

REPORT ON CONSULTATIVE MEETING WITH KEY ACTORS IN THE BUSHMEAT INDUSTRY

THEME: ONE HEALTH – MAKING BUSHMEAT HUNTING, TRADE AND CONSUMPTION SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE



Introduction

On January 22, 2024, the Centre for Biodiversity Conservation Research, in collaboration with the University of Ghana, the Ministry of Health, and York University, convened a consultative meeting at Anita Hotel in Ejisu, Kumasi. This workshop brought together key stakeholders in the bushmeat industry, including bushmeat traders, hunters, butchers, and 'chopbar' operators. A total of forty-two participants out of the projected forty-five, were in attendance. Among them were 35 individuals directly involved in the bushmeat trade, five members of the project team, and two guests representing the Ghana Wildlife Division and Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly. Participants were given the option to bring their children if they had no one to care for them while attending the workshop. Therefore, two participants each brought along one child.

Agenda

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss strategies for ensuring the safety and sustainability of bushmeat hunting, trade, and consumption, as well as to promote collaboration among participants. The workshop agenda was designed to encourage productive discussions and cooperative problem-solving. Registration for the workshop began at 8:15 am, followed by the official start of the meeting at 8:45 am, during which all participants introduced themselves. The key agenda items included:

1. Welcome and Introduction:

- Opening remarks (Prof. Yaa Ntiamoah-Baidu).
- Purpose of meeting and overview of the workshop objectives and expected outcomes (Dr. Kofi Amponsah-Mensah).

2. Presentation:

- A presentation on the project objectives and research findings (Dr. Fidelia Ohemeng). Key challenges and opportunities were identified.
- Dr. Akosua Gyimah Omari-Sasu, the District Health Director at Ghana Health Service (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly), delivered a presentation on the health and safety considerations related to bushmeat trade and consumption. The presentation was conducted in both English and Twi, ensuring comprehension among all participants, as Twi is widely spoken in Ghana.

3. Breakout Sessions:

- Participants were divided into three breakout groups to encourage focused discussions. These were facilitated by Dr. Kofi Amponsah-Mensah, Dr. Fidelia Ohemeng and Dr. Emmanuel Ankrah Odame. Every group deliberated on the different challenges encountered in their daily activities and brainstormed potential solutions to these challenges.

4. Plenary Discussions:

- Facilitators from each breakout group presented their results.
- Open discussions were carried out on common themes, differences of opinion, and potential solutions.

5. Action Planning:

- Identification of key action points and strategies.
- Assignment of responsibilities and timelines.

6. Closing Remarks:

- Summary of key takeaways.
- Expression of gratitude to participants for their active engagement.



Figure 1: Resource persons who facilitated the consultative workshop.



Figure 2: Participants at the consultative meeting on the Women Rise project

Outcomes: The workshop yielded numerous valuable results, which included:

1) **Identification of Key Issues:**

- i. One important issue highlighted during the workshop was the absence of a national association where participants could address their concerns. Several participants, who had inherited their businesses from previous generations, noted the existence of a national group about 40 years ago, which is currently inactive. Furthermore, hunters in Jachie stated that there was once a functioning hunters' group in the area, but it is currently inactive. This absence poses challenges in regulating meat prices. Both traders and hunters therefore expressed a desire to establish a new association that could accommodate bushmeat traders and hunters.
- ii. Furthermore, although many individuals expressed a preference for bushmeat due to its palatability and high quality compared to other protein sources like chicken, goat meat, and beef, they often found it unaffordable due to its high cost. The queenmother of bushmeat traders in Atwemonom pointed out that the increasing cost of bushmeat is attributable to human settlements encroaching on forested areas and clearing bushes nearby. Hence, hunters must venture farther from urban centres to obtain bushmeat, resulting in higher transportation costs and increased involvement of middlemen in the trade. Additionally, some hunters mentioned that 'chopbar' (Traditional eateries in Ghana) operators contribute to the inflated prices of bushmeat by reselling it at significantly higher rates. Chopbar Feeling unfairly treated, hunters consequently raise their selling prices to these 'chopbar' operators. Also, traders attributed the high cost of bushmeat to the fact that 'chopbar' operators offered hunters more money for their meat, leading hunters to prioritize selling to them over other buyers, thus inflating prices at 'chopbars'. However, the 'chopbar' operators disagreed with this assertion.
- iii. Some hunters disregarded the closed season, leading to numerous problems for them and notably impacting bushmeat availability due to the risk of over-harvesting.
- iv. Incidents of harassment by wildlife officers during the closed season were reported. Several bushmeat traders voiced their grievances, citing instances from the previous year when their bushmeat was confiscated despite having acquired it well before the closure of the hunting season. In response, the meeting chair, Prof. Yaa Ntiamoa-Baidu urged Dr. Meyir Ziekah, the wildlife officer, to address these concerns, emphasizing the unfair treatment experienced by the traders. It was proposed that a mechanism be established to verify that traders obtained their meat before the closed season. Such a system is already operational at the Atwemonom bushmeat market in Kumasi and could serve as a model for addressing similar issues in other locations.

Furthermore, traders proposed that strict enforcement of the law should be in place during the closed season to prevent hunters from supplying bushmeat, as they would purchase it if offered. Additionally, some traders voiced concerns about sourcing bushmeat from neighboring countries, particularly Ivory Coast, and argued against being compelled to surrender such meat during the closed season. They acknowledged the illegality of hunting bushmeat in Ivory Coast and admitted to illegally transporting their goods across borders. Dr. Ziekah emphasized the importance of discontinuing this practice, warning of the potential introduction of zoonotic diseases into the country.

Furthermore, the group noted a deficiency in veterinary inspection of bushmeat, highlighting the need for enhancement to ensure that all meat undergoes inspection before being sold to consumers just like the protocol followed for domestic animals.

- v. The hunters expressed dissatisfaction with the high cost of purchased guns and bullets compared to locally manufactured ones. Therefore, they suggested that locally made bullets should be more readily available. Dr. Ziekah cautioned hunters to purchase guns and ammunition exclusively from licensed vendors since no entity has been given the legal rights to manufacture guns and ammunition in the country.
- vi. In Goaso, hunters reported that they are prohibited from hunting during the dry season, which is within the open season, due to rampant bushfires set by individuals believed to be hunters. They expressed frustration over their meat being confiscated during bushfires, even when they were not responsible. Dr. Ziekah offered to contact the Regional manager in the area to address these concerns and find a mutually beneficial resolution.
- vii. Traders expressed concerns about the increasing trend of individuals unfamiliar with the trade purchasing and selling unwholesome meat sourced from other hunters and traders. They requested measures to monitor and regulate this practice to safeguard consumers from purchasing substandard meat.
- viii. According to some of the hunters present, most of the forests have been converted into cocoa farms displacing the animals and making it hard to find bush animals when they go for hunting. They requested that this be controlled so that the business will be sustained. Dr. Ziekah noted that the government of Ghana has been promoting cocoa farming in those areas, thus explaining the observation.
- ix. Another concern arose regarding the mortality of small mammals due to the application of herbicides by farmers on their fields. A farmer from Northern Ghana reported this issue, indicating that small mammals suffer adverse effects when consuming crops treated with herbicides, with even sheep and donkeys being affected.

- x. Some traders acknowledged their role in the issue, admitting to not fully complying with restrictions during the closed season, which contributes to the depletion of animal stock.

2) Collaborative Solutions:

○ Results from the breakout session (Ways to ensure the sustainability of the trade)

- i) Establishment of a national association for bushmeat traders as a platform for addressing their concerns.
- ii) There is infrequent monitoring by veterinary officers to oversee bushmeat traders hence some individuals carry out inappropriate and unsafe practices which affect the trade.
- iii) The activities of 'galamsey' (illegal gold mining) operations, chainsaw operators, deliberate firesetting, and cattle herders must be regulated, as they have had adverse effects on the trade, particularly hunting. These activities drive animals deeper into the forests, rendering them harder to hunt, consequently leading to a significant decline in the initial catch and driving up the price of bushmeat.
- iv) It has been observed that the reproductive cycles of many bush animals appear to have shifted, prompting a need for a review of the closed season duration. Some suggested extending the closed season from August to January to accommodate the animals' birthing periods before capture. However, concerns were raised regarding the implications for trade during the extended closed season. As a result, some participants disagreed with this proposal. Bushmeat traders should be helped financially to have other sources of income during the closed season.
- v) Some of the traders suggested that they suspect that female bushmeat traders are not respected as much as men who trade in beef and other sources of protein. Thus, they emphasised the importance of protecting them and advocated for the establishment of a national association to ensure their recognition and safety.
- vi) Unlicensed bushmeat traders often lack the experience of their licensed counterparts, resulting in the sale of unwholesome products. Establishing a bushmeat trade association could help mitigate such issues.
- vii) Veterinary officers should always be invited to inspect animals before they are sold and consumed.

- viii) Provision of storage facilities for meat during the closed season is essential, as the current limited storage space prevents them from purchasing an adequate amount of meat beforehand.
- ix) Misrepresentation of bushmeat trade issues by radio and television stations has had a detrimental impact on the business in the past. Such misinformation should be monitored, and instead of advocating for a complete cessation of bushmeat consumption, accurate education should be promoted.
- x) Grasscutter farmers pose a significant challenge to their trade by often criticizing the traditional bushmeat trade to promote their products. They suggest that rather than alienating these farmers, efforts should be made to include them in bushmeat trade discussions, especially since they occasionally supply traders when hunter stocks diminish, particularly during the closed season. Involving them in such meetings could reduce their condemnation of the traditional bushmeat trade. Dr. Meyir Ziekah, however, noted that grasscutter rearers fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture, which actively encourages grasscutter farming, making it difficult to halt their activities. He expressed willingness to address these concerns.
- xi) Financial assistance should be provided to help them settle the debts accumulated as a result of the difficulties they encountered during the COVID-19 outbreak. A trader shared that during this period of reduced patronage, one of her young sons had to take up menial jobs for about three months to support the family until she could stabilize her business again.
- xii) During the closed season, traders asked for the government provide support for them. This assistance would guarantee rigorous compliance with regulations, particularly given that bushmeat trading constitutes the main source of income for numerous traders. Support might take the shape of financial aid or job opportunities, thereby effectively discouraging illegal hunting during the closed season. Dr. Ziekah urged hunters and traders to explore grasscutter farming as a potential alternative income source during the closed season.
- xiii) In conclusion, one trader urged everyone to prioritize integrity and honesty in their transactions, emphasizing that such values are crucial for ensuring the success of any interventions implemented for the collective benefit of all.

○ **Results from the breakout session (Ways to ensure the safety of the trade)**

- i) It was recommended that bushmeat traders adopt good hygiene practices. Many participants acknowledged the potential for bushmeat to carry diseases such as Ebola, underscoring the importance of implementing safe practices to safeguard both themselves and consumers. These practices include regular and thorough handwashing, wearing appropriate attire while working, and using gloves when handling bushmeat. However, concerns were raised about consumer discomfort with traders wearing gloves, highlighting the need for widespread public education on the health and safety aspects of the bushmeat trade. Some traders found it impractical to wear gloves while selling meat and suggested that thicker gloves could be used only when handling meat from freezers.

On the other hand, a trader from Mankessim indicated that bushmeat could not harbour diseases; but rather it requires proper preparation with spices to ensure its safety for consumption. This viewpoint was corroborated by a smoked bushmeat trader in Mankessim. Additionally, some of the traders admitted that they had no idea that bushmeat could harbour zoonotic diseases until researchers and wildlife authorities educated them on these issues. Hunters also acknowledged the potential for bushmeat to harbor diseases, noting that they occasionally observed signs of illness in animals during their activities in the bush. Hunters should be encouraged to release animals that look unhealthy when they capture them.

- ii) It was also recommended meat be washed with salt to eliminate some bacteria before processing ensuring its safety for consumption. ‘Chopbar’ operators, in particular, were encouraged to adopt this practice before serving meat to customers.
- iii) Bushmeat traders were advised to keep their fingernails trimmed to avoid introducing germs to the meat. Buyers should also be educated not to touch the displayed meat for sale to prevent the introduction of germs.
- iv) Regular handwashing and cleaning of trading equipment, especially the chopping blocks used by traders, are essential to prevent the sale of unwholesome products.

3) **Actionable Plans:**

Attendees were tasked with proposing the most effective method for establishing the national association. One suggestion involved compiling lists from various regional groups to create an official entity, for example Atwemonom Bushmeat Traders and Hunters

Association. Some existing groups, like the Atwemonom Bushmeat Market, Mankessim Bushmeat Group, and Techiman Bushmeat Group, already had well-established systems in place. These groups would then select representatives to convene in another workshop aimed at discussing the next steps toward forming a national association for bushmeat traders. To ensure success, traders were encouraged to welcome new members into the group.

Next Steps

A follow-up strategy was devised to monitor the advancement of the identified action items. Narkie Nartey was tasked with maintaining regular communication to facilitate ongoing collaboration and information exchange among the stakeholders. Each attending group was allotted a two-month timeline (from the meeting date to the end of March) to submit the names and contact details of their respective leaders. These leaders would convene at a later date for additional discussions regarding the establishment of a national association.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the consultative meeting was productive, fostering collaboration and open communication among participants. Through fruitful discussions and shared insights, key priorities were identified and strategies devised to address challenges facing the bushmeat trade. Stakeholders were encouraged to remain committed to the goals and objectives outlined. Furthermore, all stakeholders were encouraged to maintain regular communication and cooperation in the decision-making processes. Assigning responsibilities and fostering cooperation is crucial for monitoring progress. The outcomes will contribute to the success of the project and enhance the overall effectiveness of the team.