
18. TRADITIONAL AFRICAN WILDLIFE UTILIZATION: SUBSISTENCE HUNTING, POACHING, AND SUSTAINABLE USE

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SUMMARY

This paper examines traditional African wildlife utilization activities, with particular emphasis on subsistence hunting, or the procurement of wild animals for purposes of meeting household needs. It is noted that subsistence hunting in Africa is often defined by the state as poaching (hunting outside the bounds of the laws set by the state). State conservation efforts in Africa have seen limits placed on access to wildlife resources through national legislation. Hunter-gatherers and some pastoralists and farmers in Africa exploit a wide array of wild animals for economic, social, and spiritual purposes. Three countries in Africa allow subsistence hunting: Botswana, Namibia, and Tanzania. In all three cases, subsistence hunting is limited to peoples of hunting and gathering origin and/or practice. The subsistence hunting activities of the Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) San of northeastern Namibia and northwestern Botswana from the 1960s through the mid-1990s are examined, and it is argued that the offtake rates of hunters appear to be sustainable. The acquisition of surplus meat is sometimes done for purposes of storage and to share meat with other people in order to reinforce social relationships and provide food to those who do not hunt. In the 1990s community-based natural resource management programs were initiated among the Ju/'hoansi in both Namibia and Botswana. It is too early to say

whether these programs will enable the Ju/'hoansi to become economically self-sufficient.

Another strategy of promoting conservation in southern Africa which involves removing people from their ancestral lands and taking away their hunting rights is presented using the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in Botswana as an example. Changes have occurred over time in subsistence hunting strategies in the central Kalahari, with an expansion in the utilization of horses and donkeys as hunting aids. The greater efficiency of equestrian hunting has led to concerns that offtake rates are too high. The government of Botswana, therefore, decided to relocate the people of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, with the result that the social and economic well-being of the former residents of the reserve has declined. The conclusion drawn is that community-based approaches that allow local people access to and control over wildlife resources may have more positive impacts on conservation and sustainable use than those strategies that dispossess local people and reduce their access to wildlife resources.

INTRODUCTION

Hunting of wild animals was and is considered a traditional customary right of many, if not most African peoples. Throughout much of Africa's history, people exploited wild animals and plants to meet their dietary, material and spiritual needs. Although individuals in African communities generally made their own decisions about hunting, community leaders and elders often played a role in resource use and management, establishing rules, for example, about animals that should not be hunted and stipulating that they should receive certain portions of game animals that were killed (Schapera, 1943 pp. 252–262; Marks, 1976). With the establishment of colonial governments in Africa by European nations, the state assumed an even greater role in determining who had access to wildlife resources and under what conditions (Marks, 1984; Anderson and Grove, 1987). Post-colonial African governments have followed similar policies, passing legislation that regulated the use of various species and stipulating the methods, locations and timing of wildlife exploitation (Graham, 1973; Bonner, 1993).

Members of African communities generally exploited wildlife to meet subsistence needs. The concept "*subsistence*" is sometimes defined as "*resource dependence that is primarily outside the cash sector of the economy*" (Huntington, 1992 pp. 15–16). This economic definition is, in many ways, inadequate in the context of contemporary Africa since virtually all Africans, including those in remote rural areas, are integrated into the market economy. Many people in Africa sell wild animal products (e.g. bushmeat) in order to generate income (Asibey, 1974; Hart, 1978; Martin, 1983; Murray, 1983; Fa, Juste, Del Val, and Castroviejo, 1995). People also pay sizable sums of money in Africa for traditional medicines, the ingredients of which sometimes include wild animal products.

For the purposes of this paper, a distinction will be drawn between subsistence hunting and commercial hunting. Subsistence hunting, as used here, refers to the procurement of wild animals in order to meet household needs. Subsistence pro-