

Conflicts as Indices to Evaluating the Effectiveness of Natural Resources Conservation in the Cross River National Park, Nigeria

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Abstract

Despite the legislative frameworks put in place to enable the preservation of natural resources, it is discovered that conflicts undermine the sustainable conservation of natural resources. The paper examines the nature and intensity of conflicts within the Park while highlighting the critical causes for conflicts within the area. A total of three hundred and ninety-five questionnaires were distributed to eight study communities and the National Park management to elicit information on the factors that account for conflicts in the park. Findings show that conflicts exist in the park owing to a number of factors which include park location and objection of the communities to the restrictions imposed on access to natural resources. These collectively manifest as threats to the communities and the park objectives. The factors accounting for this are identified to include lack of adequate employment of community members by Park management, lack of compensation by the park management to community, unemployment, closeness of park boundary to communities and the restrictions of livelihood sources of the communities. The study advocates for community enlightenment, and the adoption of participatory approaches in creating and managing the National Park.

Index terms— Enlightenment, community, unemployment, closeness.

1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the numerous functions performed by National Parks, it is observed that Park environment frequently strive under conditions of conflicts. Conflict may be regarded as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to injure, or eliminate their rivals (Otitte and Albert 2001), Thayer, (2005), Davey, (1993), Coser (1956), Cordell, J. (1993). The conflict situations in park areas are often attributed to conditions of discordance between the park management and the surrounding indigenous communities based on the multiple-values attached to the existence, sustenance, welfare and the role of the natural resources within such environments.

The steadily increasing incidences of these conflicts reflect that a consensus has not been reached that will enable the conservation scheme to be achieved. The resulting consequences have been the emergence of series of Author : University of Calabar, Calabar. E-mail : liessien@yahoo.ca criticisms on the impacts created by the establishment criticisms on the impacts created by the establishment of National Parks. This is because while the designation of a national park could be seen to result in future conservation benefits to humankind; it has also resulted in destabilizing the ability of people to survive in present times. It is thus clear that there is a genuine clash between the needs of biodiversity conservation and the development needs of the people.

The commencement of a strict conservation policy by the management of the Cross River National Park, witnessed a strong resistance by communities of the zone. This is because the strict conservation policy demanded restrictions on the ability of the support communities to have free access to the natural resources within the park environment. The consequences have manifested in the form of conflicts of varying dimensions between park

authorities and the indigenous peoples of park communities owing to the rich diverse ecosystems of the park; which contain plant and animal resources, produce seeds and fruits for consumption, flavorings, spices, medicines, building materials and other uses (Schmidt 1996).

2 a) Conservation versus Development conflicts in Protected Areas

Concern has been highlighted on the need to have insights to the compatibility of conservation and development in human inhabited protected areas. Fisher, C. and Ury (1985) and Buckles and Rusnak (1999) identified some of the causes of conflicts related to natural resources utilization to include situations where natural resources are embedded in an environment or interconnected space wherein actions by one individual or group may generate effects that disrupt the livelihoods of those surviving on it for food; natural resources may be embedded in a shared social space where complex and unequal relations are established among a wide range of social actors, resources scarcity, increasing demand and unequal distribution; situations in which natural resources are used by people in ways that are defined symbolically. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that protected area conflict is largely connected to contests over resources and access to them and into the forces that make such competition increasingly widespread. The availability of natural resources is not the causes of conflict, rather the forces that compel and make such competition widespread and thus trigger tension and often lead to clashes (Imeh, and Adebobola 2005). In other words, the environment is linked to the base of all social conflicts that pertain to resources use and conservation. Ghirmine & Pimbert (1997) explain the protected -area conflict and the interrelationship of macro-trends as emanating from primary focus on rising income per capita, productivities and technological modernization, while the issue of rural social security and sustainable livelihood have received secondary attention. Over-looking basic community needs is the dominant reason for conflicts thereby undermining the conservation goals. Daniels (2002) highlights three administrative procedures employed in many National Parks which are often conflict inducers. They include the Top-Down, Mixed Management and Bottom-up Management approaches. The three approaches have been adopted in human inhabited areas worldwide and have resulted in varying impacts. The top-down management approach involves a command management in which the management of protected areas is strictly controlled by the park authorities while the local communities have no direct control or power in the administration and management of the park and its resources. The resulting effects of such management mode have been the involvement of local communities in economic activities that are less sustainable than previously engaged in. The second approach which illustrates resource management in protected areas is the mixed top-down and bottom-up concepts which attempts to partially involve local communities in the management and administration of park areas. The resulting impacts have been the creation of various land uses, anthropogenic landscape features, culturally significant and sacred areas and natural resource distribution to enhance the local communities' abilities to support their livelihoods within the confines of the Park (Arambiza 1995, Leitao 1994, Njiforti, and Tchamba, (1993) and Mitchell 1993). The third park management approach is the bottom-up community participation and it involves a total and complete participation of the indigenous people in the management of park affairs.

3 II.

4 METHOD OF STUDY

The study made use of questionnaires to collect data from a total of eight study communities within the two Divisions of the Cross River National Park namely the Oban and Okwangwo Divisions. Within the Oban Division, selected communities are Abung, Okarara, Neghe and Oban. In the Okwangwo Division, the communities selected include Butatong, Bamba, Okwabang, and Okwangwo. Questionnaire data was collected using a dual perspective assessment method involving the National Park management and its host communities. Two hundred and eighty-one questionnaires were distributed to eight study communities while one hundred and fourteen questionnaires were also distributed to the National Park management to elicit information on the factors that account for conflicts in the park.

5 III.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing conflicts in the Cross River National Park, a total of two hundred and fifty-five (255) respondents, equivalent of ninety-one percent (91%) of those sampled from the communities, indicated being aware of the existence of the park. Twenty-six (26) respondents, representing nine percent (9%) indicated not being aware of the existence of the park. Responses from the questionnaire showed that there is a significant level of awareness of the Park existence. a) Conflicts in the Cross River National Park.

The study considered the need to establish the level of association or relationship of integration that existed between the communities and the Park management. One major way of so doing is to examine the communities' acceptance of the National Park Support Zone Strategy based on the designation of communities into the Park's Support Zone as outlined by the Park for the communities located within and around the Park. From

the responses, two hundred and six (206) respondents, representing seventy-three percent (73%) regard their communities to be part of the Support Zone, while a total number of seventy-one (71) respondents, representing twenty-seven percent (27%) objected to their communities being part of the Support Zone. Two hundred and fifty-four (254) respondents within the communities or ninety percent (90%) indicated the existence of differences of opinion between the Park management and the communities. Twenty-seven (27%) respondents, making up ten percent (10%) of the sample, denied the existence of any differential opinions between the Park and the communities.

From the National Park's perspective, the acceptance of the existence of conflicts between the park management and its surrounding host communities, is also clearly established by the response of eighty-seven (87) respondents or seventy-eight percent (78%) who opted for yes and twenty-five (25) or twenty-two percent (22%) of respondents who are not aware of the existence of any disagreement between the Park and its host communities. To further buttress the Park management's knowledge of existing conflicts, it was necessary to determine the knowledge of the conflict types. A percentage representation of respondents' responses show that sixteen percent (16%) indicated open hostilities, fourteen percent (14%) chose resentment, nineteen percent (19%) selected disagreement and fifty-one percent (51%) indicated noncooperation with the Park management.

Various divisions of the park are affected by the disagreement in disparate proportions. Respondents indicated that Oban Division is most affected. Eighty-six (86) respondents or seventy-five percent (73%) affirmed this fact, while twenty-eight (27) respondents or twenty-five percent (25%) selected the Okwangwo Division as being most affected by disagreements. b) Threats faced by the National Park management in conservation.

The major challenge faced by the National park in its strive to achieve conservation in the Cross River protected area exists in the form of threats. Threats are actions or decisions undertaken that are most likely to mar the success of deliberate efforts. The establishment of the National Park is a deliberate effort aimed at achieving the conservation of natural resources from unreasonable exploitation. To clarify the existence of threats in the park, respondents, who are staff of the National Park, were required to ascertain if the park conservation scheme was in any way threatened and the nature of the threats that existed. Twenty-four (24) respondents, or twenty-one percent (21%), considered poaching to be a problem faced by the park authorities, while sixteen (16) respondents, representing fourteen percent (14%), regarded illegal logging to be the threats that is most likely to disrupt the conservation efforts. Thirty-five (35) respondents, constituting thirty percent (30%) of the sample population, selected noncooperation of rural communities in the conservation process. Twelve (12) respondents or ten percent (10%) accepted ignorance of the park's objectives for establishment, while twenty-seven (27) respondents, or twenty-three percent (23%) of the park management study population accounted for intrusion. c) Factors responsible for Conflicts in the Park.

An analysis of the park authorities' responses shows that there is a high consciousness of the existence of reasons for the conflicts. This is because sixty-six (66) respondents or fifty-eight percent (58%) acknowledge that reasons exist for the conflicts, while forty-eight respondents or forty-two percent (42%) do not acknowledge the existence of reasons for the conflicts within the park. The reasons given by the park management as being responsible for the conflicts in the National Park include, lack of adequate employment of community members by Park management (12%), lack of compensation or failed promises by the park management to community (16%), unemployment and alternative development (25%), closeness of park boundary to communities and the restrictions of livelihood sources of the communities.

From the sampled population, it is seen that forty-eight (48) respondents, representing forty-two percent (42%) attributed the disagreements to lack of education of the people by the park management, thirty-two (32) respondents or twenty-eight percent (28%) selected failed promises by the park management, twenty-four respondents or twenty-one percent (21%) opted for lack of alternative livelihood sources, while ten (10) respondents, representing eight percent (8%) identify unemployment as being the central reason the communities would have for conflicts.

7 d) Implications of Conflicts in the Cross River National

Park.

It would be an understatement to assert that the persisting conflict situations between the park management and the communities of the National Park have implications on the conservation process. However, both positive and negative implications result from the challenges that surround the National Park. e) Positive Implications.

The main argument presented by the proponents of environmental conservation is in line with the need to slow down the human misuse of the natural environment and thereby put in place a pragmatic utilitarian conservation in which the environment is protected, not only for its authentic and spiritual values (biometric preservation), but also to enable the availability and subsequent use for the present and future. This is in line with Zimmermann's (1966) definition of a resource, as being, not merely characterized by physical presence, but also the use value, which plays a more significant role.

In addition to this, the human development index establishes a relationship between wealth and human development, and anchors on the fact that human development ranking is based primarily on the average life expectancy, health, literacy and nutritional indices. Hence, the conflict situation in the protected area of the Cross River National Park is a reflection of the high level of suppression and marginalization of the rural populace,

9 CONCLUSION

which is rapidly calling for attention in order to set in motion strategic machineries that can aid the human development of this area. f) Negative Implications.

The spates of conflicts within the National Park have highlighted effects which cut across a wide sector of the environment. With incidences of conflicts on the increase, the ecological integrity of the environment is threatened, particularly as intruders, who having inhabited the area for long, are well-informed of the geographic configuration of the park, and would indiscriminately exploit the resources therein to the detriment of the conservation objectives. In addition to this, it is seen that the variables that are affected as a result of the existing differential conservation and development value of the National Park resources are intricately linked, and as such, rather than the progress March 2012 development of the area will continuously be experienced.

In an era where literacy and technological developments are on the increase, it would not be sufficient for the African environment to be backward and slow in its developmental strides. In other words, to favourably compete with other nations of the world, there is the need to re-examine critically, the existing factors of conflicts, such that solutions and options are selected and implemented that will enable conservation and development to integrate for, as succinctly described by the pragmatic utilitarian conservationists, 'the greatest good, for the greatest numbers, for the longest time'! (Gifford Pinchot) This, simply put, refers to the need for both the park management in addition to their adopted policies, to co-exist peacefully with the communities and their strides to eke out their known means of livelihood development in a familiar environment and in occupations that they can readily associate with, for growth and development.

IV.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a strong and urgent need for the Government at both federal and state levels, to adopt participatory approach in creating and managing protected areas that have tremendous ecological values. Final decisions that involve environmental programmes should be based on the pulse observed at the grass-root level. Representatives from affected communities, government administrative officials and conservation experts are stakeholders who should be involved in the development of strategies that are associated with protected area creation and management.

A social assessment is necessary for the establishment of conservation projects that directly affect the lives of the rural people inhabiting the area. This can be commissioned where it was omitted as a process of initiating a park around an already inhabited area. This is relevant because, a fraction of the responsibility of government involves ensuring that the interests of its citizens are protected, such that the people exist in comfort. Government's responsibility to its citizenry further includes creating an enabling environment for its people acquire or develop a legitimate and sustainable means of livelihood that is enhanced by the relevant formulation and execution of policies. It is therefore vital for the government to assist the rural communities attain a level of development that is sustainable.

In order for the conservation process to be effective in the Cross River National Park, it is necessary to consider some relevant issues. The first is that conservation processes in areas that are inhabited by indigenous communities often have a much longer history than government-designed protected areas and as such the traditional conservation processes of indigenous communities are legitimate and can be adopted to further enhance the conservation scheme. Secondly, it is vital to recognize diverse governance types within a protected area as being legitimate for the effective coverage of the area and the promotion of a high level of connectivity within a large area such as the Cross River Park. There is also the need for the park management to design enlightenment programmes for communities, affected by the park or conservation activities that have significant cultural contents (Lusigi 1992). The essence of this is to address issues or points of conflicts from a cultural perspective. The situation of the Cross River National park demands enlightenment programmes with a cultural bias prior to the establishment of the Park. The affected communities had developed a tradition surrounding their means of livelihood, including their occupations, foods and land-use management processes. These cultural patterns have been handed down through ancestral lineage. The development of new sources of livelihood would therefore require a high level of re-orientation and adaptation. Consultants that understand the culture of affected communities would be relevant in championing conservation issues within the communities.

V.

9 CONCLUSION

Currently, many countries have been challenged in the provision of sound and realistic approaches for the effective conservation of their natural resources, particularly where the sources of livelihood of rural communities have been affected. The establishment of protected area projects such as the National Park in any ecologically well-endowed resource environment should be primarily for the benefit of the indigenous people and subsequently, the world at large. However, it would appear that the initiators of conservation programmes reflect and emphasize more on the long term benefit of biodiversity conservation to mankind, which is often to the detriment of the people and communities occupying protected areas. This can in metaphoric terms, be described as preparing a meal for the unborn child, without first nurturing the womb that carries the child. In relation to this statement, it would be an under-estimation to declare that the people and communities inhabiting the Cross River National

221 Park enclave and support zones have been deprived. Hunger, sickness, unemployment, poverty and premature
222 deaths are the conditions that characterize the current situations in these areas.¹

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