

Food Insecurity in Southern Africa: Is Bushmeat a Sustainable Solution

Southern Africa is experiencing one of the most persistent food crises globally, driven by a combination of structural and environmental factors. Food security in southern Africa is influenced by several emerging issues, including weakness in the governance system, shifting ecological patterns, and climate change. The food crisis has affected all the countries of the southern Africa region; however, countries in this region have been affected differentially. While the majority of the countries are bound to procure external food aid, a few have been able to contain the situation and to mobilise internal resources to reduce the food crisis in their countries. The majority of the people of southern Africa are rural with agriculture as their main source of livelihood, also agriculture is one of the main contributors to their economies.

According to SADC, food insecurity in the Southern Africa is mediated by ten key factors, which are as following: In appropriate national agricultural and food policies, insufficient government investment in agriculture, in inequitable land distribution, low soil fertility and land degradation, inadequate social protection policies and strategies, over-reliance on food aid, insufficient preparedness for disasters such as drought and floods, inadequate technological development, poor access of farmer to agriculture inputs, models of humanitarian response that undermine local livelihood base and systems.

According to the UN World Food Programme, 6.5 million people are affected by the food crisis in southern Africa, resulting in malnourishment of 21 million children. Five countries that have declared a national disaster because of the drought and requested international aid are Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, and Zambia. Due to the growing severe food crisis, countries like Zimbabwe and Namibia have announced plans to slaughter hundreds of wild elephants and other animals to feed their hungry population.

Most of these southern African countries have a large population of wild elephants, which has also led to some human-wildlife conflict as resources become scarcer. Amid these Challenges, various food alternatives are being explored in the use of wild animals as a sustainable food source to address the food demands of the citizens. Other Countries in the Southern African region have also practiced culling of their wildlife populations to feed their citizens, as they

don't have enough food grains for their population. Communities in the southern African region have traditionally relied on the wildlife population for their subsistence, especially during times of crisis.

The food security in African countries is an alarming issue, which is often aggravated by various factors like civil war in the countries, poor rainfall, and other climatic factors like drought. However, the bushmeat can be a short-term solution, but is it sustainable in the long term? The question needs to be examined. Africa, which is known as the continent of rich resources, is forced to eradicate its precious fauna due to hunger. The world community often tries to limit the extent to which it is done; however, they are not succeeded in addressing this problem.

African tribes often can be seen in National Geographic, Discovery episodes, sustaining their life by hunting and largely depending on the bushmeat. It is generally considered their traditional life routine and lifestyle. However, it may not be true in all cases; hunting is not their luxury but their survival. The bushmeat is not just done in African countries just for food for their family or village, but it is widely commercialised nowadays in African countries. In central and western Africa the bushmeat hunting has become one of the serious threats to chimpanzees and other endangered animals.

The other risk associated with bushmeat is related to their health. There is increasing evidence of meat-related diseases often spread with viruses, parasites, and infections. The local people who consume this meat are ignorant about its implications. They are not aware of the fact that it is illegal to kill such endangered animals, and it also adversely affects the wildlife populations. Therefore, a more collaborative and community-based approach is needed to disseminate the education among the local population. The strict legal enforcement can also help in dealing with illegal trade and bounty hunter-like crimes. Also, the engagement of local communities with wildlife can establish a positive relationship between them, which can help create compassion towards these animals. A mutual relationship can be possible between humans and wildlife that can be the same as in the case with their relations with cattle's population. The perfect example is the Mundari tribe of South Sudan.

Therefore, more sustainable and practical solutions can address this crisis. Firstly, community-based wildlife management is needed by providing incentives, revenue sharing from

ecotourism, and a responsibility-laden approach. Secondly, alternative livelihood opportunities like farming, ecotourism, agroforestry, and beekeeping should be promoted. Other solutions like raising awareness and education about the implications of bushmeat consumption, supporting other alternative plant-based protein sources, and controlled and regulated use of hunting of non-endangered species can be helpful. Africa, which is famous for its wildlife population, should not become the graveyard of endangered species, due to their government's failure in addressing hunger and livelihood opportunities.

***Views are personal**

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The Department of African Studies has launched an initiative called "Scholars on Africa" with the primary objective of promoting the research ideas of scholars and faculty members on current happenings and contemporary issues related to the African continent. This initiative serves a dual purpose, as it not only facilitates academic exploration but also provides valuable insights to the policymakers of India on matters concerning Africa. By actively engaging with scholars and faculty members, the initiative aims to foster a better understanding and relationship between India and Africa, bridging the gap between the two worlds.

Under the "Scholars on Africa" initiative, Scholars of the Department of African Studies are encouraged to contribute write-ups on various African issues, not exceeding 300 words in length. It is noteworthy that these write-ups will be forwarded by any faculty members of the Department. These write-ups serve as a platform for scholars to express their personal views and insights on a diverse range of topics, including History, Politics, economics, culture, and social issues prevalent in Africa.

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