

ILLEGAL WILDLIFE ACTIVITIES IN THE CAMRAIL RAILWAY AND ITS SUROUNDINGS - ASSESMENT

1.1 Background

The train of Cameroon, runs by the Cameroon Railway Company (CAMRAIL), has been identified since the late 90's as a major facilitator of the bushmeat trade including trade in protected species, for bushmeat dealers mainly supplying the capital Yaounde.

The Camrail-MINFOF project is the result of a collaborative agreement signed in July 2001, between the Cameroon Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MINEF) and the Cameroon Railway Company (CAMRAIL). This agreement aims to contribute to the protection of wildlife and biodiversity conservation in Cameroon through enforcement of the regulation, which bans transportation of bushmeat or any other wildlife products from remote locations to urban markets by train. The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) was contracted in 2005 to assist the Cameroon Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF, former MINEF) and CAMRAIL with effective implementation of this agreement.

With growing population in urban centers or around industrial complexes (logging concession, mining camp or other related implantation), demand for wild meat will continue to rise. The general trend is that the expansion and development of new markets, and the rising prices are stimulating trade from dwindling resources. Because of the area and number of people involved in the bushmeat trade, conventional law enforcement is virtually impossible. Thus, policies should be designed so that they can be implemented effectively by placing management at those points (e.g. controlling long-distance transport to urban markets), enabling limited staff to have a major impact on reducing the unsustainable exploitation of bushmeat

The primary objective of the project is to develop an education and public awareness campaign related to illegal hunting and bushmeat trade, and to continue to implement and expand an effective law enforcement system for controlling bushmeat trade. Effective law enforcement is to be achieved through training and supervision of government agents and CAMRAIL personnel posted along the Yaounde-Ngaoundere railway. Preventing people from carrying bushmeat on this railway will limit access to lucrative markets and ultimately reduce hunting pressure.

2. LAGA and the assessment report

On August 2005 the World Bank decided to support LAGA's work and asked LAGA for an assessment of affectivity of the technical support given to law enforcement measures in three projects that are either financed by the World Bank or connected to World Bank supported schemes. The assessment reports can be used as a base for assisting the Government of Cameroon in increasing or improving the provided technical assistance.

3. Methodology

LAGA has compiled this report based on its routine work technically assisting the Government of Cameroon in investigations and operations against illegal wildlife activities. It is therefore admitted that this assessment is not based on a scientific methodology but is rather a collection of incidental information. Although incidental information collected over time can help in mapping trends and mechanisms, it has its obvious disadvantages and it is therefore important to understand what this assessment is and what it is not.

3.1 Investigations

Between September 2005 to September 2006 14 missions were sent to the field collecting information about illegal wildlife activities connected to the Camrail route and its stations' areas. Although a single observation can give a picture of the situation, multiple investigations over 12 months allowed an assessment to be reliable and conclusive. LAGA was using three different investigators not connected to each other to allow cross-checking and increase reliability of information. Investigators had to produce recordings and other evidence to support their observations, again to increase reliability of information.

3.2 Operations

Investigations are used for the aim of planning operations to be executed by MINFOF and the forces of law and order. Information gathered was concretized in an operation and arrest in September 2005.

4. Results

4.1 Investigations

In general the investigations showed that at this stage the project already demonstrated an impact in minimizing bushmeat trade on the train and in changing dealers behavior. Many stopped using the train for this activity, some diverted to public transport by road. Challenges still remain as corrupt practices, mainly of Camrail employees, limit the potential affectivity of the control mechanism. The same corrupt practices are used to board passengers without issuing of tickets thereby incurring direct economic loss to the Camrail Corporation.

4.11 Preparations before entering the train

Any search method is based on profiling technique that aims at focusing the sample searches on items that are more suspicious or are more likely to contain contraband. Offenders naturally will always try to gather information on the profiling criteria and look for ways to avoid being targeted.

As a dividend of effectively of the project at the first stage, new methods of concealing bushmeat are observed. Some of these new methods are quickly replicated among the dealers as Camrail employees serve as advisers to those interested in outsmarting the control system.

Dealers tend to smoke their bushmeat longer to make it drier, and seal it better to avoid the strong smell. Dealers started using women's hand bags and travel suitcases filled with cloths instead of cheap bags, thinking these are out from the normal profile. Security guards advised dealers to split their bushmeat to small items in different bags. Concealing bushmeat in large sacks filled with beans and other crops was also observed.

4.12 Getting into the train

MINFOF station in Belabo was recommended by several dealers for issuing a document legalizing dealers' bushmeat. For 3,000 CFA sellers were able to purchase a document turning the bushmeat to "acquired through a legal auction" and receive advices on how to move it safely on the train.

In the Belabo train station a mechanism was observed of getting passengers to the train without ticketing. The chief of Africa Security seems to regularly collect bribes to facilitate this. Two other Camrail workers are involved- the controller of the gate to the reception room and the controller on the train. The second was observed leading the passenger to the first class and collecting different amounts of money without issuing any ticket or receipt. This mechanism is often used by bushmeat dealers who can then enjoy avoiding any ticketing control and even protection of their luggage from searches. The bags can be brought to the storage room earlier so that other Camrail employees will bring them to the passenger onboard. There are examples where the luggage will be put on the merchandise wagons only to be collected from Yaounde storage room, and other arrangements for the merchandise train.

Another example for that is a wife of a former Camrail worker that has been using her contact and ability to travel without payment to develop a successful bushmeat business over the years. She still continues as her contacts allow her both to travel for free as well as be protected.

It is evident therefore that traveling without a ticket or payment and carrying a contraband on the train are tightly linked. Replacing the ticket payment with a bribe is done systematically, and by Camrail controllers as well as security guards.

4.13 In the train

Security guards were observed to be the main advisers and protectors of bushmeat dealers in the train. For 1,000 CFA for an average package, the guards are holding the bags throughout the journey in the corridors, away from the dealer and protect it from searches.

Military personnel feel protected from any attempt of search in their belonging and therefore contacted by dealers to carry their bushmeat.

While the ecoguards are generally effective, they are still operating under pressure where any incident of bushmeat detection leads to a negotiation stage with security guards or other Camrail workers pleading on behalf of the offender. This leads to lack of transparency in “negotiations in the corridors”, and some incidents where detections ended up in allowing the offender with excuses as –“the bushmeat is for self consumption and not for sale”, or “the bush fowls are for a hotel in Yaounde, and therefore not bushmeat”. In several times this sparked outrage among other passengers who protested against the inequality.

4.14 Getting out of the train

Obala station is often perceived as an easier station to drop with the products. This is linked to many observations where there was no control at all, especially on Sundays.

Although this old method is used much less than before, sacks are still thrown out of the moving train especially around Elig Edzua. A hundred meters before the Yaounde station, passengers often jump out of the train with the sacks as it slows down. This requires the complicity of the security guards (500 CFA).

In the Yaounde station Security Guards (Africa security/ DAC) carrying luggage are not checked. They were regularly observed receiving bribes from dealers to carry their luggage out to avoid the control.

Africa security guards were regularly observed receiving 500 CFA for opening the emergency gate for the dealers to avoid exit control.

4.15 Sale

The surrounding of the Yaounde station used to be a major marketplace where protected bushmeat is openly sold right after arrival from the train station. Though the magnitude of this has reduced protected bushmeat is still sold around the station but in a different method. In the shade umbrellas near the station, sellers are exposing permitted bushmeat but keep in hidden storage rooms and refrigerators nearby to take trusted clients and sell in a confidential way. The protected bushmeat sold still arrive through the train although not solely.

4.2 Operations

On 22/9 investigations information was used for an operation against a dealer near the Yaounde train station inside a hidden storage room- involving the hand of a chimpanzee. This operation aimed at exposing the new ways dealers are using to still carry on their illegal activities. The raided hidden storage room contained 6 refrigerators serving at least 3 different dealers in protected species. Article 158 of the wildlife law provides in this case 1-3 years imprisonment and/or 3,000,000 – 1,000,000 CFA fine.

The procedure in this case was interrupted by the delegate of the Central Province as it was his last day and the day of Ministers' replacement and the offenders took advantage of this. This case is exceptional for the LAGA-MINFOF cases.

This is a good example to demonstrate MINFOF irregularities the Camrail-MINFOF project may lose effectively for. The law clearly states that a complaint report established needs to be transmitted to the court within 72 hours unless transaction has taken place (Art. 147/Wildlife Law) and further excludes any offence involving Class A animal from transaction. Complaint reports established by the MINFOF chief attached to the project need to be respected and follow procedure rather than lost in the provincial services.

5. Analysis

- The Camrail project seems to have a very good impact on minimizing bushmeat trade on the train and offers a good mechanism of control.
- Trade still continues mainly facilitated by complicity of Camrail employees.
- It is certain that those dealers that are not yet deterred are getting constant inside information, they observe the system and know how to exploit its weaknesses.
- The level of complicity of the Camrail workers makes the work of the ecoguards extremely difficult. It is therefore very important to improve their "incorruptible" image and eradicate any incidents of "negotiations" by individual ecoguards that are just encouraging Camrail workers and dealers to mount more pressure on the others.
- Military passengers represent a loophole as they are not searched.
- To date there are not yet good examples for major prosecutions.

6. Discussion

The project in its first operational year seems to have achieved good results but in order to continue it must be realized that the challenges of the first stage are different from the challenges of a second stage.

It is important to understand the stage of this project in the light of basic law enforcement theory. The first stage of introducing a law enforcement effort is always the easiest and most rewarding. The gap between no enforcement to even basic enforcement automatically diverts a large "soft" layer of offenders out of the illegal practice. A harder layer continues the illegal practice on a base of risk and gain and will continue until they are convinced the risk is indeed higher than the gain. Till that happens they will continue to exploit any information they can get on the enforcement mechanism and any corrupt element inside it. The fight against corruption, a higher level of deterrence and preventing offenders from knowing the mechanism are three major challenges at this end of the first stage.

The fight against corruption has to be a point of focus at this stage to the project where internal control to fight corrupt practices of Camrail staff has to be applied for the control mechanism to be effective. Taking this step is also in the direct economic interest of The

Camrail Corporation as the same corrupt practices that damage the project also cuts its revenue.

The second important objective is proving a higher risk factor for the offenders. This can be achieved by following up important cases achieving strong prosecutions and advertising those prosecutions.

A third principal is preventing offenders from exploiting information about the control mechanism. In this line confidentiality is sacred while routine is perceived as a problem. Breaking the routine through random control operations outside the program can have an enormous value in making it much harder for the offenders to adjust and exploit the information they gather.

Besides the shifting challenges discussed above new ways should be explored to improve the efficiency of the profiling method. Sniffer dogs can be used to make control more effective as a method of direct detection can supplement a method based on profiling and sample searches. Sniffer dogs are already proving successful in wildlife law enforcement for more complicated tasks as detection of ivory. It is surely possible to be applied in bushmeat that carries stronger smell. The use of dogs will reduce passenger's discomfort while creating a strong psychological deterring effect of the dog that detects a lie beyond the human senses. At the same time it should be noted that training and using sniffer dogs is a long term investment that may not find the necessary professional technical support capacity it needs in Cameroon.

7. Recommendations

- Introducing internal control of ecoguards and Camrail employees and publicizing strong sanctions and legal proceedings taken against corrupt elements. This is in the direct interest of Camrail Corporation as it incurs losses due to corrupt practices.
- It is important that the project follows up cases initiated as a result of its control. The MINFOF chief has to receive more responsibility in channeling the cases to court through the Provincial Delegation and be accountable for cases that are not channeled to court contrary to the law.
- Moving towards measurable standards for the two recommendations above (ie. Target number of prosecutions of wildlife offenders/ acts against corrupt practices per year).
- Introducing more extra activities of random controls to break routine.
- Liaise with MINDEF to insure, through letters and an available focal point, searches of Military personnel, so far perceived to be "protected". This will have to include a clear legal procedure for court cases against military violators.
- Assessing the potential use of sniffer dogs.



Operation against train station hidden storage room- involving the hand of a chimpanzee.

