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Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihoods in Rural Ghana: Impacts and Coping Strategies

Abstract

Increasingly, conservationists and policy makers are in quest of projects directed towards biodiversity conservation. However, impacts of biodiversity conservation projects tend to be more severe in natural resource-dependent communities with limited livelihood options. This article examines the impacts of a biodiversity conservation project – creation of Kakum Conservation Area (KCA) – on livelihoods of rural people in Ghana, in terms of experiences and adaptive capacity of local communities. The article reveals that the impacts of the KCA project on local livelihoods varied according to proximity to the KCA boundary and the type of crops cultivated, as well as the scale of previous dependence on resources in the KCA. The article indicates that the KCA project would benefit by: (i) understanding the socio-cultural and political context influencing rural residents; and (ii) providing alternative livelihoods for communities experiencing the impacts of the KCA. Policy implications are further presented.

Keywords: Biodiversity conservation; ecotourism; Ghana; Kakum Conservation Area; livelihood; protected areas

1.1 Introduction

Biodiversity conservation – keeping natural ecosystems functioning and healthy – is a typically complex and often multi-scale process that affects multiple stakeholders and agencies and remains central to sustainable development (i.e. achieving a balance between socio-economic development and environmental conservation). Natural resources form the basis of human existence – food, housing, transportation, land use and economic development – and require effective planning to ensure sustainable management. This demands transparent and collaborative decision-making and management approach that is flexible to changing circumstances and is suitable to local contexts. To achieve this, biodiversity conservation projects such as creation of protected areas and forest reserves, and introduction of ecotourism are increasingly recognised for their contribution to development programmes at both local and global levels in terms of conserving natural environment and producing ecosystem services necessary for human existence (Bojo, 2000; Cobbinah, 2015; Cobbinah et al., 2013; European Commission, 2002).

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