
The role of social institutions in determining peoples' access to meat from hunting in northern Republic of Congo and implications for food security

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Abstract

The over-hunting of wildlife in Central Africa, coined the 'bushmeat crisis', has serious implications for the food security of people dependent upon this protein and energy source. This study examines how hunters with different levels of wealth and vulnerability access meat, and how this varies in relation to the hunt harvest. The aim of the research is to explore the social institutions that govern access to meat, how these institutions affect peoples' access to meat from hunts, and understand possible food security implications of changing hunt harvests due the reducing abundance of wildlife in these forest areas. The results show that in areas where wildlife is more abundant and harvests are higher, there are clear advantages for both wealthy and vulnerable hunters, but in those areas with depleted wildlife stocks the most vulnerable individuals suffer disproportionately while wealthier hunters appear able to maintain their benefits from the hunt. The research highlights the high degree to which social institutions and underlying power relations act to control access to benefits from bushmeat, and argues that policies aimed solely to ensure biologically sustainable use of wildlife will not be sufficient to ensure bushmeat continues to contribute to peoples' food security in northern Congo.

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