



Bushmeat, poverty and food security

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From a development perspective, wild animals are an important component of the natural capital, which underpins the livelihoods of many poor people in Central and West Africa. As a result, development cooperation initiatives, which run to millions of euros in value annually, need to take account of the potential for sustainable use of wildlife to support local livelihoods; a process which should be undertaken in the broader context of integrating environmental concerns into development work. This applies to rural development and food security programmes, where attention is needed to ensure that wildlife resources are not lost unnecessarily, and for transport and infra-structure projects, where mitigation measures need to be put in place to address their impacts on bushmeat species.

Given the difficulty of mainstreaming environmental issues into development activities, some programmes and projects need to focus on achieving conservation objectives within the context of sustainable development.

The scale of the trade

In the past, development agencies have paid little attention to the importance of bushmeat for subsistence or trade. However, current estimates of the volume of bushmeat traded in the Congo Basin are between 1-3.4 million tonnes per annum. This trade is important to both local and national economies, and is even traded internationally. Not only is it clear that this is valued at millions of euros annually (see Table below), accounting for as much as 2.5% of GDP in at least one country, but much of it is “informal”, going on between traders that are not licensed and whose activities seldom show up in national-level accounts.

COUNTRY	Value of bushmeat trade (annual)	Year
Gabon	\$26 million urban; \$22 million rural	1993
Central African Republic	\$23 million	1999
Cote d'Ivoire	\$105 million	1996
Ghana	\$ 205 million	1996/7
Liberia	\$42 million	1989

As a result of its informal nature, and the recent rapid expansion, few countries have implemented effective trade regulations, even where national legislation allows for this. Effective regulation needs to: discourage trade in endangered species, such as great apes; regulate off-take of other species for long-term sustainable yields; and support management systems that are sustainable economically, socially and institutionally, as well as biologically.

In particular, this should allow fair prices to be paid to forest-dwelling hunters and trappers who have traditionally lived in or near the forest supply areas. And this, in turn could offer some long-term incentive to support sustainable management systems. It also needs to focus on building the capacity and confidence of local communities to prevent outside commercial hunting gangs from over-exploiting their traditional resources.

Food insecurity and poverty

Undoubtedly the large amounts of traded bushmeat provide food, but for whom and at what price? As with most commodities, the poor benefit least from trade, which seems to apply for bushmeat trade as well as the revenues from trophy hunting in the region. For rural farmers, hunting and trapping have long been an important activity to get food, and to reduce crop damage.

To get an impression of how important bushmeat could be for food security, the FAO figures for under-nourishment in the Congo Basin (1998) show that 50% of people are under-nourished (i.e. consuming less than *ca.* 2000 kcal/person/day). These very high levels of under-nourishment are a reflection of the depth of poverty in the region, as indicated using the Human Development Index (1998) lists of 174 countries. All but one of the Congo Basin countries are ranked 130 or lower; Gabon is an exception at 123.

These national figures indicate how important all sources of food are in the region, but more detail is needed on the place bushmeat has in household food economies, especially for poorer communities and those in remote rural areas where alternative protein sources are scarce. With this information, the full impact of losses of wildlife resources, making poor people even poorer, will be appreciated.

As with the food security figures, only preliminary information is available on the benefits that come to trappers and hunters from this lucrative trade. For some commercial hunters in the region, annual income ranged from \$ 250 - 1000, with some households in south Cameroon making \$ 80 / month during peak trading months. These figures indicate that bushmeat trade can contribute to achieving the international development targets of reducing the number of people earning less than a \$1 / day, although this can only be sustained if hunters' incomes could be improved, within a regulated bushmeat trade that can maintain supplies.

Direct and underlying causes bushmeat species losses

Addressing the loss of mammal species requires that both the underlying and direct causes are taken into account. This means that hunting & trapping methods and intensity, and access to forest areas need to be regulated because they are direct causes of loss of bushmeat species. However, such direct causes of loss are often driven by underlying economic, social and institutional pressures. These include: human population growth and migration; poverty and inequality; development policies and laws; and weak or ineffective governance.

This has two implications. If conservation attention is focussed solely on field level initiatives, such as protected area management initiatives, then the underlying policy constraints that are driving unsustainable development and unregulated hunting will continue. Both policy and field issues need to be addressed, albeit at different levels and probably by different agencies. The second implication is that, at policy level, many of the underlying causes of unsustainable bushmeat trade are also those which cause poverty. There is therefore scope for conservation and development agencies to work together to address the same underlying causes of poverty and biodiversity loss.

European Community Actions

The overall message for development cooperation agencies must be that there are sufficient policies and procedures in place to reduce the negative impacts of development activities on wildlife, and to support the establishment of systems for the sustainable management of bushmeat as long as there is political will to implement them. Immediate action can be considered at 3 levels.

First, at the policy level, the European Community Communication on Rural Development and Food Security stresses the importance of sustainable use of all natural resources. Communications on both Integrating Environment into Development Cooperation, and the Biodiversity Action Plan for Economic and Development cooperation make specific recommendations relevant to improved management of bushmeat. Of these, the most urgent is to strengthen the capacity of the European Commission, in Brussels and the Delegations, to deal with environmental issues, through recruitment of technical staff, and establishment of an Environment HelpDesk.

Second, within the Congo Basin, more attention needs to be given to incorporating environment into poverty assessments, because these assessments inform national poverty reduction strategies, which in turn guide EC Country Support Strategies. Using current methods, the chances of recording bushmeat as an important resource for poor people is remote, despite evidence to the contrary. Building effective EC development would also be better guided by well-researched National Environmental Profiles, and thorough Strategic Environmental Assessments for proposed policy reforms, and detailed Environmental Impact Assessments of all EC infrastructure projects. The latter issue is particularly important because all countries in the Congo Basin have identified transport as a priority for EC investments under the forthcoming Country Support Strategies.

Third, at the field level, wildland habitats need to be secured for a host of environmental benefits, of which wildlife supplies are but one. Making wise use of these forested areas for sustainable supplies of non-endangered species will require building management regimes that involve local communities, government and private sector interests in co-management arrangements.