

Subsistence Hunting and Special Game Licenses in Botswana

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Introduction

Hunting has played a key role in the economies and social systems of local communities in Botswana (Schapera, 1943:255-262; Campbell, 1971; Wilmsen, 1976; Murray, 1978). Subsistence hunting is the customary and traditional use of wild animals for food, raw material, social, and ceremonial purposes. The hunting of wild animals also provided surpluses that were shared with other households, exchanged for goods or cash, or given in the form of tribute to chiefs and other high status individuals.

Traditionally, all Batswana had the right to hunt whichever animals they wished in tribal territories. When the British government declared Bechuanaland a Protectorate in 1895, Batswana were allowed to maintain their hunting rights on tribal land. As one of the early Protectorate Game Proclamations (No. 19 of 1940) put it, "Any member of a Native tribe may, with the permission of the chief of such tribe, hunt any game within the Territory, sell or barter any game killed within such tribal area" (quoted in Schapera, 1943:256-257). Traditionally, Tswana chiefs had the authority to set limits on the numbers and types of animals that could be taken by hunters (Schapera, 1943:257; Spinage, 1991:9-11, 113-116). In remote areas, where chiefly authority generally was not as strong, local people continued to hunt relatively freely.

Special Game Licenses in Botswana

Botswana is unusual in Africa in that it has passed legislation guaranteeing subsistence hunting rights to its citizens. Under colonial governments in Africa, local people's rights to hunt were restricted or done away with completely (Anderson and Grove 1987). In part because of the presence of populations in rural areas that depended to a significant degree on wild resources and the long tradition of hunting in the country, the government of Botswana decided in 1979 to establish a Special Game License under the "Unified Hunting Regulations" (Republic of Botswana, 1979). The purpose of this special license was to guarantee rights to those people who belonged to communities that foraged for a living or who were Remote Area Dwellers (RADs) who depended on hunting and gathering for a subsistence and income.

The Special Game Licenses (SGLs) were aimed at legitimising subsistence hunting by the poorest members of the population, making it possible for them to hunt legally. Possession of the Special Game License by an individual who was engaged in hunting theoretically provided that person with immunity from prosecution under the Fauna Conservation Act, now the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act, 1992 (Republic of Botswana 1992). Its primary purpose was to allow those people who were subsistence hunters to obtain specified types and numbers of game (for a list of these animals, see Appendix 1).

The original intent of the Special Game License was that it would be phased out after a short period as people came to depend less on wild resources. According to some of the staff members in the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, an intent of the SGLs at the early stage was to enable people to obtain wildlife products which they would then sell. They would then use the money they raised to buy Citizen Hunting Licenses or Small Game Licenses (David Lawson, Fred Mogatle, personal communication). Ultimately, the idea was that the SGL would be a means of providing people with sufficient income so that they would "no longer have to be

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dependent on the hunting and gathering lifestyle." The SGL was thus viewed by some people as a means of bringing about cultural change, or, as one government planner put it, "civilisation."

Special Game Licenses were allocated to individuals by licensing officers of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) after an assessment was done by the Remote Area Development Officer (RADO) or, in some cases, the Assistant Community Development Officer (ACDO). The Village Development Committee (VDC) played a role in the assessment process in a number of remote area communities.

Special Game License provisions included the following: First, the licenses were free of charge. Second, they were good year-round, unlike the hunting licenses given to citizens or to safari hunters which can only be used during the hunting season. Third, SGLs allowed for the capture of a fairly wide variety of animals, both large and small.

Criteria for allocation of SGLs included (1) whether the individual was dependent upon wild animals for subsistence (ie, the individual was considered a hunter-gatherer), (2) whether the individual was a Remote Area Dweller who resided in an officially recognised RAD settlement, (3) whether the individual had a job, (4) whether the person had alternative sources of subsistence and income (eg, if that person was getting food through government drought relief or destitute assistance programmes). Data indicate that between 850 and 1,000 licenses were allocated to Remote Area Dwellers in 1994-1995 (Maotonyane 1995; Hitchcock, Masilo, and Monyatse, 1995).

Since its inception in 1979, the Special Game License has been somewhat controversial. Some people in Botswana see the license as a kind of privilege for a "special class" of people and thus view it as being inherently unfair. Others, notably biologists, conservationists, and some members of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, see the SGLs as being subject to abuse and thus contributing to the decline in wildlife numbers in Botswana. Not surprisingly, the people who have SGLs or who potentially would qualify for them, like these licenses and want to continue to receive them. Some members of rural communities maintained that access to these licenses was crucial to their livelihoods.

Subsistence hunting was a strong, viable part of the local economy and culture, but it has begun to wane in importance in Botswana. One reason for this decline is the reduction in the numbers of wildlife and another is the transformations that have occurred in the economies of rural people, with diversification of household production systems and expanded involvement in wage labour. The legal basis protecting subsistence hunting in Botswana is uncertain, in part because of the inadequacy of the legislation and because of the variable ways in which hunting laws have been enforced (Hitchcock, Masilo, and Monyatse, 1995). One of the problems faced by local people was that they were not sure whether or not they might be arrested if they sold products obtained through the use of the SGLs. The lack of clear policy guidance on activities that can be carried out with SGLs has led to a crisis of confidence in rural communities about SGLs.

In 1994, the Research Division of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks noted an alarming trend: Wildlife numbers in Botswana had declined dramatically over time. Aerial wildlife census data indicated that there were far fewer wild animals in the early 1990s than had been the case in the 1970s. As the Research Division of the DWNP noted in its 1994 report, "Cause and effect for these trends is not well defined, but it is obvious that the core area for wildlife in the region is being compressed by human activities such as fencing and livestock grazing" (Research Division, Department of Wildlife and National Parks, 1995:13). A cultural factor which contributed to the decline in wildlife numbers was hunting, both legal and illegal.

Serious questions were raised about the impacts of hunting by SGL-holders on the wildlife resources of the country and whether or not current offtake rates could be sustained over the long term. The numbers of animals that can be taken by SGL-holders did not fall under the

Department of Wildlife and National Parks' annual quota. What this meant, in effect, was that people in possession of SGLs could hunt at rates over and above those allowed for citizen and non-citizen hunters in Botswana.

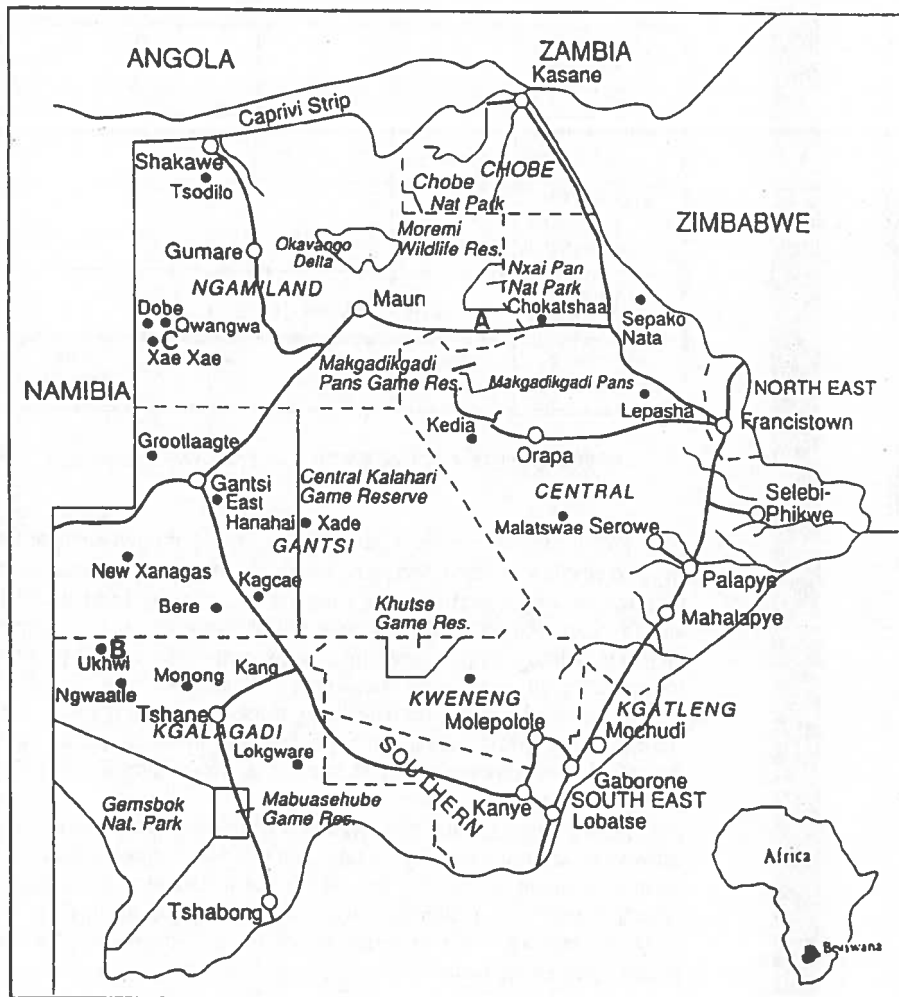


Figure 1: Map of the Republic of Botswana showing Remote Area Dweller (RAD) settlements and communities where the Special Game License study was undertaken. A = Phuduhudu, Northwest District, B = Ukhwi, Kgale District, C = /Xai/Xai (Xae Xae), Northwest District.

The Special Game License Investigation

In 1995, it was decided to call for an investigation of the issue of Special Game Licenses in order to examine current parameters of SGL utilisation and their impacts. Accordingly, a consultancy was arranged in conjunction with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks and the Natural Resources Management Project (NRMP), a joint Government of Botswana - United States Agency for International Development project which began in 1990. The SGL consultancy was carried out over the period from August 13 to October 15, 1995. It was done by three people, Robert Hitchcock, Rosinah Rose B. Masilo, and Poppy Monyatse.

The consultancy research took several forms. Background reading of documents was carried out, including examination of Department of Wildlife and National Parks and Natural Resources Management Project files along with materials obtained from the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) in the Ministry of Local Government, Lands, and Housing. It also looked at files of other central government and district council offices along with those of donor agencies, non-government organizations, and individuals. In addition, interviews were conducted with representatives of relevant government ministries and with DWNP, RADP, and other staff at the district level.

Visits were undertaken to three selected site areas selected in collaboration with personnel of the DWNP and the NRMP. The three study sites were (1) Phuduhudu, North West District, (2) Ukhwi, Kgalagadi District, and (3) /Xai/Xai, North West District. Table 1 presents data on the communities where the study was undertaken. Interviews were done of members of households that held SGLs as well as ones which had not been allocated SGLs. Comparative data was obtained from the detailed study of Zutshwa in northern Kgalagadi District done by the Sociology Section of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks in mid-1995 (van der Jagt 1995). The work in the local communities enabled us to see first-hand some of impacts of SGL usage and allowed us to gain insights into the kinds of constraints and opportunities facing local people involved in subsistence hunting.

Table 1: Communities in Which Special Game License Study was Undertaken

Community	Pop Size	# of Households	# of Interviews	Household Size	# of SGLs Issued	Breakdown of Ethnic Gps
Phuphudu Ngamiland	314	66	12	5.1 persons	5(1994)	Basarwa-95% Bananjwa-5%
Ukhwi, Kgalagadi	430	51	10	7.4 persons	32 (1995)	Basarwa-40% Balala-27% Bangaloga-33%
/Xai/Xai, Ngamiland	368	28	9	13.1 persons	15 (1995)	Basarwa-87% Mbanderu-13%
Zutshwa, Kgalagadi	365	53	50	5.5 persons	28 (1995)	Basarwa-52% Balala-26% Bangaloga-22%

The three sites investigated were all remote area communities that had been designated as RAD settlements under the Botswana government's Remote Area Development Programme. Each site had people who derived part of their food and income through subsistence hunting. There were also people in these communities who engaged in other kinds of economic activities, including agriculture, livestock production, and wage labour.

All three of the communities had a majority of households engaged in hunting. At /Xai/Xai 90% of the households hunted at least some of the time. At Ukhwi the percentage of households engaged in hunting was somewhat lower (58%), but Ukhwi had the highest percentage of hunting households of all of the Kgalagadi District RAD settlements, the next closest one being Zutshwa (van der Jagt 1995:89-98; Mike Painter, personal communication). At Phuduhudu 66% of the households had members who hunted.

The data obtained during the interviews indicate a variety of attitudes to SGLs. Virtually everyone who has them likes them and wants them to continue. The vast majority of the SGL holders would like to see the numbers of animals and the range of species on the license expanded. On the other hand, some of the DWNP officials to whom we spoke disliked the SGLs.

A concern of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks was that there was "widespread abuse" of SGL privileges, with SGL holders "regularly" overshooting their licenses or illegally transferring their SGLs to other people. Our findings were that abuse of SGLs does occur on occasion, but it is not nearly as widespread as assumed. In the places we did interviews, only a few people had others hunt for them. Nearly all of these people were family members who were hunting for people who were elderly widows or incapacitated.

Shooting more animals than are allowed for on the SGL occurred relatively rarely. If it did occur, it usually was limited to one or a few species (notably gemsbok). Many of the species on the license were underhunted, and some of the species were not obtained at all. Some of the people who were allocated SGLs did not use them, so the amount of SGL-related hunting was less than one would assume given the numbers of SGLs allocated to people.

Arrests for hunting violations are a common feature of life in many remote area communities. According to our interviews, 37.5% of the people interviewed at /Xai/Xai had been arrested at some point for violating hunting laws; the figure for Ukhwi in western Kgalagadi was 30%, and it was 41.6% for those in Phuduhudu, North West District. An impact of high rates of arrest was that much-needed labour was withdrawn from the community. Another impact was that donkeys and horses used in the illegal hunt were confiscated, something which affected household transport and plowing capabilities.

A major human rights issue in Botswana has been the treatment of people detained on suspicion of having violated wildlife laws (Mogwe 1992). While concern about treatment of people by DWNP was a concern of a number of people we interviewed, we found that in the communities where we did our investigations, individuals who had been arrested were treated with respect by DWNP officials.

Another contentious issue regarding SGLs had to do with the types of weapons that could be used to hunt. Some Regional Wildlife Officers required SGL-holders to use traditional weapons (ie, bows and arrows, spears). In a few places, notably around the Okavango Delta in North West District, RADs were allowed to use guns to hunt. Thus, there are differences on a national level in terms of the kinds of weapons allowed. The result is that sometimes people are arrested for using the wrong kind of weapon.

Local DWNP offices can and do restrict the numbers of SGLs that are given out to local communities, thus reducing the access that RAD households have to wildlife. This situation can be seen in Ngamiland, for example, which decided in 1995 not to give out SGLs in Controlled Hunting Areas that were stipulated for use by safari companies or concessionaires (e.g. Xaxaba). They also did not give SGLs to those members of RAD communities where there was some question about the future of the community, as was the case with Phuduhudu in the Ngamiland State Lands (K Nkwane, RWO, Maun, personal communication, 1995).

The situation in a number of RAD communities today, including the ones that we visited, is that the changes in wildlife abundance, human population densities, weaponry, and other factors (eg, training in how to track and hunt) have led to difficulties in people getting sufficient

wild meat to meet their needs. This is especially true for those groups that are in settlements with sizable numbers of livestock and relatively low game densities. In some areas, notably in the commercial ranching areas, local people usually are not designated as Remote Area Dwellers and thus they do not qualify for Special Licenses.

Many RADs who we interviewed, and ones whose opinions we heard voiced by others, maintained that the numbers and range of species of animals on the SGL were insufficient to meet their annual subsistence needs. When we obtained information on the numbers of animals actually gotten by hunters over the previous year, it was found that there were certain species on the SGL which were nearly always taken, notably gemsbok, and others which were either not obtained (eg, springbok) or killed in lower numbers than was permitted under the terms of the license (eg, duiker and steenbok).

There were several reasons given for the failure to obtain some of the species on the license. One of the most commonly cited reasons was that the numbers of animals in the vicinity of the settlements of our informants were, according to them, quite low. They were fully aware that wildlife numbers were declining. Many of them said that they were having to travel at least two days and sometimes up to four or five days just to find animals which they could hunt. A second reason given for the low numbers of certain species of animals killed was that they were not able to use specific procurement methods. Traps, for example, were seen as crucial for obtaining springbok and the smaller antelope species, but these are not permitted under government faunal legislation. Yet another reason given for the lack of hunting success was that local people were having to compete with other hunters, both licensed and unlicensed, who were hunting with rifles. The use of guns was said to make it more difficult for hunters using traditional weapons because the animals' stayed farther away from hunters.

The impact of SGL-holders on the wildlife populations of the three communities reportedly was not as great as that of outsiders who entered the area to hunt. Both DWNP officials and local people told us that non-local people took many if not most of the game animals in the three regions, some of whom did not have hunting licenses of any kind. At least some of the offtake was a result of ration hunting by DWNP staff and hunting by Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) personnel.

Given the fact that we only interviewed a portion of the SGL-holders and we were not able to get detailed observational data on the wild animals obtained, the nutritional importance of meat brought in to the three communities by SGL-holders is something that can only be estimated. Wilmsen (1989:232) noted that foragers at /Xai/Xai averaged over 8 kilograms per person per month of wild meat in the 1973-1980 period. Groups in the central Kalahari investigated by Silberbauer in the 1950s and early 1960s had a return rate of 7.8 kilograms per person per month (Silberbauer, 1981:204), while central Kalahari groups studied by Tanaka during the period from September, 1967 to March, 1968, had a return rate of 6.8 kilograms per person per month (Tanaka, 1980:66-68). Based on the limited information we were able to obtain at /Xai/Xai in October, 1995, the return rate today was roughly 1.2 kilograms per person per month, a figure substantially lower than was the case for foragers in the 1960s and 1970s. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that people complained frequently of having insufficient meat to eat.

An assessment of the role of SGL-related products in RAD welfare level at the individual level reveals that SGLs provided people with a means of supplementing their diet. Meat procured with SGLs was shared both within and between households. Nearly all of the people who had successful hunts in the previous two years had shared meat with other people. Some of the meat-sharing between households was done because a number of people from different households co-operated in the hunt and participated in the processing of the meat into biltong. Hunters who borrowed equipment to hunt shared meat with those people from whom they got the equipment.

Meat-sharing is a crucial aspect of the /Xai/Xai, Ukhwi, and Phuduhudu social and

economic relations. One reason for meat-sharing is that it ensures that the meat from large body-sized prey are consumed before it spoils. Sharing also helps even out the variance in hunting success. Based on observations and what people said, some individuals are excellent hunters, while others are lucky to get any animals at all when they go hunting. As Marshall (1976:295) notes about meat-sharing, "The fear of hunter is mitigated: the person whom one shares will share in turn when he gets meat; people are sustained by a web of mutual obligation." /Xai/Xai meat-sharing depends in part upon the body size of the prey; the larger the prey item, the more likely it is to be shared.

Meat plays a significant role in the community, according to informants, because it ties people together. It also provides a source of protein to elderly family members and friends who are the recipients of gifts of meat. Elderly people are sometimes given specific parts (eg, the eyes, the head) according to local custom. Children were also given meat or the broth in which meat was boiled.

While some people (eg, safari operators and some representatives of conservation NGOs) maintain that the people who the SGL is intended to benefit actually gain least from its use, data from the three communities we investigated indicate that this is not, in fact, the case. The benefits of SGL usage at the community level are significant from a nutritional, economic, and social standpoint. Wildlife products derived from SGLs provide a major source of material for crafts, which in turn are a crucial source of income especially for poor households.

The meat and other products obtained through SGLs are important not only for the households of the SGL-holders, but for other households as well. At the same time, the size of the sharing networks has declined over time as a result of reduction in household size and withdrawal of meat from sharing networks by people who hoard it or sell it, usually to other members of the local community but also to outsiders.

Based on what we learned from our interviews and assessment of documentary information, wildlife still has tremendous cultural significance. The people to whom we spoke observed a whole set of rules concerning wild animals. Like many other groups in Botswana, the Shua of the Phuduhudu region had particular species of wild animals as totems (*sereto*) which they were not supposed to eat (eg, wild cat, antbear, and duiker). Traditionally, certain species of animals were considered to be the property of royalty, one example being pangolin (*kgaga*). Some people also noted that in the past they gave elephant tusks and lion skins to the chief (*kgosi*) since they were considered royal game. Certain animal parts were also used in traditional healing.

Conclusions

Subsistence hunting is still important to a fairly sizable number of rural people in Botswana. Judging from both quantitative and qualitative data collected over the past twenty years, combined with information obtained during the course of the 1995 SGL consultancy, subsistence hunting provides food, materials, and income to households in a number of communities. Remote Area Dwellers, in particular, have been the beneficiaries of the Special Game Licenses issued by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks.

Detailed research on a number of issues relating to hunting is necessary in Botswana in order to provide inputs to policy decisions such as that involving the future of Special Game Licenses. It is not possible to say at present to what extent people in various remote area communities depend on wild animals for subsistence and income. One reason for this is that much of the research on RADs in recent years has tended to be broad-based socio-economic surveys which generally have not examined in much detail specific issues relating to the importance of wildlife to individual livelihoods. Without problem-oriented research on wildlife-related issues, it is possible that policy decisions could be made that would have significant

impacts on the well-being of Basarwa and other rural populations.

Access to SGLs is seen by some as a human rights issue. SGLs provide for a basic social and economic entitlement: the right to adequate nutrition. They represent a means of assuring socio-economic welfare in remote communities in Botswana. Taking SGLs away from RADS could well have negative effects; standards of living could decline, and people would have lower access to goods that are crucial in exchange and distribution systems in rural communities. SGL-holders felt, therefore, that SGLs should continue. If they are to be phased out in certain areas, it should only be in those places where alternative livelihoods are available.

People in remote areas of Botswana maintain that they have a right to exploit natural resources. This right derives from what they see as their traditional ways of making a living and from government policy documents which hold that people should have sufficient land and resources to support themselves. Some of the people who have Special Game Licenses today argue that the removal of these licenses would be a violation of their basic right to food. Members of some community-based organisations in remote areas have emphasised that international human rights instruments such as the International Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights include provisions to the effect that people have a right to subsistence. The problem that Remote Area Dwellers face today is how to balance the necessity of meeting basic needs at present and ensuring that there are sufficient resources to support themselves and their children in the future.

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Appendix 1

Species and numbers of animals that can be taken on a Special Game License (SGL)

Species	Number	Species	Number
Hartebeest	4	Duiker	30
Ostrich	2	Steenbok	30
Wildebeest	4	Monitor Lizard	10
Lechwe	3	Wild cat	50
Springbok	4	Jackal	U
Kudu	1	Bateared Fox	50
Impala	4	Silver Fox	10
Sitatunga	1	Genet	50
Buffalo	2	Caracal	10
Tsessebe	1	Monkey	20
Warthog	3	Spotted Hyena	20
Gemsbok	2	Wild Dog	U*
Eland	1	Baboon	U

Plus All Birds (Except Conserved Species)

U - Unlimited

U* - Unlimited (but this is a conserved species under the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act, 1992)

Note

This is the original list of animals and species on the Special Game License under the Fauna Conservation [Unified Hunting] Regulations, 1979, Second Schedule, Regulation 7(1). A number of the species on the SGL were deleted in the early 1990s, including buffalo, ostrich, eland, wildebeest, and wild dog.