group recognized that in each country unique circumstances exist which need to be well known and understood before consideration is given to which measures should be implemented to address the bushmeat issue.

Discussion and conclusion

In the course of their deliberations the working groups identified the various benefits and values provided by wildlife, recognized the severity of the threat to wildlife that is posed by the bushmeat trade, and proposed a wide range of actions that could be taken in response to this threat.

What needs to be done to address the bushmeat problem can be generalized as an issue that has long been of concern to FAO, namely the need to reconcile the management of wildlife and protected areas with the interests of people. This is a difficult and complex issue because of the potential for conflict between conservation and livelihood objectives under the different approaches to the management of the bushmeat issue that are being proposed.

A people-centred approach to the bushmeat issue has been adopted by the Overseas Development Institute [ODI] of the United Kingdom. This approach is summarized below because it coherently integrates the bushmeat issue into a wider natural resources context and proposes a rigorous approach to managing it.

The difficulty and complexity of this issue are evident from the fact that although the requirement to reconcile the needs and demands of conservation and livelihood perspectives was recognized long ago by Professor E.A.O. Asibey of Ghana, such reconciliation has proved difficult, even where conservation of particular species appears to be consistent with livelihood concerns.

One prerequisite for achieving this reconciliation is that, despite the by now substantial evidence that the bushmeat trade in its current form is unsustainable and that local and global extinctions may be imminent, conservationists have to recognize that the need to accommodate the interests of people requires that protection of species that cannot withstand hunting must be balanced with the rational off-take of those that can. Simply banning bushmeat hunting to protect the most vulnerable species, even if it were possible to

implement, would extinguish a key livelihood strategy and would probably reduce nutritional status for many rural poor.

Allowing hunting of species that can withstand it is crucial because hunters and consumers can relatively easily substitute different bushmeat species as and when they become scarce or locally extinct and thus take pressure off vulnerable species, but from a conservation perspective, it is not possible to find substitutes for extinct species. In other words, hunters can be flexible but conservationists cannot.

To bring about a reconciliation of conservation with the needs of people, information is needed on issues that are either inadequately understood or hardly documented at all. Until recently, research on the bushmeat industry has mostly been driven by conservation priorities, and livelihoods concerns have tended to be secondary and incidental. But the importance of bushmeat in range state economies requires that policy development takes the human dimension fully into account. For this to be done effectively requires more information on such issues as:

- The nature and extent of the poverty linkages in bushmeat production and consumption, including the distribution of value in the bushmeat commodity chain;
- The policy constraints which influence the trade, and their implications for the welfare of the poor;
- The underlying governance issues, and the potential for these to be addressed within the wildlife sub-sector;
- The record of development and conservation projects in achieving human welfare as well as conservation objectives, and promising developments in these areas;
- The lessons which might be learnt from other disciplines as regards the reconciliation of social and conservation aims.
- The underlying traditional values and cultural heritage that characterize linkages between community and village.

Research along these lines will provide an opportunity to explore the differences in perspective which arise when the human dimension is brought to the fore, and priority is given to livelihoods, economic and socio-cultural concerns.

In terms of solutions to the bushmeat problem, a potentially promising option would be to develop a community interest in the forest resource as a whole, with bushmeat as only one component of a broader system of community-based natural resource management. Where livelihoods perspectives have been given priority over narrow preservation concerns, then the way may be opened for a more constructive engagement with local populations. The possibilities of linkage to other income-generating opportunities (such as community-based timber production) illustrates the realistic possibility of identifying additional sources of income for local people.

But putting in place effective management systems such as community-based initiatives undoubtedly represents a very major challenge. If one considers what this would actually involve, then it is clear that large amounts of money will be needed if management models are to be established on a scale sufficient both to secure the well-being of large numbers of poor people, and to conserve the resource.

Governance is another crucial issue that has to be addressed.

The bushmeat crisis could reasonably be described as essentially a crisis of the overall governance of the forest zone, and could thus be addressed as one element of a broader

strategy towards reforming the governance of natural resources. In fact, there are reasons to see wildlife management as a good point of entry into this wider governance reform. Not only would it build on a constituency whose marginalisation is at the heart of poor forest governance (the rural poor), but it also might do so in ways which could have a synergy with other development efforts.

One approach to addressing this issue would be the granting of forest exploitation rights to local communities, which could well lead to better management of timber and NWF resources, and could have potential in relation to hunting and bushmeat. One reason for this is that the management capacity developed in relation to timber and NWFs could become available to the management of hunting and bushmeat - a good example of how capacity developed in one context can be applied in others, and a means of lowering transaction costs for capacity building where they might otherwise be prohibitive.

However, the areas conceded to communities for timber exploitation are often relatively small and much larger areas are likely to be needed by hunters to accommodate the range and habits of different prey species, and allow for a sustainable off-take. Landscape (ecosystem) approaches may therefore be required in order to broaden the area of coverage and to allow for an integrated approach to management.

An additional consideration is that forest legislation is often based on simplistic assumptions about the nature of land title, and presumptions as to single and exclusive usage of the forest resource. Landscape perspectives would have the added advantage of broadening the range of overlapping activities which are recognised to be legitimate in a given community area.

The work of the In-session Seminar strongly showed and communicated the Ghanaian experience relating to “rediscovery” of the cultural heritage, values and symbols attached to wild animal species. These values often support behaviour, practice and usages favourable to the protection or wise management of the resource. National institutions in charge of wildlife have interest in rediscovering these values and using them in their management and extension work.

The spatial harvest theory developed by McCullough (1996) also looks to be promising. This advocates division of areas under management into hunted and non-hunted (protected) zones (*‘sinks’* and *‘sources’*), with animals moving without restriction between the two. A generous estimate of the source area relative to the sink allows wide potential margins for over-harvest, and acts as a counter-balance to the lack of biological knowledge.

Similar approaches are already in operation in marine fisheries, involving the *‘no-take areas’* concept, where protected zones are defined in relation to future harvest needs and not independently of them.

It is far from certain that these new approaches can be accommodated within the existing IUCN system of protected area categories, because strict rules of protection provide little flexibility in either legal or management terms. By the same token, forest-dwelling people have learnt to be sceptical of offers by conservation agencies to restrict their access to their resources, ostensibly in their own long-term interest. But the high costs of maintaining the *‘fortress’* model of biodiversity preservation may create their own pressures for openness to new approaches.

A specific problem relating to forest people is that the lack of an historical span of governance wider than the village is a challenge in many forest areas, which were often characterised by their *‘stateless societies’* in pre-colonial times. But in these circumstances the

opportunities to create new alliances - for example, federations of local users to handle the management and marketing of other forest resources, such as timber and NWFPs - may also offer potential for the bushmeat industry.

One may thus conclude that in spite of the daunting nature of the bushmeat problem, ways of addressing it are emerging that offer some hope of effectively getting to grips with it.

References

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