

# Briefing

**Biodiversity; Natural resource management**

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## Policy pointers

**Funders of wild meat** alternative projects should ensure they have strong feasibility criteria, including considerations for long-term funding and technical support. Our five key criteria can provide a useful starting point.

**Designers and implementers** of wild meat alternative projects need to recognise the diversity of reasons that people choose to eat wild meat and their needs and aspirations for participating in such projects.

**Policymakers should** follow the Convention on Biological Diversity's Voluntary Guidance for a Sustainable Wild Meat Sector, ensuring that wild meat alternative projects properly account for local realities, cultures and preferences.

**Project designers are** encouraged to use IIED's five-step project design guidance, and similar tools, when planning wild meat alternative projects, to ensure they succeed.

## Wild meat: developing alternatives through good project design

In many rural areas worldwide, wild meat plays a crucial role in people's diet. However, its overexploitation in some areas puts food security, rural livelihoods and biodiversity conservation at risk. One way to tackle these challenges is to establish wild meat alternative projects. But to ensure these succeed, we need to understand why people eat wild meat and what alternatives are acceptable. This briefing argues for 'back to basics' project design, drawing on IIED and partner guidance. This should be based on fundamental principles that reflect the reality and preferences of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) through participatory processes. Good project design, as part of national, regional and global wild meat strategies, will contribute to a more sustainable wild meat sector.

Wild meat (commonly called bushmeat) is meat taken from animals captured in the wild, such as insects, reptiles, fish, birds and mammals. Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) have hunted and consumed wild animals for millennia. In many rural areas this is a low-impact, sustainable activity. However, in others, hunting and wild meat consumption far outstrips supply, threatening to undermine biodiversity conservation, rural livelihoods and food security.

The trade and consumption of wild meat play critical roles in delivering on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including on poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and life below water and on land (SDG 14, 15).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework proposes targets that include ensuring that the harvesting, trade and

use of wild species is sustainable, legal and safe for human health, and that people's needs are met through sustainable use and benefit sharing — including benefits related to nutrition, food security, livelihoods, health and wellbeing.

In 2018, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Voluntary Guidance for a Sustainable Wild Meat Sector. The guidance notes that wild meat projects "need to take into account local realities, cultures and preferences and should be developed and implemented with Indigenous Peoples and local communities or support community-based income projects" and must include "the development of culturally acceptable and economically feasible alternative food" sources. This recognises that strategies to achieve a sustainable wild meat sector that meets people's needs will include wild meat alternative projects (see Box 1).

## To avoid the current pitfalls of wild meat alternative projects, they must be viable from the outset

Despite significant investment, the effectiveness of wild meat alternative projects is largely unknown,<sup>2,3</sup> and it is common to hear anecdotal evidence of abandoned, failed wild meat alternative projects. This is mainly because projects do not meet basic feasibility criteria for effective project design, or fail to respond to why people choose to eat wild meat, and what alternatives they want.

Our UK Darwin Initiative-funded project 'Why Eat Wild Meat' provides valuable insights for those planning and designing wild meat alternative projects. From this we have compiled a practical guide to better design wild meat alternative projects, particularly in rural contexts — 'Wild Meat Alternative Projects: Practical Guidance for Project Design' (see Figure 1). Drawing on this guide, our briefing highlights some of key areas where revisiting project basics could ensure better project design.

### Probing project feasibility

To avoid the current pitfalls of wild meat alternative projects, they must be viable from the outset.

Step 1 of the guide proposes that funders and project implementers apply five feasibility criteria,<sup>4</sup> to ensure projects are effective:

1. Long-term donor commitment
2. Hands-on technical assistance for project participants
3. Local support for projects, including free, prior and informed consent
4. Multidisciplinary partnerships
5. Research skills for understanding the current situation.

The prevalence of small, short-term grants is undermining the success of wild meat alternative projects, resulting in insufficient resources for project design, monitoring and evaluation, and hands-on support to project participants.<sup>5</sup> Longer funding cycles and realistic timeframes for scale up and implementation are key. Long-term technical support is also needed, which could include:

- 1) Sharing best practice, and open and honest learning about why projects succeed and fail
- 2) Mentoring for improving theory of change and project monitoring and evaluation
- 3) Practical guidance and requirements for recognising IPLC values and priorities.

### Box 1. What are wild meat alternative projects?

Wild meat alternative projects — often referred to as 'alternative protein projects' — have been a key feature of conservation programmes for decades. Typically, they are used to reduce pressure on endangered wild species. Aiming to achieve food security and biodiversity conservation, they encourage people to move away from consuming wild meat, through the introduction of small livestock such as chickens and pigs, insect or plant-based food choices, or sustainable fishing. Some projects introduce an alternative income-generating activity such as tourism guiding, beekeeping, livestock rearing or agroforestry.

This briefing focuses on projects that are intended to provide an alternative source of food rather than providing alternative income sources.

### Understanding the diversity of drivers

Wild meat alternative projects are commonly based on flawed assumptions which undermine many of them. These include assumptions about substitution (ie an alternative food source may supplement rather than substitute for another food source); community homogeneity (ie a community is not one, it includes people of different ages, genders, ethnicities — with varied preferences and needs); and impact scalability (ie what works in one community will not necessarily work elsewhere).<sup>6</sup> These assumptions are often based on inadequate information about people's needs, aspirations and the factors that influence why they choose to eat wild meat.<sup>7</sup> Too often this leads to interventions that are inappropriate for a particular community. Investing in inclusive project design that asks the right questions and accounts for IPLC's perspectives is crucial to improve the effectiveness of wild meat alternative projects.

We draw attention to two key aspects for improving project design: exploring **why** people eat wild meat and investigating **what** types of wild meat alternative project would work best.

Figure 1. Practical guidance for the design of wild meat alternative projects<sup>14</sup>



People in rural areas choose to eat wild meat for varied reasons — availability, affordability, taste preferences, tradition, religion and culture, for example.<sup>8</sup> Eating wild meat is a **choice** informed by emotional and physical attachment.

Fully exploring, during project design, **why** people choose to eat wild meat is essential for building a culturally respectful, as well as sustainable, wild meat sector.<sup>9</sup>

The project's research team interviewed people in four villages around the Dja Faunal Reserve in Cameroon. It found that ease of access, taste and perceived health benefits were important, and under-recognised, drivers of wild meat consumption (see Box 2 and Figure 2).

Secondly, investigating **what** type of wild meat alternative project is appropriate for a particular community is also vital. Projects can take many forms depending on decisions, for example, about who is best to target (eg women or men), what interventions/outcomes are needed (eg income, food or both), at what scale (eg household or community) and with what — if any — conditions (eg benefits conditional on no hunting). These decisions are often made by technical advisors, who may overlook IPLC's perspectives. For example, if a project requires different groups to work together it is key to understand power dynamics within and between households<sup>10</sup> to avoid mistrust<sup>7</sup> and risk exacerbating inequalities and conflict. One approach that can be used is scenario-based interviews (see Box 3).

### The way forward

With mounting concerns over the role of the wild meat trade in zoonotic disease transmission — driven by questions about COVID-19's origins — we anticipate a rise in interest in wild meat alternative projects. Indeed, this may be intensified by international calls for bans on wildlife consumption and trade. Such demands, however, risk exacerbating food insecurity, driving land use change,<sup>11</sup> undermining human rights, damaging conservation incentives and harming sustainable development.<sup>12</sup>

Achieving a sustainable wild meat sector requires moving away from ad hoc, small-scale projects to designing comprehensive strategies including multiple interventions (ie not just wild meat alternative projects) along wild meat value chains.<sup>13</sup> Wild meat alternative projects can be an important part of building towards a sustainable wild meat sector. Yet currently many fall short of expectations. Where they are implemented as part of global, regional and national wild meat strategies, they need to be culturally respectful and respond to the diverse

### Box 2. Study: why eat wild meat? The role of taste, health and tradition in rural Cameroon

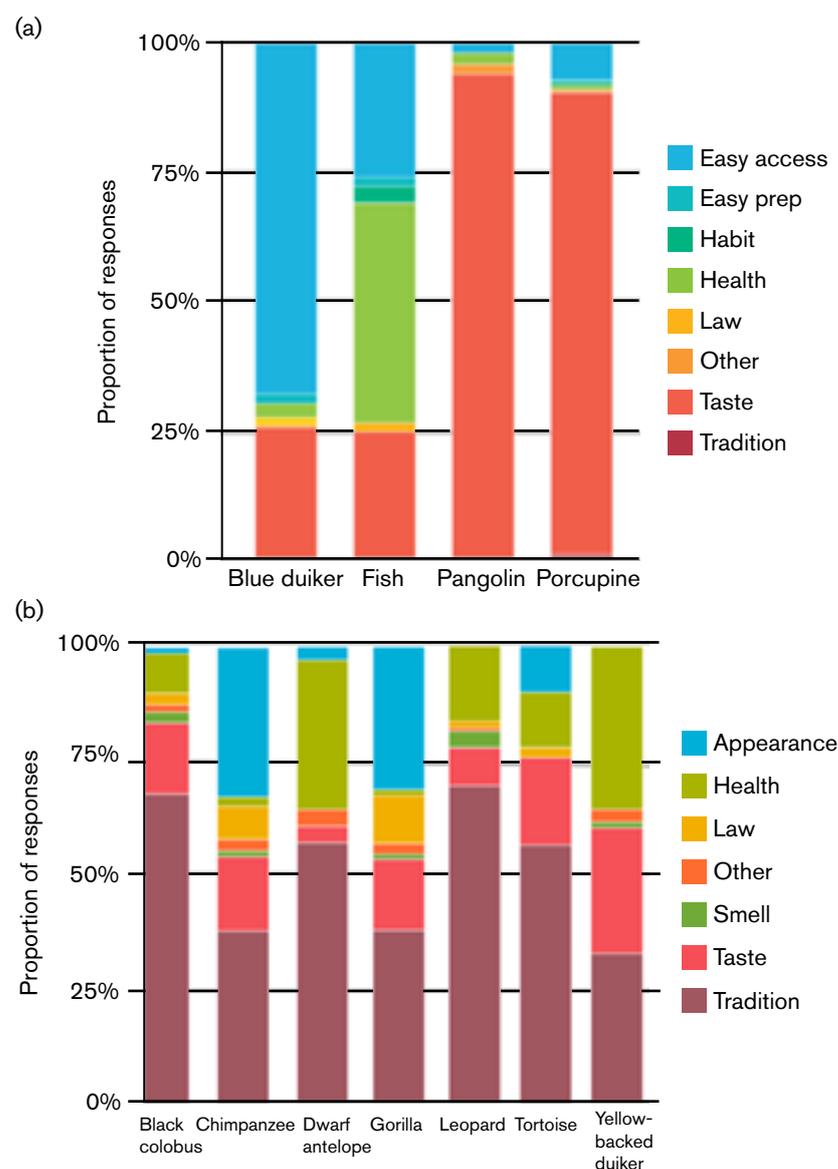
From April–June 2019, we carried out semi-structured interviews with 542 people in four villages in rural Cameroon. Figure 2 shows the species that were cited as preferred and avoided, and the reasons why.

Taste was an important reason why people chose to eat pangolin species and brush-tailed porcupine. Perceived health benefits were an important reason why people chose to eat fish species (seen to be lighter on the stomach than dark meats).

Tradition was a prominent reason cited for avoiding the consumption of some species, particularly leopard and black colobus. These species were regarded in two of the study villages as totem species and 'spirits of the forest'.

This challenges dominant narratives that consumption of wild meat in rural contexts is mainly driven by availability, ease of access and affordability. Other factors like enjoyment, taste, health and tradition — often seen as secondary — can be just as important.

Figure 2. The reasons cited for a) preferring or b) avoiding each species, shown for species cited by >10% of participants.



### Box 3. Using scenarios to explore assumptions

Scenario-based interviews can be used to predict the responses of people who might be involved in a project. Discussing the future provides valuable insight into not only how people are likely to respond to the scenarios presented, but also why they might respond that way. This information is valuable for informing the assumptions made in project design.

During research in rural Cameroon, the research team used this approach to understand how people's hunting and consumption might change over the next five years under different project scenarios. They found that projects offering both food and income generating opportunities were 10–25 times more likely to reduce household hunting and wild meat consumption, compared to subsistence-only projects. Due to concerns over fair benefit sharing, levels of household hunting or wild meat consumption were unlikely to change if a project provided benefits to a group/collective of individuals, rather than directly to the household.

reasons why people consume wild meat. Our guide supports this process and can be used alongside the CBD's guidance to develop viable alternatives. This will lead to projects that ultimately help countries meet their objectives for sustainable wildlife management as

required by the SDGs and Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

#### Francesca Booker and Stephanie Brittain

Francesca Booker is a researcher in IIED's Natural Resources Group. Stephanie Brittain is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oxford.

### Notes

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## Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges.

Fondation Camerounaise de la Terre Vivante (FCTV) is an independent NGO based in Cameroon which promotes sustainable development and community-driven solutions to environmental problems.

The Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science (ICCS) is an academic research group based in the Department of Zoology, the University of Oxford. ICCS works at the interface of social and ecological systems.

Living Earth is part of the Conservation Foundation and its focus is to build the environmental, social and economic resilience of communities.

### Contact

Francesca Booker  
[francesca.booker@iied.org](mailto:francesca.booker@iied.org)

Stephanie Brittain  
[stephanie.brittain@zoo.ox.ac.uk](mailto:stephanie.brittain@zoo.ox.ac.uk)

Third Floor, 235 High Holborn  
London, WC1V 7DN  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399  
[www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)

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