



Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme

Sustainable Trade in Wildlife Commodities



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One of Africa's greatest resources is its rich wildlife, which underpins the growing tourist industry in most of sub-Saharan Africa. While this industry is a lucrative source of revenue, the benefits are not necessarily enjoyed by the wider community, and the demand for more land for conservation conflicts with the demand for more land for agricultural purposes. While conserving biodiversity is a global responsibility, infinite amounts of land are not available for the purpose, and this means that wildlife resources must be managed in a sustainable way. This includes trophy hunting and harvesting of wildlife as food. Commodity-based trade may facilitate the sustainable exploitation of wildlife.

Background

The teeming herds of wildlife that roamed sub-Saharan Africa and provided a source of food for our hunter-gatherer ancestors and their descendants were a cause of amazement, admiration and temptation to the early European explorers that rapidly led to over-exploitation. Before the arrival of guns, off-take of wildlife for food by

indigenous people made a sustainable contribution to population control, as did other predators. This changed with the availability of modern weapons and the demand for greater quantities of animals to supply not only meat but trophies, ivory, and other products popular in the global market. At the same time, increasing settlement and agricultural activity placed pressure on wildlife, restricting them to less and less land. When it was recognised that there was a real danger of wildlife disappearing altogether, tracts of land were set apart as nature reserves, where wildlife could be conserved. In addition, private game ranches and sometimes government-owned hunting concessions permitted wildlife to be hunted under conditions that prevented the activity from leading to their extinction.

In recent decades, conservationists have called for more extensive tracts of land to be set aside for conservation, to address the problems of nutritional stress and limited gene pools that arise as a result of limiting ability to migrate and seek new pastures. The projected increase in tourism has proven

attractive to governments. The result is the creation of transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs) that allow fences to come down between reserves situated in different countries. Some conservationists want fences to be abandoned wherever possible. Conversely, veterinarians are convinced removal of fences will result in more frequent disease outbreaks & loss of trade opportunities for livestock producers. This inevitably raises questions as to the effects of increased wildlife/livestock/human interaction in terms of the health and safety, as well as the socio-economic effects.

Wildlife conservation and livestock production – are they compatible?

Apart from predation, the major concern at the wildlife/livestock interface is disease. Various wildlife species are reservoir hosts for diseases that do not affect them at all but can be serious for livestock. The classical example is African buffalo, which can harbour foot and mouth disease viruses, but other well known examples are gnu (wildebeest) and malignant catarrhal fever and warthogs and African swine fever.

Transmission also occurs in the opposite direction, with bovine tuberculosis causing heavy losses to wildlife and bovine brucellosis having been diagnosed in African buffalo. However, mixed livestock/wildlife ranching has proven successful with careful species selection and management. It is probable that biodiversity conservation will have the best hope for sustainability if it is integrated with livestock production and other income-generating opportunities so that the socio-economic effects are positive.

There are also concerns relating to human health that have to be addressed, because 75% of zoonotic diseases are reported to have originated in wildlife. The perception that the wildlife/livestock interface is an area of potentially extra high disease transmission is certain to have a negative effect on trade in livestock or wildlife commodities unless it can be shown that the risks can be effectively managed.

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What is the role of commodity-based trade?

Commodity-based trade (CBT) offers a means to trade in animal products from potentially high-risk areas and opens up new possibilities for trade in commodities derived from game species. In spite of the fact that wildlife species may be a source of pathogens, venison is popular and often fetches good prices in export niche markets. Currently venison is usually sourced from areas free of diseases like foot and mouth disease, but there is no scientific reason why de-boned, de-glanded venison from healthy animals (as is the case for beef) should not be sourced from any area regardless of its disease status. Because CBT is based on the premise that the safety of a commodity depends on its ability to transmit disease and not the disease status of its area of origin, it has the potential to facilitate trade in livestock and wildlife commodities emanating from even the interface areas. Provided that sound scientific evidence exists that the commodity would be unable to maintain and transmit disease-causing agents because the agent could not survive in it, the commodity should be accepted as posing only an acceptable (appropriate) level of risk. The ability to obtain good prices for wildlife as well as livestock commodities would make game ranching more attractive to producers and allow more people to benefit.

Commodity-based trade therefore offers scope for better and more sustainable integration of livestock production and biodiversity conservation.

What are the key elements for trade in wildlife commodities?

- Potential markets for venison exist within and outside the region;
- International acceptance, particularly by OIE, for CBT without requirements relating to the area of origin of the commodity has been achieved;
- Producers who are interested in sustainable wildlife utilisation or mixed livestock and game production are identified and trained.