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Socioeconomic Dynamics of Bushmeat Hunting in a West African Protected Area

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Abstract

The prevalence and impacts of illegal hunting of bushmeat are under appreciated in Nigeria, despite indications that it constitutes a serious conservation threat in the region. Bushmeat hunting has emerged as a severe threat to wildlife conservation and the existence of mega-herbivores and large carnivores in Nigeria Protected Areas. This study investigated the socioeconomic dynamics of bushmeat hunting in Oba Hills Forest Reserve (OHFR) in the south-west of Nigeria, with the objective of developing solutions. Data for this study were collected from a sample of 250 household heads (HH) in 8 villages close to the forest reserve. Bushmeat hunting is conducted mainly by young and middle-aged men who engaged in seasonal employment. The villagers confirms that bushmeat hunters were people living within close proximity to the reserve. The local household heads acknowledged that bushmeat hunting expedition is mostly conducted during the dry season with individual hunting as the most frequent hunting style in the reserve. The scale of bushmeat hunting is high as hunters were observed to acquire bushmeat every day from the reserve. The extent of bushmeat hunting activities was significantly associated with level of income, occupation, ethnicity and bushmeat consumption of the local HHs. The socioeconomic characteristics, the relative effect of culture of consuming bushmeat and the need for cheaper source of animal protein reflects villagers' involvement in bushmeat hunting. Failure to provide stakes for local villagers surrounding wildlife-based land uses and weak penal system that do not provide sufficient deterrent to illegal hunters influenced bushmeat hunting in OHFR. We conclude that the aforementioned factors needs to be addressed for bushmeat hunting to be tackled effectively. However, in the absence of political and economic stability, controlling bushmeat hunting will remain extremely difficult and the future of wildlife conservation will remain bleak.

Keywords: Bushmeat hunting, conservation, income , protected area, seasonal employment