



# Wildlife Policy Briefing

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## Bushmeat & poverty alleviation: implications for development policy

**David Brown**

*The bushmeat trade is a subject of heightened interest in conservation circles, but has rarely been taken up by development assistance agencies. This has hindered the search for effective solutions which engender local ownership. Three considerations commend the issue to development agencies at the present time: in relation to poverty alleviation, wild meat figures strongly in social safety nets and might figure as a component of economic growth and development; it could well figure in governance reform. This paper considers the arguments relating to these three areas and the policy implications arising.*

### Policy conclusions

- There is a need to shift the bushmeat debate onto more positive terrain, recognising the many benefits which the trade in wild meat offers the range state economies.
- There are strong practical and moral arguments to favour increased engagement by development assistance agencies in this debate.
- The arguments in favour of bushmeat as a component of social safety nets are strong; those relating to its possible role in economic transformation are less well understood.
- Bushmeat could well figure as a component of governance reform; this would have implications for the policies of international conservation agencies quite as much as range state governments.
- Strategies of governance reform would include legal and regulatory reform, in a pro-poor direction. These must be linked to the establishment of channels of legitimate trade, if the reforms are not merely to drive this lucrative industry further underground.

### Bushmeat - the positives?

This article is concerned with the bushmeat trade – that is, with the trade in wild meat (usually smoked meat of larger mammals), for consumptive purposes as a protein source. It focuses on the situation in West-Central Africa. With some licence, the article treats the trade in this region in a fairly homogeneous way. The bushmeat trade is a multi-million dollar industry in the sub-region, and often a major component of local economies. Though estimates are necessarily speculative, volumes of 1-5 million tonnes of undressed meat annually (worth US\$2-10 billion or more) are widely quoted in the literature.

In many ways, this trade can be viewed in a very positive light. Its scale, vigour and international penetration bear witness to the resilience, resourcefulness and self sufficiency of peoples who are often living at the very margins of global economy. Bushmeat has many characteristics that make it

attractive to these peoples, particularly to the poor.

These include:

- High returns to discontinuous labour inputs, with low risk and minimal capital outlay.
- Excellent storage properties and a high value/weight ratio; it is easily transported and is thus an attractive commodity for producers in isolated areas who have few alternatives.
- A commodity chain characterised by high social inclusivity, in both wealth and gender terms.
- Labour inputs that are easily reconciled with the agricultural cycle, and with diversified income-earning strategies.
- Unlike many high-value marketed commodities, usage can readily be switched between consumption and trade.

The starting point in any analysis of the bushmeat trade should surely be these positive benefits, and any attempt to improve its management should take the preservation of them as its fundamental parameter.

That these benefits are rarely seriously acknowledged, and even less often preserved in policy, can be related partly to genuine concerns about sustainability of a resource whose supply appears markedly inelastic. But the stigmatisation of the trade in western media goes beyond this issue, and arguably owes more to the projection of the values of industrial society onto the tropical world than any desire to guarantee the future interests of the bushmeat-dependent poor. Paradoxically, far from securing international conservation objectives, such stigmatisation may well be contributing unwittingly to their frustration.

### Varying perspectives on the bushmeat trades

To date, the academic literature – and even more so, coverage in the popular media – have focused predominantly on the negative effects of the trade on wildlife populations. Other interests have been acknowledged, though the context has usually made clear that the central issue is biodiversity, and that the human interest is, at best, a contingent one.

The arguments in favour of the conservationist perspective are strong. Witnessed by such indicators as declining population densities of vulnerable species and changes in the age distribution of the harvest, the evidence is overwhelmingly of an erosion of important components of

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Box One: The potential for hunting and the bushmeat trade to contribute to poverty eradication		
Criterion	Opportunities	Constraints
<b>Barriers to entry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>70% of value captured by hunters in Ghana</li> <li>Appears to be high unsatisfied demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barriers low – depresses profit margins, and reduces investment opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Value added in processing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A luxury commodity, where price is not necessarily competitively set</li> <li>A segmented trade could increase the demands for management of the resource</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rustic qualities disfavour product enhancement</li> <li>Opportunities for export-oriented production low</li> <li>De facto illegality a barrier</li> </ul>
<b>Investor behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High value retained by hunters indicates limits to centralisation of control</li> <li>Often figures as a means of generating capital to invest in longer-term enterprise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May not be locally based. In this case, likely to be oriented to profit taking for investment outside sector</li> </ul>
<b>Scope for expansion in production</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farm-forest ecotone highly productive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dependent on infrastructure changes</li> <li>Estimates of sustainable levels of production are almost always below present production levels</li> </ul>
<b>Potential for improved management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved governance is a major attraction for donor investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low human population density in source areas restricts opportunities and raises transaction costs</li> <li>Poor governance scenarios</li> </ul>
<b>How to improve the situation of the resource</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint enterprise favours linking bushmeat to forest management</li> <li>May be better to focus on policy parameters and leave initiative with local groups to develop their own management models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management interventions by have often proven excessively high cost and fragile</li> </ul>
<b>International policy context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CITES Central Africa Bushmeat Working Group a promising development</li> <li>CBD may present a positive international policy environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not favourable due to restrictive implications of CITES trade approach</li> <li>Moralisation by western environmental and animal welfare movements a constraint</li> </ul>

the mammalian stock throughout the core producer zones.

However, there are some strong arguments in favour of a change of approach. They relate to two sets of considerations:

- The fact that conservation-based strategies are not working well in the range states where the need for management is greatest. Indeed, there is a view that such conservation-oriented strategies are unlikely.
- Stigmatising the trade and/or presenting it as a 'crisis narrative' has the effect of legitimising a shift in ownership away from the resource users towards external interests. Given that this is a sovereign resource, ignoring local claims of ownership seems an unlikely way to improve its management.

There is a need, therefore, to give greater consideration to the human welfare dimension, both as a practical consideration and on moral grounds. This has institutional implications. Some conservation agencies have sought to take on board the developmental aspects of the trade, often within a 'community-based approach' to conservation-cum-development, in the hope of finding 'win-win scenarios'. But all too often, this has produced solutions which satisfy neither constituency (Oates, 1998). Progress could be much faster - and better embedded - if development assistance perspectives and instruments were also engaged. This is partly a question of the beneficial effects of a development-oriented funding stream, but largely a matter of approach. It is suggested that a social orientation is an essential prerequisite for real national ownership.

#### Is there an agenda for development assistance?

Development assistance priorities are largely set by the framework of the 'Poverty reduction strategies' (PRSPs) which are currently the favoured instrument of the international community, particularly the World Bank. There are broadly two areas of potential interest for bushmeat within this trajectory. These are *poverty alleviation* and *good governance*.

#### Bushmeat and poverty alleviation

In identifying the roles which bushmeat might play in poverty eradication (see Box One), consideration needs to be given to two dimensions of pro-poor change:

- the value of social safety nets to the poor
- growth and poverty reduction, and their implications for the poor

#### Social safety nets

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) including bushmeat have

a well established role in sustaining and protecting the existing living standards of the poor, and ensuring that they do not fall into chronic poverty. Safety-nets are likely to assume particular importance where, through impoverishment or for other reasons, there are few external interventions to help the poor manage risk and uncertainty, for example, through public and private transfers (pensions, remittances), insurance systems and public support schemes (food aid, employment programmes). In most bushmeat range states, these support structures are little developed or entirely absent. Given the impoverishment and marginality of most forest dwellers, there is a strong case for bushmeat to be included in development assistance strategies, as a component of social safety nets (Davies, 2002).

#### Growth and poverty reduction

The second area of potential interest is economic growth and transformation. Donor interest would undoubtedly be increased if it could be shown that the bushmeat trade might contribute to poverty eradication on a substantial scale. This is an under-researched theme in the literature, and also one with a dearth of useful evidence. However, there are good grounds for caution. These relate both to the low transformative potential of rustic commodities such as bushmeat and the fact that transformation, were it to occur, would not necessarily be pro-poor.

A range of factors, including the nature of the resource, the character and volumes of its trade, and the availability of alternatives, are of relevance here. Paradoxically, it may be partly because of the virtues of bushmeat as a livelihoods asset that it is unlikely to figure strongly in rural transformation. Economists would argue that the characteristics which are typical of the trade – accessible technology and near to open access rights, leading to low thresholds of entry and broad participation – will result in tight margins and very limited potential for profits to be reinvested productively in the sector.

There would also seem to be few opportunities for value to be added in processing, through technical sophistication or increased investments of labour (in this respect, bushmeat may differ from, say, artisanal woodworking). This is especially likely to be the case where the trade is treated as *de facto* illegal, and is pursued in a clandestine way. Its stigmatisation internationally also limits the potential for export-oriented processing and value added. In terms of volume, even if projections of sustainable offtake are over-cautious, they are often so far below existing levels as to make it most unlikely that sufficient capital could be generated from the sector to sustain long-term growth. In Central Africa, for example, Fa *et al* (2003) give a conservative estimate that, if present rates

of offtake are maintained, relative to population trends, then bushmeat protein supplies will drop 81% in less than 50 years. However, if the supply was reduced immediately to sustainable levels, then all countries other than Gabon would be seriously effected by the protein loss. The dominant image, therefore, is of an industry with 'mining' characteristics, and without major forward and backward linkages into the wider economy. Without such linkages, there is little likelihood of the multiplier effects which would turn commodity extraction into a vehicle for economic growth.

However, there are some counter-arguments. Urban demand is high and possibly growing, and bushmeat can feature as a luxury item in a segmented trade, even where substitutes exist at a competitive price. Unlike most agricultural goods, there is little evidence of major swings in prices. Bushmeat appears to perform quite differently, as a traded commodity, from other NTFPs, having both higher levels of returns to producers and less vulnerability to product substitution. Evidence suggests that hunters can capture a surprisingly high proportion of the value added in the trade. A recent study of the commodity chain in Ghana, for example, found that hunters captured 74% of the final sale price in chop bars (Mendelson, *pers. com.*). Low barriers to entry will not, therefore, necessarily drive down prices to the point where there is no investment potential.

An additional consideration concerns the income raised. In West and Central Africa, hunting is traditionally undertaken by young men at an early stage of the family cycle, to accumulate capital which is later invested in setting up enterprises with a longer time horizon, such as export crop production and petty trade. It thus provides a stepping stone to greater prosperity for a social category that might otherwise be problematic for society. There is also historical evidence of the ways in which bushmeat can play a secondary role in supporting economic change. Asibey, for example, notes the part it played in underwriting the development of the Ghana cocoa industry and opening up the forest frontier (1974). Thus, even a decapitalising stock can have a role in economic growth and structural change of long-term benefit to the poor.

### **Some recent evidence**

Assessing the evidence for and against these propositions is inhibited by the paucity of the data on the social dimensions of the trade. This is largely a consequence of the difficulty of researching a predominantly illegal commodity chain. Particularly lacking is evidence on the investment behaviour of 'capitalist' bushmeat entrepreneurs: what levels of surpluses do they make? Where do they invest them - back into the sub-sector or locality or elsewhere? How do they negotiate prices with their suppliers? Where are the greatest profits to be made? Clearly, there are likely to be greater prospects for economic development where there is perceived to be value in re-investing income in the development of the sub-sector, with due regard to sustainability, rather than merely mining one primary commodity after another to its economic limit. While this entrepreneurial information is often lacking, some case study evidence is beginning to emerge on the role of bushmeat in the livelihood strategies of the poor. The work of de Merode *et al* (2003) is particularly interesting in this regard. Its conclusions, reviewed in a parallel publication in this series, challenge some important assumptions underlying current conservation strategies.

### **Bushmeat and governance**

The second strand of the argument for the recognition of the wild meat economy in development assistance thinking and strategies concerns the issue of governance. This is a particularly challenging area. In the first instance, the character of many of the range states is unpromising (weak central government with low outreach; major opportunities for rent seeking by officials; low, dispersed and fragmented forest

populations; narrow spans of authority over natural resources). Bushmeat tends to figure within that group of commodities which are conceded informally to the rural majority (albeit on terms set by those rent-seeking officials), with the quid pro quo that more coveted and higher value resources, particularly timber, are to be monopolised by the state. At the same time, the thrust of international conservation efforts has, in recent decades, done little to improve the quality of governance. By and large, local resource users in biodiversity-rich areas have found themselves marginalised in conservation discourse, both institutionally and morally. Existing approaches tend to be premised on the need to take resources out of local control, denying their value to those within closest proximity, who suffer their negative effects. In return, these users are offered the promise of conjectural benefits in the distant future. In areas where future welfare is highly discounted, such promises are unlikely to convince.

### **A review of potential instruments and strategies**

To date, management approaches have focused primarily on the attempt to manage the offtake through community-based schemes. However progress has often been slow, and successes difficult to sustain. A recent review by DFID concludes that "the scope for sustainable management of bushmeat is limited, except where integrated into community forest management" (2002). An alternative strategy would be to shift the attention away from the project instrument towards the creation of a policy environment in which wild fauna is likely to be conserved. This would address the fact that, under present tenurial arrangements, the incentives for forest dwellers to conserve wildlife are almost always negative.

A three-fold strategy is required:

#### **1. Legal and Regulatory reform**

As with other natural resources, wildlife laws are often anti-poor and effectively unworkable. The case of Cameroon illustrates this point (Box Two).

What is notable about the existing legal frameworks is how far divorced they are from the realities of the trade and consequently, how unsuited they are to ensuring that the benefits are justly distributed and/or invested productively (cf. Ly & Bello, 2002). A drastic reduction of the regulatory burden would be unlikely to worsen the condition of the resource, but could do much to instil local support.

The greatest impact would come from actions to give local people long-term rights over their wildlife. The arguments for this proposition are partly moral and economic (it is they who bear the cost); and partly conservation-based and practical (they have the ability to apply communal sanctions, and their support is essential to control such a decentralised resource). These rights would need to encompass any benefits from consumptive and non-consumptive uses within the wider environs. This would include ensuring that the main - and immediate - beneficiaries of protected area demarcation were the affected populations. It would then be up to them to decide whether it was worth retaining the wildlife in their localities; if so, their new-found right would give them what has hitherto been most lacking - the authority to exclude.

Putting all this into practice is not necessarily straightforward. There would probably be strong political resistance to the move - in that it would, at least by association, challenge the control of the politico-industrial complex over the highest value forest resource (timber). The identification of the category of 'resident users' might also be problematic, particularly in zones of continuing immigration, or where 'traditional ownership' is contested. 'Residence' is also a fairly moveable feast in bushmeat producer areas. Tradable quotas are one possibility to cover the non-localisation of claims (Inamdar *et al*, 1999), though the governance challenges would be formidable. A simple mechanism would generally be preferred to regulate the overall offtake in line with scientific monitoring.



### Box Two: Wildlife legislation in Cameroon

The formulation of forests and wildlife legislation in Cameroon, has been the product of diverse and conflicting pressures, and implementation suffers accordingly. The most recent legislation is the 1994 Forest Law. This freely permits traditional hunting in all zones not subject to restrictions (curiously, the latter include buffer zones as well as protected areas). However, traditional hunting is limited to traditional technologies (i.e. tools derived only from vegetable materials) and class 'C' species (vermin and common reptiles), and is oriented exclusively to subsistence use. Trade is totally prohibited. Legal commercial hunting is effectively beyond the means of the rural majority. Commercial hunting can only be undertaken by a licensed operator, using a firearm, according to the provisions of a *cahier des charges*. Additional permits are required for transport of game and wildlife sale. Egbe comments that the notion of traditional hunting within the law is archaic and unrealistic. He comments "A law which makes the most common forms of conduct illegal is itself an instrument of indiscipline". A 1995 decree (though not the original law) makes reference to community hunting zones (CHZ). These can be up to 5,000 ha in size, though the area designated must be free of any other title (for example, timber or farming), which effectively excludes almost all available areas. Criteria for the allocation of CHZ are still under discussion, as are the terms for their exploitation. At present, commerce is precluded. This makes it difficult to put in place management systems in line with established patterns of use. The decree also makes provision for communities to receive 10% of the proceeds of hunting by outsiders employing a licensed guide, albeit only for socio-economic infrastructure projects. However, at present rates, this would be likely to give communities a maximum of £350 per year, probably in return for exclusive hunting rights. Egbe makes recommendations to bring the law into line with existing patterns of usage and strengthen community institutions and incentives for conservation.

**source: Egbe, 2000**

Flexible closed seasons are probably the most workable solution, though only feasible where they enjoy local support.

### 2. Legitimate trade

The second requirement for any policy advance is surely the establishment of channels of legitimate trade. As noted by Davies, 'development agencies need to be persuaded that not only is the bushmeat trade an economic driver but that it is worth investing in a regulated trade to bring benefits to the rural poor' (2002:588). Likewise range state governments. In the present situation of almost universal criminalisation, the only effect of attempts to tighten up on management is to drive the trade further underground – increasing the profits from illegality (Dickson in Oldfield, 2003). Neither will there be any willingness for responsible entrepreneurs to seek to invest in the higher end of the value chain (overseas and urban niche markets) which might act as a motor of local economic development. A trade development strategy is not inherently 'pro-poor' or 'pro-conservation', and other steps would be needed to promote these objectives. But without it, it is difficult to see how increased investments in management can ever improve the condition of the resource.

### 3. Greater transparency

Allied with all these measures (and an essential prerequisite for them) is the need to acknowledge the crucial role which wild meat plays in producer economies. This requires a range

of measures to increase transparency: acknowledging the trade in national production statistics (Asibey and Child, 1990); revising poverty assessments (Davies, 2002); and including wild meat within national poverty reduction strategies (only in Nigeria and Bolivia – neither of them major range states – has this occurred to date).

### Conclusions

Making the case for investing in bushmeat to development assistance organisations raises complex issues with important strategic and political dimensions. Aid agencies are under increasing pressure to justify their budgets in terms of short-term impacts – a consideration which disadvantages all activities in the forest sector, wildlife included. There is widespread scepticism about the likelihood of quick 'win-win' scenarios in the low governance contexts typical of this sector. If the principle of 'triage' is applied, then it is unlikely that the wildlife resource would figure in development assistance, despite the high emotions which it generates in conservation circles. But one of the primary justifications for bringing this issue into realms of development assistance is the impasse which has been reached in conservation-oriented policy. Despite the best intentions of many conservationists, a biodiversity focus is most unlikely to prioritise the consumptive use of the wildlife resource. If bushmeat is to be brought out of the closet, and made the subject of legitimate debate commensurate with its importance in livelihoods and national economies, then another perspective is needed to prioritise those concerns. As this article has underlined, the challenges are many. They must be faced as much by conservation and development agencies as by policy-makers in producer states.

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The author is a Research Fellow in the Forest Policy & Environment Programme at the ODI. He can be contacted at <d.brown@odi.org.uk>. See also the website of the ODI bushmeat programme, <www.odi.org.uk/bushmeat>.

Series editor: David Brown

Administrative editor: Dina Hashem