



Wildlife Co-Management in the Bénoué National Park-Complex, Cameroon: A Bumpy Road to Institutional Development

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Summary. — The ongoing efforts to set up wildlife co-management in Northern Cameroon are investigated. To this end, a situation analysis of legal, social, economic, and organizational factors was performed. It thus appeared that participatory management has been slow to institutionalize due to inadequate legislation, poor planning, and insufficient policy formulation. Building on the results, suggestions are made with reference to the ecosystem approach. It is argued that wildlife collaborative management should be a triadic convention involving state agencies, the private enterprise (professional hunters), and the civil society (community of local users and facilitating nongovernmental organizations) in the sharing of roles and benefits.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A growing number of national parks have failed to reverse the precipitous decline in biological diversity throughout the tropics. At the root of the paradox is the ineffective state protection against encroachment, coupled with the hostile reaction of local populations to a myriad of negative effects (Naughton-Treves, 1999; Nepal & Weber, 1995; Neumann, 1992). An alternative approach to conservation has been to provide local communities with economic incentives and the opportunity to participate in the decision-making (Child, 2000; Gibson & Marks, 1995; Songorwa, 1999). This principle was the basis of several community-based wildlife management (CWM) programs. Two examples of such institutions are Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) and Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas (ADMAGE) in Zimbabwe and Zambia, respectively (Child, 2000; Gibson & Marks, 1995; Songorwa, 1999).

After two decades of experimentation, the new approach is now undergoing a critical assessment (Fabricius, Koch, & Magome, 1999; Gibson & Marks, 1995; Roe, Mayers, Grieg-

Gran, Kothari, & Fabricius, 2000; Songorwa, 1999; Wainwright & Werh Meyer, 1998). A number of weaknesses have emerged thus far including, failed delivery and/or insufficient incentives, lack of power devolution, and in some cases persistent loss of biodiversity. These flaws stem from the underlying assumptions and implementation difficulties rather than the philosophy of CWM itself. For instance, nonfinancial incentives (e.g., democracy, pride, and sense of

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ownership) are usually overlooked in favor of cash or in-kind incentives, both of which are contingent on wildlife abundance, market value, and constituency size. Several reviewers have faulted CWM programs for their hierarchical structure and the retention of certain management tasks above the village level (Gibson & Marks, 1995; Olthof, 1995). These criticisms fail to recognize that a village may be too low a decision level to ensure the sustainable management of wildlife. In the case of large, high-valued species, the requirements for a sound management such as habitat size, data on ecological processes, and technical skills are seldom met comprehensively at village level, if ever.

Overall, the examples from Southern Africa are positive and attest that wildlife conservation by sustainable use is possible given appropriate land tenure and a distortion-free market (Child, 2000; Child & Chitsike, 2000). In particular, co-management is an interesting tenure system that places a resource under the joint governance of the state and a local community. Developing grassroots institutions, however, is lengthy, conflict provoking, and messy (Edwards, 1999; Fabricius *et al.*, 1999; Ostrom, 1990); but this task can neither be side-stepped nor fast-tracked without risking a disaster.

The present study assesses the institutional framework governing wildlife in Northern Cameroon, including an ongoing project funded by Global Environment Facility (GEF), in the hopes to inform future endeavors of the same kind. For the purpose at hand, I have defined the community to include all resource users whose actions are liable to affect wildlife and its habitat, be it directly or indirectly. Further, a distinction is made between local users (farmers and herders) and external users (professional hunters and a local cotton corporation). Throughout, the term "stakeholders" extends the community as just defined to state administration and its auxiliaries, i.e. rural councils and traditional rulers. Finally, I argue that the envisaged co-management should be a triadic convention between the three segments of the society namely the *state*, the *private enterprise* represented by professional hunters and the *civil society* including the community of local users and facilitating non-government organizations (NGOs). The proposed arrangement draws upon the ecosystem approach and its underlying Malawi principles (look at <http://www.biodiv.org> under "decisions COP5"). The ecosystem approach had been recommended by the Convention on Bio-

logical Diversity (CBD) as a management strategy that equitably promotes conservation and sustainable use of resources. Currently the most important global biodiversity treaty (180 parties as of April 2001), CBD was open for signature in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro and came into force on December 1993.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 provides some background to the study setting, followed by a description of the research methods in Section 3. Legal, socioeconomic, and organizational factors appear in Sections 4–6; finally Section 7 discusses the main results as well as suggestions for improvement.

2. STUDY SETTING

This section briefly describes the study setting with respect to site location, demography, economy, sociopolitical institutions, and the ongoing GEF Biodiversity Project.

The study site is located in Cameroon Northern Province, wherein 44% of land surface is occupied by 28 hunting zones and three national parks. The Bénoué National Park-Complex comprises the park itself and 10 adjoining hunting zones. Eight of the latter are leased out to professional hunters. The remaining two namely "Black Buffalo" and "Bel Eland," hereafter referred to as pilot zones, are being tested for co-management, under the auspices of the GEF project.

The provincial population stands at about 1.3 million, with an annual growth rate of 5.1% (MINPAT, 1993). This fast growth is sustained mostly by immigration from the Far North province and neighboring countries. In the early 1980s the migration influx swelled, after the construction of a hydroelectric dam at Lagdo created opportunities in agropastoral and fish production. The area is therefore a melting pot of ethnic groups whose major creeds are Islam, Christianity, and Animism, in decreasing order of influence.

At least 80% of the population within the province spend their time in agropastoral economy (Koulagna & Weladji, 1996). Cotton is the only cash crop grown locally and plays a dual political and ecological role. Politically, its production and processing fall within the exclusive control of *Société de Développement du Coton* (SODECOTON), a parastatal with strong French interests. On ecological grounds, expansion of the cotton frontline toward nat-

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