

Topic 1: Regulating Bushmeat Harvests: what is desirable and feasible?

8:00-8:30

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Outside the protected areas of IUCN category II and I, Central African governments have developed wildlife laws to manage offtake of partially protected or unprotected species, but many species are being rapidly depleted in many sites. The overall situation would be enormously improved if these laws were enforced, but enforcement is very weak and ineffective for a number of reasons:

- 1) Laws are inappropriate. The laws are usually based on the old French or Belgian game laws, and as such are fairly standard across different Central African countries (although differences exist, especially regarding the status of certain species). In general they categorize species as either completely or partially protected, or not protected at all. They only allow hunting during half of the year, they forbid most kind of hunting except firearms or snares made from “traditional” materials (not metal or plastic), and, where species are on the permitted list, females are usually not allowed to be taken. In addition, there is a permit system that includes firearms registration that is inaccessible to many and a quota of animals per hunter per unit time. The species list, harvest quotas and timing of closed hunting season aspects are poorly informed by science.
- 2) Laws are not taken seriously. Corruption and lack of either enforcement capacity or political will encourages bushmeat trafficking by both the rural poor and by those with power further up the “commodity chain”. Law enforcement agents, when they do enforce the law, usually go for the soft target -- the poor-- and leave the more powerful actors to continue their illegal, and often more destructive practices. As a result, laws are often seen as unfair in the eyes of rural citizens.
- 3) There is new, huge and growing urban demand. The proportion of people living in towns and cities is changing beyond recognition: 87%, 65%, 53% and 35% of all Gabonese, Congolese, Cameroonians and DRC residents respectively, are urban dwellers, compared with 17%, 32%, 14% and 22% in 1960. The total population size, urban and rural, has increased 3 to 4-fold and is now almost 130 million people in those four countries alone. The absolute size of the total urban population in the region has increased roughly 10-fold in that time, and now stands around 75 million. In Kinshasa alone, a recent study found 80% of Kinshasa buy bushmeat (FHI360, 2015).

In response to this, we might look to traditional customary rules on wildlife hunting as a more effective means of ensuring the sustainability of bushmeat harvest. Such customary rules vary regionally, but generally require permission from a local chief to hunt, and a tribute, or tax, paid to him/her in the form of a portion of the catch, or, in some areas, salt and/or alcohol. These traditional rules were founded during an era of much more powerful local rule by traditional leaders, relatively low human population density, very restricted means of transport out of village hunting zones, and therefore limited trade. These systems were more intended to ensure the control over resources by excluding others and to maintain traditional power structures than to ensure the sustainability of hunting per se. In most areas in the region, these traditional rules have been eroded by the weakening of the traditional social structures and have not been able to adapt to highly organized bushmeat poaching, often involving outsiders, very good transport systems (and, more recently, telecommunications), and the ever-increasing commercial bushmeat trade to the towns and cities of Central Africa.

What can Central African Governments and rural communities do to resolve the dilemma about the lack of enforcement of hunting laws and inextricable challenges of effectively managing hunting outside protected areas to ensure long-term sustainable protein resources for rural peoples?

There is need for improving the legal system to ensure is both effective at ensuring the sustainability of those resources and feasible to enforce – it must be simple, cost effective and have real buy in from both community members and the government agencies responsible for enforcement. Within twenty years, if the business-as-usual approach continues, the main species that people will hunt over the entire region will be rodents. Can hunting regulations outside of protected areas be simplified and locally-relevant wildlife management systems be developed so that protected species be protected and wildlife effectively managed in areas where the government cannot viably operate? What does this approach look like, and how do we get there? It must strictly enforce species rules, hunting techniques, appropriate areas, and spatial scales so that hunting can be sustainable for generations to come.

The table below summarizes some solutions to the listed challenge. With the above summary of the presentation in mind, participants are invited to think about challenges faced by wildlife authorities and rural communities related to hunting regulations and how to encourage better compliance. What are the practical recommendations for governments and donors in a 20 year timeframe?

Challenge: Lack of sufficient resources for government agencies to apply wildlife laws outside protected areas and a lack of rural support for wildlife laws

Potential Solution	Considerations
Community management of wildlife in communal lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities do not have financial resources and technical capacity to develop quotas and monitor offtake. • Communities do not have the authority to arrest, traditionally control outside poachers, nor the power to stop bushmeat mafia • Do governments and donors want to invest in this? Would it be at the cost of investing in protected areas?
Simplify the laws, considering:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legalize year-round subsistence harvest of specific non-protected species (rats, blue duiker) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local sale vs household subsistence consumption—can it be controlled, and what are the impact of each on wildlife populations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistically take into account modern hunting methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will changes in techniques improve or negatively impact nearby protected area management?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmonize laws across provinces within a country 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure hunting permit system accessible and affordable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are wildlife agencies willing to proceed on this? How to ensure sustainable harvest? How to avoid corruption?
Hybrid co-management models of wildlife conservation and local hunting	Inside designated protected areas (i.e. IUCN Category III-VI) and/or buffer zones where subsistence hunting is allowed, wildlife agencies work with local communities to ensure long-term off-take systems
Other?	