

# Wild Meat and Food Security in Refugee Hosting Areas

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**Reconciling development and conservation imperatives is particularly prominent in refugee situations in north-western Tanzania, where the needs of vulnerable livelihoods and diminishing wildlife populations need to be addressed together**

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Since 1993, Tanzania has been host to one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the world and certainly the largest population within Africa. Refugee numbers peaked at 800 000 but have since reduced to around a half million people. Tanzania is also one of the world's most resource-rich countries, with bountiful wildlife and diverse ecosystems. The close proximity of wild animals to large refugee populations has had significant conservation implications.



Simon Milledge / TRAFFIC

Tanzania hosts the largest refugee population in Africa, around 548 000, almost two-thirds of them residing in formal refugee camps

Focusing on north-western Tanzania, a recent study<sup>1</sup> by TRAFFIC was a first attempt to understand the conservation and livelihood implications of wild meat use in refugee situations. The report's findings suggest the need for a broader range of policy and programme responses that address the root causes and drivers of wild meat use. With a more expansive approach, it may be possible to balance the food security and livelihood needs of both refugees and local communities while also ensuring the stability of adjacent wildlife populations.

Demand for wild meat has been driven partly by insufficient refugee food rations that fail to supply any meat protein whatsoever.

Refugees have been criminalized for seeking to secure what is regarded as an essential part of the local diet.

The illegal harvest and trade of wild meat has led to serious wildlife declines and represents lost development opportunities for Tanzania.

## Serious wildlife declines

The demand for wild meat has caused wildlife populations to plummet in areas surrounding refugee camps. Within less than a year of an influx of refugees in Kagera in mid-1994, poaching escalated to a massive scale. It was estimated that about 7.5 tons of wild meat, equivalent to 60 wild animals, were illegally hunted and supplied to the two main refugee camps of Benaco and Kilale Hill each week, where up to 450 000 refugees were hosted.

A comparison of wildlife surveys suggests some species declined by 60-90% in nearby protected areas between 1990 and 1998. In Burigi and Biharamulo Game Reserves, many large herbivores such as Buffalo *Synceros caffer*, Eland *Taurotragus oryx* and Sable Antelope *Hippotragus niger* declined. In the Moyowosi and Kigosi Game Reserves, species declines were recorded for Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius*, Common Zebra *Equus burchelli*, Roan *Hippotragus equines*, Sable Antelope and Sitatunga *Tragelaphus spekei* amongst other species. In all cases, illegal hunting for wild meat was identified as the primary cause of decline.

In Gombe National Park, decreasing numbers have been noted for several wildlife species including Buffalo, Zebra, Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus* and Duiker *Cephalophus* spp. Available evidence also indicates a significant decline in Gombe's Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* population in the southern portion of the park, where nearby villages have large Congolese immigrant populations which traditionally eat primate meat.

Poaching for wild meat has led to a serious decline in chimpanzee numbers in Gombe National Park



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# Key Findings

**Three major policy issues associated with wildlife declines and the influencing factors are relevant to wildlife and refugee camp management:**

**Demand for wild meat has been greatly increased by insufficient refugee food rations**

The main driver behind wild meat consumption and trade has been food insecurity stemming from insufficient refugee food rations, and specifically the lack of meat protein. Despite the efforts of the World Food Programme (WFP) and its partners, the minimum requirement of 2100 calories per day has not always been met due to logistical problems or lack of donor funds. Food shortages have resulted in rations falling as low as 1400 calories per refugee per day. In addition, rations do not include animal meat, which is culturally and nutritionally a core part of most African diets.

Due to policy and economic constraints, very few refugees are allowed to keep domestic livestock such as goats, pigs and poultry for domestic consumption and sale. Refugees respond to a shortage of sustenance in a number of ways, including theft, the bartering or sale of rations, and forced migration. Another strategy to cope with food insecurity is to exit the camp perimeter to hunt for wild meat illegally or establish hunting and trade networks with local residents who can move more freely to supply meat.

**Refugees are being unfairly criminalized for seeking to secure food, a basic humanitarian right**

The illegal nature of wild meat exploitation has meant that refugee involvement often reinforces and exacerbates local resentment of their presence, particularly on the part of government authorities. This is despite the fact that local host populations also trade and consume wild meat from illegal sources themselves, and sometimes through the engagement of refugees.

While relatively high rates of crime are evident in refugee hosting areas, prison statistics indicate that refugees are

not more likely to commit a crime than members of the host population. Nevertheless, a disproportionate number of refugees seem to have been arrested for wildlife poaching. For example, 87% of arrested poachers in Kagera Region were refugees in the mid-1990s.

Taken together, these statistics point to the fact that refugees were and are being criminalized for seeking to secure what is supposed to be a basic requirement in terms of local food culture. In essence, refugees have been twice penalized: first, their need for basic food requirements has not always been satisfied and second, their own attempts to meet them are inevitably illegal due to the lack of alternative legal avenues.

**The decline in wildlife and the illegal nature of wild meat use represents lost development opportunities**

Locally, wildlife declines represent lost opportunities for wildlife revenues for governments and surrounding communities. In Kagera Region, for example, trophy hunting revenues are the most tangible financial benefits from wildlife accrued by government. As a result of illegal poaching, declines in wildlife populations reduced hunting revenues to the local government more than four-fold between 1991 and 1996, representing a major negative impact.

However, there is another side to the issue. Local Tanzanians are also involved in the harvest and sale of wild meat to refugees. In a part of the country with few other income-generating options, the potential income from the sale of wild meat is undoubtedly too lucrative to ignore. At the same time, the illegal nature of this trade limits the ability of government authorities to regulate and capture associated revenues. Further, the absence of a greater stake in the management of local resources has meant that local Tanzanians have few incentives to participate, opting instead to mine the resource base unsustainably for individual gain to the greatest extent possible.

Tanzanians near Lugufu refugee camp preparing for hunting excursion



# Recommendations

With the large-scale repatriation of refugees back to Rwanda, the scale of the wild meat trade in refugee situations has undoubtedly dropped since the mid-1990s. Still, the remaining refugee camps continue to be a serious threat to local wildlife populations. The range of drivers behind wild meat use in the Kagera and Kigoma regions suggest a need for diverse policy responses to the issue, since one approach alone cannot hope to address the underlying causes and influences of wild meat usage in refugee hosting areas. Four generic recommendations are offered to mitigate negative impacts:

## Alternatives to wildlife law enforcement need to be explored and tried

Due to the illegality of wild meat trade, law enforcement and other measures to enhance protected area management capacity have been the main strategies of the government to date. Wildlife law enforcement will continue to be important, particularly in the case of endangered or valuable species like Chimpanzee or African Elephant *Loxodonta africana*. However, enforcement-related interventions have their limitations and are not appropriate in all circumstances. Further, such approaches do not appear to be protecting remaining wildlife populations successfully.

Alongside enforcement, the instigation of different strategies, including incentive-based approaches that are culturally acceptable and economically viable, would probably be much more effective in addressing a food security issue with major conservation and livelihood implications.

### Study area



Tanzania, with approximate study area in north-west boxed

First, the possibility of a legal, controlled wild meat trade should be explored, even if only on a seasonal basis and in certain areas. The wildlife policy provides for such a possibility and the establishment of Wildlife Management Areas could facilitate local stewardship of wildlife resources. Moreover, certain species such as Bushpig *Potamocheirus* spp., Bushbuck and some Duikers can withstand a relatively high level of hunting pressure and could be candidates for sustainable offtake.

Second, a study into the feasibility of ranching or farming certain wildlife species specifically for meat production in north-western Tanzania should be conducted jointly by government and members of the development and conservation communities, with a primary focus on increasing meat availability inside the refugee camps.

Third, it would be prudent to promote off-farm and non-farm income-generating activities to local communities and refugees, to help provide alternative sources of household revenue. Increased disposable incomes could enable people to buy livestock meat and potentially reduce wild meat demands



Waiting for repatriation - children born in refugee camps

## The management of refugee camps must take better account of potential negative impacts on surrounding wildlife and habitats

While a lot of environment-related lessons have been learned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and implementing partners, greater attention needs to be paid to wildlife issues in terms of refugee camp management in Africa. Currently, a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy is practised throughout the refugee camps of western Tanzania, effectively ignoring the important role wildlife ultimately plays in meeting refugee nutritional requirements, as well as the range of detrimental conservation impacts.

During the response phase to humanitarian crises, wild meat considerations should form part of the contingency planning process for refugee emergencies in addition to the range of other environmental considerations. Monitoring and evaluation, including the collection of baseline information, should include trade and use of wild meat. Monitoring indicators should also reflect wildlife populations and wildlife-based revenue data where relevant.

Representatives from the wildlife sector should be part of inter-agency co-ordination mechanisms to help ensure the wild meat issue is tabled at refugee camp, district and national levels. In areas where environmental rehabilitation and management is planned or taking place (e.g. home gardening, afforestation), measures to ensure food security should be incorporated to minimize wildlife poaching.

Most crucially, refugee relief donors – many of whom also support conservation and wildlife management programmes in Africa – should be made aware of the consequences when funding appeals are not met and food rations are cut. Many donors have already made commitments to provide minimum standards of care, but recognition is also needed of the wide range of impacts when these standards are not met.

Donors must also acknowledge that respecting the cultural preferences of refugees may sometimes require the provision of wild meat as an essential part of refugee rations. In this regard, it is worth noting that humanitarian assistance to displaced populations in Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia during the early 1990s, for example, did include the regular provision of meat protein.

The physical setting of refugee camps is another important consideration. Consultation with wildlife authorities is required when establishing new refugee camps, as well as deciding upon the closure or consolidation of existing camps.

## Effective management responses to wild meat use must involve new partnerships between conservation and humanitarian assistance actors

Beyond awareness, there is a clear need for partnership arrangements to allow the specialist knowledge of the conservation community to be linked with the long-term community-based programmes of the development community.

Within the context of refugee camp situations, it is important for conservation-orientated civil society groups to enter into dialogue and partnerships with UNHCR, WFP and other relevant implementing partners, and to agree on how best to proceed in terms of addressing the wild meat issue in the context of the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP/MKUKUTA). Two potential avenues for initiating dialogue include monthly inter-agency meetings at refugee camps as well as monthly development partners sub-group meetings on refugee issues.

**The unsustainable exploitation of wild meat in the refugee hosting areas of north-western Tanzania is a serious problem rarely acknowledged. Few understand the nutritional, health and financial benefits of wild meat consumption to refugee well-being, whilst others fail to appreciate the long-term economic and environmental impacts of unsustainable offtake.**

**Better enforcement of wildlife laws and regulations cannot address the drivers of wild meat use. Positive incentives, whether via equitable market frameworks for wild meat or provision of alternative sources of protein or livelihoods, may better address refugee needs and local development imperatives.**

**All stakeholders, from policy makers to refugee support agencies to wildlife managers, would therefore be wise to broaden the complement of policy and programme responses if unsustainable wild meat use is to be controlled.**

This project is part of TRAFFIC’s wild meat programme in East and southern Africa funded by:



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Layout and design by Richard Thomas

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the wildlife trade monitoring network

is a joint programme of

