

## **Resource development versus conservation conflict-forces in the Cross River National Park, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *The development strive of support-zone communities is reflective of the level of effectiveness of sustainable conservation of natural resources in the Cross River National Park, Nigeria. To examine the nature and intensity of development and conservation conflict-forces within the Park, purposive sampling is used to examine eight delineated study communities and the National Park management to elicit facts on the factors that account for conflicts in the park. Findings show that development and conservation 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 indices 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, proximity 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 managing the National Park.*

**Keywords:** *Conflicts, conservation, Cross River, development, National Park*

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### **I. Introduction**

One of the critical concerns that characterize the protected areas in Africa in the face of changing environmental systems and land-use practices is the ability to strike a balance between biodiversity conservation options, sustainable resource utilization processes, and the economic development of rural communities that surround these areas. Attention is drawn to the roles of development and conservation measures as significant indices that have characterized human interaction with the natural environment through time particularly as it relates to the utilization of natural resources.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> Within human inhabited protected areas such as National Parks, it is seen that on the one hand, bordering communities' multiple-value attachment for resource development and on the other hand, policies, strategies and programmes formulated in line with conservation principle have frequently been at points of conflicts. The attempt to protect the natural environment and the resources therein while on the other the need to have unrestricted access to natural resources have attracted attention.<sup>[4][5][6][7]</sup> Numerous studies have concentrated on the factors that threaten the effectiveness of national parks; concern is here highlighted on the need to have insights to the compatibility of conservation and development in the Nigerian park based on the contests over resources, accessibility indices and the forces that make such competition increasingly widespread. This study makes a case that the availability of natural resources is not the causes of conflict, rather the forces that compel and make such competition widespread and thus trigger disagreement, denial and tensions that result in undermining the effectiveness of conservation in national parks.

#### **1.1 Accounting for conflicts in National Parks**

The steadily increasing incidences of conflicts in National Parks especially within Africa point to the fact that the most effective development-conservation model is yet to be arrived at in order to enable conservation objectives of National Parks to be achieved. The resulting consequences have been the emergence of series of criticisms on the impacts created by the establishment of National Parks. The designation of a national park is essentially to safeguard natural resources for future availability and benefits while also presenting access- restriction that undermine ready economic opportunities for communities. It is clear that there is a clash between the objectives of biodiversity conservation and the development needs of the people inhabiting these areas. The administrative procedures employed in many parks can be considered as catalysts to conflict inducement. Three administrative options are generally recognized which include the top-down, mixed management and bottom-up management approaches.<sup>[8]</sup> These approaches to administration have diverse resulting consequences and impacts such as displacements, disagreements, opposition and non-compliance.<sup>[9][10]</sup><sup>[11][12]</sup> In Nigeria, seven national parks exist namely Okomu, Old Oyo, Chad Basin, Gashaka-Gumti, Kamuku, Kainji and the Cross River National parks. The parks are collectively concerned with the conservation, and protection of unique ecosystems biological diversity and heritage including the promotion of environmental

education and ecotourism for both and future benefits. The strict conservation policy in the Cross River National park demands restrictions on the support-zone communities' ability to have free access to the natural resources within the park's environment.

## **1.2 Resource development and conservation complexity in protected areas**

The complexity that underlines the development and conservation of resources in national parks is based on the multi-dimensional forces that act to hinder development and conservation.<sup>[13] [40] [15] [16] [17]</sup> The natural environment and its attribute resources constitute veritable basis for both human development and conservation within National Parks in Africa. The cultural, medical and development ties to the environment are indicative of the ability to provide food, fuel and fodder. The food, fuel and fodder (F-3) forces that exist within critical environments such as National Parks have to a large extent propelled and encouraged the exploitation of natural resources. The cultural ties to the natural environment of many communities as a medium for extraction based on its recognition as a 'giver of life' have triggered repeated and wanton resources decline. From the environment, the rich diversity of fauna and flora have provided the much needed support for meeting the human needs for food, fuel and fodder. Similarly, the concerted efforts at conservation are owed to the declining resource availability trends that are promoted by incessant encroachments through deforestation practices such as farming. In Nigeria, conflicts that pertain to resources use and conservation is as a result of the overriding influence of poverty.<sup>[18]</sup>

## **II. Method of study**

The study adopted purposive sampling using questionnaires to elicit information from a total of two hundred and fifty-five respondents in eight sampled communities of Abung, Okarara, Neghe, Oban, Butatong, Bamba, Okwabang and Okwangwo communities in the Okwangwo and Oban divisions of the National Park including the park management which has a current staff strength of four hundred and twenty within six major departments comprising ecological resources management, human resources management, ecotourism, works and maintenance, planning resources and ICT, and account and finance departments, to elicit information from a 20 percent sample on the factors that account for conflicts in the park.

## **2.1 Results**

### **2.1.1 Conflicts in the Cross River National Park**

In analyzing conflicts within the Cross River National Park, an equivalent of ninety-one percent (91%) of those sampled from the communities, indicated being aware of the existence of the park. Nine percent (9%) indicated not being aware of the existence of the park. Responses from the questionnaire indicate a significant level of awareness of the National Park's existence. This study considered the need to establish the level of relationship of integration that existed between the communities and the Park management the communities' acceptance of the National Park Support Zone objectives. This is because the designation of communities into the Park's Support Zone is outlined by the Park for the communities located within and around the Park. Seventy-three percent (73%) regard their communities to be part of the Support Zone, while, twenty-seven percent (27%) objected to their communities being part of the Support Zone. Ninety percent (90%) indicated the existence of differences of opinion between the Park management and the communities. 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 as seventy-eight percent (78%) affirmed the existence of conflicts, while twenty-two percent (22%) of respondents indicated not being 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%) indicated resentment, nineteen percent (19%) selected disagreement and fifty-one percent (51%) indicated non-cooperation with the Park management. The specific division of the Cross River National park most affected by community-park conflict is affirmed by seventy-three percent (73 %) as the Oban Division.

### **2.1.2 Threats faced by the National Park management in conservation**

The challenges faced by the Cross River National park exist 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-one percent (21%) considered poaching to be the threat faced by the park authorities, fourteen

percent (14%), regarded illegal logging, thirty percent (30%) of the sample population, and selected non-cooperation of rural communities to the conservation process. Ten percent (10%) accepted ignorance of the park's objectives for establishment, twenty-three percent (23%) of the park management study population accounted for intrusion into the park as a major threat to achieving the conservation objectives.

### **2.1.3. Conflict forces in the Cross River National Park**

An analysis of the park authorities' responses shows that there is a high consciousness of the underlying reasons for conflicts in the park. Fifty-eight percent (58%) acknowledge that reasons exist for the conflicts. The reasons identified by the park management as 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%), proximity of park boundary to communities (20%) and the restrictions of livelihood sources of the communities (27%). From the sampled community, forty-two percent (42%) attributed the disagreements to lack of education of the people by the park management, twenty-eight percent (28%) selected failed promises by the park management, twenty-one percent (21%) opted for lack of alternative livelihood sources, while eight percent (8%) identified unemployment as being the central reason the communities engage in conflicts.

### **2.1.4. Implications of Conflicts in the Cross River National Park**

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.

#### **2.1.4.1 Positive Implications**

The main argument presented by the proponents of environmental conservation is in line with the need to slow down human misuse of the natural environment and enable 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. Suffice it to note that 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, requiring a need to set in motion strategic machineries for integrating conservation with development.

#### **2.1.4.2. 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 and growth of this area being gingered, a backward development of the area through illegal encroachment will continuously be experienced. There is the need for both the park management liaise with the communities in collaborative conservation and development efforts within the area.

## **III. Recommendations**

The need to adopt participatory approach in creating and managing protected areas cannot be over-emphasized. Final decisions that involve environmental programmes should be based on the pulse observed at the grass-root level as local communities' indigenous knowledge have sustained the ecological integrity of many regions over time. In order for the conservation process to be effective in the Cross River National Park, it is necessary to consider 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. There is also the need for the park management to continuously design and develop local –level easy to follow enlightenment programmes, that encourage participatory conservation while educating on the deleterious consequences of conflicts. 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. Finally, the development of new sources of livelihood options requires high level of re-orientation, integration and adaptation.

#### **IV. 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 National Parks in any ecologically rich environment should be primarily for the benefit of the support communities and its people and subsequently, the world at large. The apparent relegation of support communities to the background in conservation is reflective of the conflicts that the conservation programmes showcase in a bid to emphasize long term benefit of conservation to mankind. This is all too often detrimental to both the communities and the conservation management. 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 inhabit the Cross River National Park enclave and support zones have been deprived and must as a matter of necessity be integrated into the conservation plan as a measure for conflict resolution.

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