

Topic 2: Bushmeat on the Nutrition and Health Agenda

Presentation: Judith Ngondi

Facilitation: John E. Fa

Though detailed analyses are still limited, there is substantial evidence that bushmeat figures strongly in rural economies not only as a traded item, but also as a pillar of livelihood safety, including food security. Bushmeat is eaten as fresh or smoked meat in soups and stews and also, occasionally, roasted or fried.

The literature assessing the relative and absolute contribution of bushmeat to household economies is still sparse. This makes it difficult to design mitigation approaches, given that the role of bushmeat in diet and household income is not sufficiently well quantified. This is because studies of bushmeat consumption often report frequency (days in a week) during which bushmeat is consumed (and, less frequently, actual quantities of bushmeat eaten from weighed amounts of meat consumed in households. Other studies have calculated bushmeat eaten from 24-hr recalls in which households are interviewed and asked to name what meats and quantities were eaten the day before. Estimates of wild meat consumed in different tropical regions have been published, ranging enormously from 0.05 kg/person/day to 0.28 kg/person/day. This variation in amounts of bushmeat consumption is difficult to explain since it could reflect differences in the study population's dependence on game meat versus fish, but also could reflect differences in time of year in which the studies were undertaken, and of course sample sizes. The major issue affecting many studies is that there is not enough information reported to assess potential sources of error or compare methodological accuracy. For large-scale studies (such as the data derived from Food Balance Sheets,), there is no indication of the statistical distribution of the data since only means are presented.

What clearly emerges from the different studies is that in west and central Africa urban bushmeat consumption is significant, and from a demand viewpoint this may account for a major source of pressure on wildlife populations. urban populations in Gabon, DRC and CAR have been reported to consume on average 4.7 kg/person/year; consumption in Libreville (Gabon) has been estimated at 7.2kg/person/year, in Bangui (CAR) at 14.6 kg/person/year in Mbanjock (Cameroon) at 2 kg/person/year, etc. Although urban bushmeat consumption per capita appears significantly lower than in rural areas according to most available studies, the contribution of urban areas to the overall bushmeat consumption is high and likely to become higher as the population of central African countries becomes more urbanised. Given the very significant urban and rural consumption and the either inexistent (e.g. Gabon, DRC, Congo) or pretty limited (Cameroon, CAR) domestic livestock sector, bushmeat remains a crucial component of the diets of many inhabitants in the rainforest region in Africa.

Country statistics on the amounts of bushmeat consumed per inhabitant, though somewhat limited, can be obtained from analyses of food balance sheets, provided by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's statistical database, FAOSTAT. While the FAOSTAT bushmeat data are probably underestimates and should be regarded with caution, the data are the most readily available official sources of information on production of wild meat in the Congo Basin and are valuable indicators of bushmeat production and consumption trends. Using FAOSTAT data, consumption of bushmeat in the Congo Basin was highest in Gabon where inhabitants consumed on average more than 16 kg of bushmeat per year between 1990 and 2005—almost four times the amount consumed in other Central African countries. Average bushmeat consumption in all countries was 6.78 kg/capita in 1990 but fell to 5.89 kg/capita in 2005. With the exception of the Republic of Congo, bushmeat consumption per capita decreased in central Africa after 1990; for Gabon, each inhabitant consumed almost 4 kg less bushmeat in 2005. The trend of declining bushmeat consumption was moderate in Cameroon, DRC and CAR, with less than 1 kg of bushmeat/year per capita from 1990 to 2005. Bushmeat consumption increases significantly with personal wealth, expressed as GDP at purchasing power parity per capita.