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A close-up photograph of a bat's face, showing its large, brown, glossy eyes and its pinkish, textured skin. The bat is positioned in the center of the frame, with its head slightly tilted. The background is dark and out of focus, with some green foliage visible on the left side. A blue rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title and subtitle text.

COMMUNITY USES OF BATS AND BAT PRODUCTS IN BUNDIBUGYO DISTRICT, UGANDA

**A catalogue from STOP Spillover
2022**



INTRODUCTION

Strategies to Prevent Spillover (STOP Spillover), a USAID-funded project led by Tufts University, is a global consortium of experts in human, animal, and environmental health. STOP Spillover aims to increase understanding and addressing the risks posed by known zoonotic viruses that have the potential to spill over and cause pandemic crises.

In Uganda, STOP Spillover project has been working in Bundibugyo district at the bat-human interface to improve understanding of the risk factors for viral zoonotic disease spillover, and developing interventions to reduce human exposure to bats, with intent to progressively reduce spillover risk. Bundibugyo is known for a significant bat population, and history of disease outbreaks such as Ebola virus.

From its inception, the project has worked with various stakeholders in Bundibugyo to gain a

better understanding of the historical context of bat-human interactions and uses in the community.

This was done through a range of Participatory Epidemiology (PE) tools, such as focused group discussions, key informant interviews, direct observations, transect walks, and bat roost mappings. The uses of bats, myths and perceived values of bats seem to vary with the diverse ethnic communities in Bundibugyo.



COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS WITH BATS



Several activities increase bat-human interaction in the communities of Bundibugyo: These includes;

Farming:

- ◆ Bats hide in cocoa trees, banana, and fruit plantations, and During farming activities such as planting, weeding, and harvesting, community members came into direct and constant contact with the bats, bat waste and vomitus.
- ◆ Collecting firewood and fruits: During fruit ripening and harvest seasons, bats are present in the fruit trees and eat fruits such as including bananas, avocados, and mangos, which are also shared with the community.
- ◆ Women and children get exposed to bats when collecting firewood and picking fruits from the forest.



Bat hunting

◆ Bat hunting is an activity mainly done by men and adolescent boys. In most of the communities, sticks are used to beat them off while in gardens and households.

◆ The community members use catapults and nets for hunting bats from caves, trees, and game parks. Some cave hunters use mosquito nets which they spread at the entrance and use a stick to poke the bats which are trapped in the net as they flee the cave.



Fetching water:

◆ Women and children are in contact with bats when they go to collect water from streams near bat caves.

USES OF BATS AND PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF BATS IN BUNDIBUGYO, UGANDA



COMMUNITY MYTHS

A. Cultural practices and rituals

- ◆ Bats are used by traditional healers to pick hairs from people as they fly around. This myth suggests that bats can be used to remove hairs from peoples' bodies, possibly to cure illnesses or bring good luck.
- ◆ Bats are believed to be drivers of night dancers. This myth suggests that bats have the power to make people dance at night. In some cultures, it is believed that bats are responsible for guiding people who engage in traditional dance rituals that take place at night.
- ◆ Visiting caves harboring bats is believed to be a source of wealth: This myth suggests that visiting caves with bats can bring wealth and good fortune.



B. Traditional Medicine and Beliefs

- ◆ Bat meat when given to children cures several diseases. This myth suggests that consuming bat meat can cure a variety of illnesses in children.
- ◆ Raw bat blood when given to children is believed to cure anemia: This myth suggests that raw bat blood can be used to cure anemia, a condition in which a person has a low red blood cell count.
- ◆ Raw bat blood is believed to increase human blood when consumed. This myth suggests that consuming raw bat blood can increase a persons' blood volume.
- ◆ Bats are used as love potions to strengthen relationships between man and woman when consumed. This myth suggests that consuming bats can be used as a love potion to strengthen relationships between men and women.



- ◆ Consuming bat meat is believed to enhance virility and increase sexual stamina.
- ◆ Bat meat consumption is associated with increased lifespan. This myth suggests that consuming bat meat can increase a persons lifespan. This belief is likely since bats are long-lived animals themselves and may be seen as a source of longevity.

C. Agriculture

- ◆ Bat guano used as manure in agricultural fields. In some communities in Bundibugyo, Uganda, bat guano/ droppings are collected and used as a natural fertilizer to enrich soil and promote plant growth.

D. Economics

- ◆ Bats are hunted and sold as a source of income for families with limited income base.
- ◆ Bat hunting and preparation is a source of livelihood for the community, and the methods used to prepare bats involve direct handling and processing of the carcass using bare hands.
- ◆ The economic value of bats motivates hunting in the community, and sometimes bats are exchanged for other items such as chicken and food cados, which are also eaten by children, posing a risk for transfer of viruses from bats to humans.



This document is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of STOP Spillover and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.