THE TIME FOR MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY IS NOW

Private actors helping to achieve Aichi Target 11
Privately Protected Areas help safeguard biodiversity

Mainstreaming CBD targets through the 2030 Agenda
Mainstreaming biodiversity policies across all sectors critical

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Colombia: Moving towards sustainable hunting and legal bushmeat trade

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In Colombia, hunting for subsistence is only allowed for personal consumption. Consequently, the trade of surpluses for subsistence purposes (housing, health, education, etc.) is illegal. Despite the fact that Colombian law guarantees provision for legal wildlife trade, the lack of regulations to actually make it operational makes it in practice impossible for rural communities to legally trade bushmeat (wild game). While the requirements to obtain a license for this activity may be well-adapted for private companies trading high-value products (e.g. pelts), for rural communities they are extremely difficult and expensive to comply with. This impacts rural communities through constant confiscations of bushmeat, which in turn leads to an underground local market.

National initiative to operationalize legal framework

Because the bushmeat trade in rural communities is mainly for subsistence purposes, and taking into account the important role bushmeat plays for cultural identity, nutrition and local economies, several Colombian environmental institutions organized a workshop to discuss operationalization of the legal framework for bushmeat trade. Conclusions reached at the workshop highlighted the need to differentiate the trade of surpluses by subsistence hunters in rural communities from those of large-scale commercial hunting, and to take into account the differences in scale, business purposes, governance systems and benefit distribution. Main recommendations included the adoption of participative adaptive management processes, where the list of tradable species, quotas and monitoring and evaluation systems are defined and locally developed based on the specificities of each social and ecological context, with the active participation of local communities. While the technical recommendations generated in the workshop shed some light on the way forward, there is still a long way to go before necessary regulations are written and adopted by the respective ministries.

Local initiative for sustainable use and trade of wildlife resources

For the hunters from Puerto Nariño (Colombian Amazon), discussions held during the aforementioned workshop motivated them to create Colombia’s first indigenous hunters association. The idea was first hatched in 2013, when they began monitoring their off-takes and evaluating wildlife in their hunting grounds. Organizing an association stemmed from their need to improve their political representation in policy decision-making within their communities and towards governmental institutions, but also to improve the way they are perceived by others: as they are viewed as being anything from criminals to important agents which secure food, maintain traditions and conserve biodiversity. The hunters are particularly concerned about the nutrition children in schools and elders in hospitals receive. Most of the food provided by governmental institutions does not take into account local diets and food preferences, and is based on highly industrially processed food with unknown consequences for health.

The hunters call their association “Airumaküchi”, which means ‘Tigers from the water’ in Ticuna. The aim of the association is to improve the quality of life and food security of indigenous and local communities—especially of hunters and their households—and to strengthen their culture through traditional knowledge related to hunting activities. The long-term plan is to lobby governmental institutions to allow for legal hunting and subsistence trade. First, however, they need to show that they can manage hunting in a sustainable manner, create trust vis-à-vis governmental institutions and NGOs, and change the way they are perceived by the public.

The association is presently focusing on a range of activities:

- Monitoring of offtakes: Through Kobocollect, a phone app that allows users to create surveys and upload responses to a common database, hunters can share results to generate discussion and inform decision-making.
- Agreeing on hunting rules: Working with an external expert to facilitate the decision-making process. The methodology used includes games and scenario building with agent-based models. The objective is to identify management scenarios that allow maximizing the multiple benefits according to the hunters’ objectives.
- Evaluating wildlife: In 2014, the hunters assessed the presence and distribution of wildlife in their territory using 25 camera traps. In 2015, they used both camera traps and a “call method” for guara (Dasyprocta fuliginosa), traditionally used by hunters on their hunting trips. The idea is to compare both methodologies and evaluate whether the “call method” can be used for more regular wildlife assessments with low investment in time and resources.
- Restoring habitats for wildlife: Hunters believe selective timber extraction that removes important fruit producing trees is forcing wildlife away from communities. Accordingly, each family belonging to the association will restore habitats for wildlife by planting local fruit trees in their fallows.
- Working with children: Working in schools to improve children’s knowledge about wildlife, its management and its importance for food security. The approach used will involve innovative methodologies that aim to enlighten children, and perhaps turn them into scientists and/or agents of change on issues related to wildlife, forests and nutrition.

Left: Gabriel, a hunter from Puerto Nariño, learning how to monitor offtakes through the KobaCollect app. (Credit: François Sandrin)

Right: Meeting of the Airumaküchi hunter’s association. (Credit: Nicole Ponto)