

Illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade: interventions needed to address the threat posed to wildlife in the Southern African Development Community



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A brief developed by participants at the meeting:
Illegal hunting and the bushmeat crisis in the SADC region
Hosted by: Panthera, Wildlife Conservation Society, London Zoological Society and the Food and Agriculture Organisation

Executive Summary

The bushmeat trade has been recognized for decades as a key threat to wildlife in tropical forests of Africa, Asia and South America. However, the severity of the threat posed by illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is less understood or acknowledged. There are strong indications that illegal hunting represents a severe threat to wildlife in the SADC region. Unless the problem is addressed, significant losses of wildlife are likely to occur both within and outside protected areas, which would confer severe ecological, economic and social consequences. Ecological consequences would comprise overall wildlife population declines, reductions in biodiversity, local disappearances of some species from both within and outside protected areas and associated loss of ecosystem functionality. Economic consequences include major impacts on tourism and trophy hunting industries and foreclosing the option to develop wildlife-based land uses. Social consequences include negative impacts on food security through the loss of a potentially sustainable supply of meat protein, the loss of tourism-based employment and the loss of wildlife heritage. This document highlights the outputs of a workshop convened in May 2012 by the Lion Program of Panthera, and Panthera and the Zoological Society of London/Wildlife Conservation Society Range-wide Programme for Cheetah and Wild Dog Conservation where a number of key interventions were identified by the group of expert field scientists and wildlife managers. The meeting was convened as large predators are particularly affected both directly and indirectly (through loss of their prey) by illegal hunting and their conservation status can reflect the severity of the threat posed in a given area.

Issue Statement

How can current leaders and stakeholders intervene to reduce or eliminate illegal hunting and the illegal trade in bushmeat to prevent negative economic, ecological and social impacts, while promoting the sustainable, legal use of wildlife for conservation, food security and the benefit of human livelihoods?

Background

In recognition of the threat posed by the bushmeat trade, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has established a liaison group on bushmeat. This liaison group has since established a set of recommendations for addressing the threat posed by the unsustainable trade in bushmeat (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011). These guidelines were used as the basis for discussion at a brainstorming session held in May 2012 by Panthera and the Zoological Society of

London, and the Wildlife Conservation Society where scientific experts and wildlife managers met to identify priority interventions needed to address illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade in the SADC region.

Wildlife populations are declining at an unprecedented rate across much of the globe (Novacek and Cleland, 2001). The world is currently experiencing a mass extinction event with the loss of large numbers of species as a direct result of human activities (Wake and Vredenburg, 2008). Rapid human population growth, climate change and habitat conversion is driving the decline of many species (Thomas et al., 2004)(Wake and Vredenburg, 2008). The hunting of wildlife for meat and income has long been recognized as an additional key factor in the decline of wildlife across much of Africa, Asia and South America (Fa et al., 2002). However, there is now increasing evidence that illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade also represent a severe threat to wildlife populations occurring in the SADC region (Barnett, 1998; Lindsey et al., 2011). Until recently the scale of problem has not been adequately acknowledged by key stakeholders and as a result, inadequate resources are available to address the issue.

Illegal hunting appears to be increasing in prevalence due to human population growth, increased human encroachment in and fragmentation of wildlife areas, and lack of alternative livelihood or protein options. The trade in bushmeat in the SADC region is becoming increasingly commercialized with illegal hunting practised on a broad scale to supply local communities in areas adjacent to parks as well as supporting demand in more distant urban areas (including international cities). The effect of these trends is elevated levels of illegal harvest and declining wildlife populations.

Overharvesting of wildlife can result in severe ecological, economic and social impacts. Ecological consequences would comprise overall wildlife population declines with associated loss of ecological functionality, reduced resilience due to biodiversity and local extinctions of species both within and outside protected areas. Economic impacts include reduced potential to develop tourism and trophy hunting industries and foreclosing the option to develop wildlife-based land uses. Social consequences include reduced food security through the loss of a potentially sustainable supply of meat protein, reduced tourism-based employment and loss of the wildlife heritage.

Large predators are particularly affected by illegal hunting, as they are both killed directly and are affected by the loss of their prey. Consequently, those species can, to some extent, act as a barometer for the impacts of illegal hunting. They are also key species – both for ecological and economic reasons and their loss from wildlife areas will have a significant impact.

Underlying causes and recommendations to mitigate current negative impacts

Intervention at multiple levels of governance and management is essential to address the socioeconomic and ecological threats posed by illegal and unsustainable hunting for the bushmeat trade. Some factors are overarching and perhaps initially seem beyond the scope of what wildlife managers and other stakeholders can achieve, but they must be acknowledged and ways to address them explored as much as possible. Other factors are more manageable at the national and local level.

Overarching issues

a) Addressing human population growth

Current trends in human population growth represent the ultimate cause for illegal hunting and the bushmeat. Increasing human populations result in increasing numbers of people reliant on exploitation of natural resources (including wildlife) to survive (Stiles, 2011). Finding mechanisms to prevent this negative spiral are imperative for the future of many wildlife populations in the SADC region and strong leadership and engagement across of sectors of government and society is strongly recommended.

National and local scale issues

b) Land use planning

There is clear evidence that illegal hunting is worse in areas close to human settlement and where unmanaged access to wildlife areas occurs (Brashares et al., 2011). There is a urgent need to encourage more effective and enforced land use planning in and around wildlife areas to allow for: the establishment/preservation of large parks; the creation of buffer zones around protected areas; alignment of land uses optimally; prevention of unplanned human encroachment in wildlife areas; all of which combined will act to minimize the impact of human settlement in wildlife areas where it occurs (Lindsey et al., 2011).

c) Promoting the development of alternative livelihoods and protein sources

In many cases, people resort to illegal hunting to source food to eat or to sell due to a lack of alternative livelihood options or protein sources, and/or as a source of instant cash. Creating alternative livelihood options and exploring options for producing alternative sources of protein has potential to reduce reliance of local people on exploiting wildlife populations to survive, and could help to improve standards of living (Van Vliet, 2011). Sustainable harvesting of wildlife is likely to be possible in many areas of SADC if planned and managed properly (see point (d)). Increasing the scope for such harvests to be legally transported to urban and other rural markets is also recommended as a possible intervention to prevent unsustainable illegal harvesting.

d) Developing formal wildlife-based land uses

Wildlife-based land uses can be a highly productive way in which to utilize semi arid lands that are marginal for agriculture and livestock (Bond et al., 2004). The legal utilization of wildlife through quota systems and selective harvest methods can produce significant quantities of meat that could potentially be used to replace illegal and unsustainable supplies (Lindsey et al., 2011). In addition, there is large scope for employment creation and the generation of significant economic benefits. To achieve the development of wildlife-based land uses, there is a need for each SADC country to explore effective devolution of the user-rights over wildlife to landholders, be they private, communal land occupants or lessees of state land and to allow regulated consumptive utilization of wildlife (Child, 2009). There is also the need for systems to be developed to allow the legal distribution and sale of legally produced game meat.

e) Providing and enforcing legal protection for wildlife

In many African countries, wildlife laws do not provide adequate deterrents to would-be illegal hunters and the punishments for illegal hunting do not generally reflect the value of the resource (Barnett, 1998). Stronger punishments associated with hunting illegally are needed to increase the costs associated with illegal harvest of wildlife. In addition, significantly elevated investments in anti-poaching security are needed to limit and control illegal hunting (Lindsey et al., 2011).

f) Education and Awareness

Lack of education and awareness is a key problem which often exacerbates the extent and effects of illegal hunting for the bushmeat trade. There is a need to raise awareness among communities, wildlife managers, NGOs, police, magistrates and policy makers of the negative impacts of illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade and necessary interventions to address the problem. Tools already available to reduce the extent of the use of bushmeat to sustainable levels need to be disseminated widely and effectively.

Pre-existing Policies

National laws relating to wildlife use in the SADC region are well developed due to the long traditions of wildlife-based tourism and in some cases, trophy hunting and other forms of wildlife

use. However, these laws tend to have a number of shortcomings relating to illegal hunting and legal forms of wildlife use. Existing laws do not provide for sufficiently severe deterrents to would-be illegal hunters and do not reflect the value of the resource destroyed (Barnett, 1998). Furthermore, there tends to be inadequate investment in enforcing wildlife laws through anti-poaching security, even in many of the flagship protected areas in the SADC region.

Many existing wildlife laws in the SADC region do not promote legal wildlife-based land uses, as a result of the failure of some governments to devolve ownership or user-rights over wildlife to communities. In most countries, the user-rights over wildlife are retained by the state, preventing communities from accessing legal benefits and ensuring that one of the only ways that they can benefit from wildlife is via illegal hunting. In some countries, user-rights have been devolved to communities, but only partially, resulting in the state retaining significant proportions of earnings from wildlife – thus imposing massive effective taxation on wildlife-based land uses.

Therefore, we are strongly in support of current efforts within the SADC region to review current legislation and to harmonise instruments wherever possible but stress the urgency of such a process to prevent the alarming declines in the wildlife that are being recorded throughout much of the region. We recommend that SADC look to existing initiatives and draw upon their knowledge and experience. These include:

- The **IUCN Resolution on Wild Meat** which was adopted in 2000 (http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/wcc_2000_en.pdf)
- **CITES Bushmeat Working Group** was established at CoP 11 in Nairobi in 2000 and funded through 2004. It held regional meetings, evaluated national policies, conducted country reviews and supported 'bushmeat officers' housed within wildlife visions. It continues as an official group but is no longer funded [<http://www.cites.org/eng/prog/bushmeat.shtml>]
- **Congo Basin Forest Partnership** is a type II (non-binding) partnership launched in 2002 to build efforts to address forest conservation issues in the region. They have produced recent findings in their 'State of the Forest 2010' report. Although the CBFP has not established a bushmeat monitoring program this most recent version of the SOF report does include a section on bushmeat [<http://carpe.umd.edu/carpedocs/index.php?tab=0>] and the regional model may be illustrative for SADC to consider.
- The **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Liaison Group on Bushmeat (LGB)** [<http://www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=LGBUSHMEAT-02>] had its first meeting in October in 2009; the results of that meeting were endorsed by the CBD in 2010. The LGB met again in June 2011 where revised recommendations were made, including options for small-scale food and income alternatives, and insights on how to improve sustainable wildlife use.

Greater acknowledgement of the issues and conservation action

Action to address illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade in the SADC region is needed now without waiting for the results of research projects. There is a need for governments, state wildlife agencies, NGOs and wildlife managers to acknowledge the threat posed by illegal hunting and prioritize the issue. Recognition of the severity of the threat in this region among the international community of nations and donors is required to enhance the prospects of securing the funding and finance needed to address the problem effectively. Urgent conservation action is needed to address illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade, in line with the recommendations outlined above.

Partnerships between stakeholders

There is a need for partnerships between state wildlife agencies, NGOs, the private sector and communities to address illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade. Significant funding is needed to address these threats and there is a need for partnerships between African governments, other nations and international NGOs.

Research through local partnerships

There is a need for more targeted and coordinated research work to be conducted on the threat posed by illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade to continue to feed into the management and decision making process. More work is needed to identify key hotspots of illegal hunting and to understand the dynamics of the trade in bushmeat at the site level. Such research is required to design the most effective interventions in each individual location.

Development of unified accord

Developing a unified strategy among SADC countries to address the threat posed by illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade will help to focus conservation efforts and promote international recognition of the severity of the problem.

Development of national plans to address the problem

The drivers of illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade are likely to vary somewhat among countries. Consequently, locally adapted action plans drawn up using the SADC strategy as an umbrella are necessary to guide conservation action. The development of national plans to address illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade will help to focus efforts, provide a basis for fund raising, and increase awareness of the problem.

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