

## Mitigating risks of disease transmission in the wild meat food chain from forest to fork in Cameroon

Many wild species are widely hunted and provide important food, nutritional and financial benefits to many communities in the tropics. However, the potential pathogen spillover from wildlife to humans is a risk that has received increased attention since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Wild animals used for food are major reservoirs for a number of foodborne pathogens such as *Salmonella* or *Giardia* but also viruses (e.g. Ebola, Marburg and others) transmitted from animal body fluids. Many zoonotic diseases also pose risks of epidemics and pandemics. Despite the potential dangers associated with wildlife use, there are practical ways of reducing the risk of contagion at different points in the wild meat food chain.

The **Center for International Forestry Research** in collaboration with **Forest Resources for People**, with funding from GIZ, are carrying out a two-year project in Cameroon to understand the behaviours that may expose actors to different risks along the wild meat food chain from the forest to the fork. The intended outcome of this project is **to recommend activities and policies that can reduce the risks of disease transmission along the food chain**.



Wildmeat is frequently found in household kitchens in many communities in Cameroon  
Photo by Joseph Mbane/CIFOR

### The project activities include:

1. A **systematic mapping** of studies that investigate hygienic practices around wild meat butchering, preparing, and sale around the world. The objective of this component is to map existing knowledge on current practices and identify gaps in knowledge (geographical and topical).
2. **Qualitative and quantitative data** on wild meat handling will be collected in three sites in the humid forest zone of Cameroon to identify, characterize, and describe the specific behaviours, beliefs, and practices involving animal contact among the different actors (hunters, primary food preparers in households, and wild meat market vendors in towns).
3. The project staff will collect **animal samples along the food chain for pathogen analysis**. The data from this activity will be used to understand the presence and diversity of pathogens along the wild meat distribution chain in the selected sites.
4. A **social and behavioural change strategy** will be designed and piloted for reducing risk of disease transmission in the sectors deemed most risky in two of the field sites.

The project uses a **multi-prong approach** to deliver a comprehensive picture of the risks in the wild meat distribution chain from the forest to the fork, and uses the evidence generated to develop concrete recommendations for mitigating these risks. Each actor in the wild meat food chain (hunters, traders/vendors, food preparers) is potentially exposed to different risks and can engage in behaviours that mitigate or perpetuate risks for themselves as well as spillover risk. The results of the study will be shared with relevant stakeholders at the national and local levels.