

WP1 The cultural meaning of hunting Ketil Skogen

Work package overview

Hunting is an extremely important mode of human-nature interaction. How people think about this interaction is closely linked to culture patterns and value systems. To address hunting merely as a relationship between humans and animals, and manage it accordingly, will miss essential dimensions of hunting as a social practice. In spite of this, hunting in modern societies has received limited attention from the social sciences. One of the objectives of HUNT has been to remedy this situation.

We have used qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups and observation) because we were investigating *meaning in context*, something which is difficult to do with quantitative methods, and because pre-existing knowledge was limited. We needed the flexibility and openness of qualitative methods to capture the unexpected and to probe cultural meaning with sufficient depth. We adopted a grounded approach in the sense that we did not presuppose a fixed theoretical framework. This has generated a number of analytical paths or “sub-projects” that are not easily summarized under a few headings. Because of this diversity we can only provide selected examples here. We encourage interested readers to follow the website and refer to publications (see list below) as they are made available online.



1.3 Bushmeat hunting in western Serengeti (Tanzania) and the Omo valley (Ethiopia)

Anke Fischer

Background

Illegal hunting is often addressed through increased law enforcement and the creation of monetary or material incentives. However, as well as formal rules, informal norms could also help reduce illegal hunting. We investigated the role of informal institutions and other cultural factors that shape bushmeat hunting in western Serengeti and in the Omo valley.

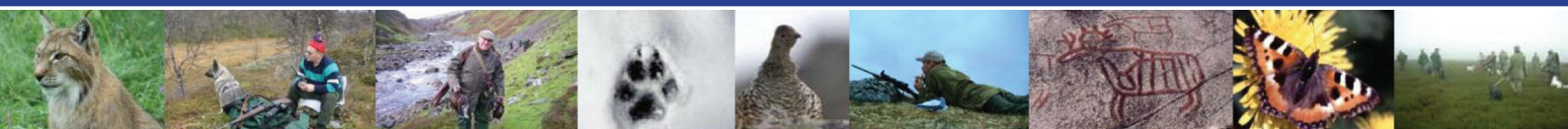
Key findings

In the recent past, clan-specific social norms worked as taboos and prohibited the hunting of certain species around Serengeti. However, these rules have been eroded: people are moving from a subsistence to a market economy, and cultural and ethnic groups are mixing. Traditional religious beliefs are being replaced by modern religious beliefs, such as Christianity, and

traditional authorities are no longer respected. In Omo, our results indicated that hunting was important for establishing relationships between people, but did not appear to be relevant for developing relationships with nature or wildlife, or developing knowledge about the natural environment. This strong focus on social relations may contribute to the disappearance of hunting and its social functions, because it also leads to over-hunting.

Bushmeat hunting is usually described as an activity carried out by men. However, we learnt that women play an important role, both in Serengeti and in the Omo valley. Women play a strong indirect role by actively encouraging men to go hunting. For example, women in Serengeti are widely seen to prefer men who hunt as partners. Women encourage men to go hunting

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because (1) they prefer bushmeat over other food, (2) they use the cash obtained from selling bushmeat to purchase household items, and (3) because they prefer not to wait for or to rely on uncertain crop cultivation. Women in the Omo valley encourage hunting through a variety of (often ritualised) means. Due to its persistent cultural importance, hunting both contributes to and is encouraged by the definition of gender roles in Omo.

Conclusions

Informal institutions can be powerful tools to constrain bushmeat hunting, but are vulnerable to social change. As it may be impossible (or undesirable) to restore previously active norms, alternative social norms that are compatible with modern society should be encouraged. Conservation interventions should pay attention to those areas where hunting is currently limited due to social norms that are still in place. Interventions that aim to address bushmeat hunting should focus not only on men, but also take the role of women into account.

Read more in:

A summary of research findings from the Ethiopian case study, <http://fp7hunt.net/Portals/HUNT/Publikasjoner/factsheets/HUSA%20research%20briefings%20Ethiopia%20June%202012.pdf>

A summary of research findings from the Tanzanian case study, <http://fp7hunt.net/Portals/HUNT/Publikasjoner/factsheets/HUSA%20research%20briefings%20Tanzania%20April%202012.pdf>

Further reading:

Lowassa, A., D. Tadie & A. Fischer (in press).
On the role of women in bushmeat hunting –
insights from Tanzania and Ethiopia.
Journal of Rural Studies.

Abstract:

The role of women in natural resource use has been a recurrent theme in social scientific research, especially in relation to developing countries. In contrast to much of this literature which focuses on differences and tensions between female and male roles, we argue that the interplay between and complementarity of such gendered roles might be highly relevant in understanding contested resource use, but are often neglected. We explore here the role of women in illegal hunting, specifically bushmeat hunting in eastern Africa. Using qualitative data from two sites, lower Omo in Ethiopia and western Serengeti in Tanzania, we found that in both places women, while not actively hunting, played a strong role through a variety of verbal and non-verbal behaviours that motivated male hunting and discouraged their non-hunting. Hunting activities were highly gendered and driven by the interplay between male and female roles, which served to maintain these activities despite strong disincentives from legislation and conservation and development interventions. In contrast to the current literature on women and natural resource use, we thus found that gendered roles complemented and reinforced each other. We discuss implications for research on gender, environment and development, and for the design of conservation-oriented interventions.



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