

Geography and Regional Planning

Development Options as Strategies for Conflict Reduction in Protected Areas: An assessment of People's Preferences in the Cross River National Park, Nigeria

Elizabeth E. Andrew-Essien, Francis E. Bisong & Adebayo I. Animashaun,
University of Calabar, Calabar

Abstract

This paper explores development options as effective strategies for conflict reduction in the Cross River National Park, Nigeria. It also discusses the tensions that result from the different development and conservation priorities that confront such human-inhabited protected areas as the Cross River National Park. The success level of the various conservation initiatives is examined from the communities' perspectives in the preferred conservation and development options. The paper using the Questionnaire and the Participatory methodologies, sought to examine the various strategies that have been employed in the Cross River National Park to enhance sustainable development. A total of two hundred and eighty-one (281) questionnaires were randomly distributed to respondents within eight selected study communities. The five focus groups earmarked for appraisal included the community leaders, hunters, farmers, Non-Timber Forested Products (NTFP) gatherers, and loggers. The findings revealed the preferred development options to include skills acquisitions, establishment of small agro-allied industries, and indigenous participation in the administration and operation of the park management.

Introduction

The need to achieve a level of sustenance in various countries of the world has resulted in the excessive use of natural resources to foster human growth and development. Development is here defined to involve the process of intervention into the existing structures of society in order to facilitate desired social, cultural, economic, and political and conservation goals (Furtze, De Lacy and Brickhead 1997). Attempts of development within the last two centuries have been constrained by the persisting prevailing poverty status of many countries, particularly the developing countries, and the rapid rate at which the natural environment is losing its ecological integrity as a result of over-exploitation. All too often, areas designated as protected areas, are inhabited by indigenous people who are opposed to the constraints imposed by protected area management to the use and access of their community resources (CRNP 1990).

The consequence of such opposition has constantly resulted in conflicts that arise from the differing goals of management and conservation. Concern has in

recent times, been on understanding how to ensure that the conservation objectives of protected areas conform to the development needs of resident people around protected areas. In other words, the management of protected areas is seen to not only involve the strict conservation of natural resources but also, to ensure that the development needs of the local surrounding populace is attended to. This paper thus examines the development preference options of selected communities in the Cross River National park as strategies for conflict resolution in protected areas. In specific terms, it attempted to identify the development options provided by the Park authority and examine the appropriateness of the development options by the communities.

Approaches to National Park Administration and Management

The planning model in use within National Parks frequently accounts for the management approaches and resultant level of cooperation that will result between the management and the surrounding communities. . The management approach in use within a region often adversely affects the development options to be put in place by the park administrators. For example, management approaches that exclude communities in the decision making processes will not be thoroughly acquainted with the preferred development needs of the communities, as opposed to management approaches that involve the communities in its decision taking processes and as such are well grounded in the selected development choices of the communities.

Daniels (2002) analyzes three approaches that are useful in understanding the planning and administration of protected areas. They include the Top-Down, Mixed Management and Bottom-up Management approaches. 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. Revenues accruing from eco-tourism are not allocated to the surrounding communities or utilized to enhance their standard of living. An example of this can be seen in Bolivia's Noel Kempff Mercado National Park. The local communities within this region are not given the option to participate in the design, management and control of the park (Wheat 2000). The managing agency of the park Foundation Amigos de la Naturaleza (Friends of Nature Foundation) generate revenue which frequently does not get to the local communities, whose sources of life are affected by the access restrictions placed on the park. The resulting effects 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 resultant effects of such attempts have created impacts, which are examined. The Kaa-Iya National Park of the Chaco region of Bolivia, involved the indigenous Guarani group in the management of its areas. The resulting impacts have been the creation of various land uses of the zone, anthropogenic landscape features, culturally significant and sacred areas and natural resource distribution (Arambiza 1995, Leitao 1994). This has enhanced the communities' abilities to support their livelihoods within the confines of

the park such as wildlife protection, agricultural fields and livestock management. The involvement of the local authorities in the management of the park resulted in reduced incidences of conflicts.

The third park management approach that can be considered is the bottom-up community participation. This management strategy involves a total and complete participation of the indigenous people in the management of park affairs. The Kayapo of Southern Brazil and the Kuna tribe of the Northern coast of Panama are indigenous peoples that have had complete control of their protected area. Indigenous peoples have made significant contributions to the utilization and conservation of the world's ecosystems. In Nigeria, the management approach employed by protected area administrators, which frequently trigger conflict, is the Top-down approach in which decisions that affect resident communities are imposed upon the communities. The reason for this is not far fetched as the prevailing social structure of the Nigerian environment creates an atmosphere for conflict situations to thrive due to the numerous diverse ethno-cultural interests and goals, in addition to the political and economic necessities of survival that prevail within the region. Thus, attempts at conservation of protected areas that exclude the incorporation of community preferred loggers, encroachers, and a lack of cooperation of support communities frequently confront development options.

Method of Study

Study Area

The Cross River National Park (CRNP), covering a total area of 4000sq km, can be found in the South-South geopolitical region of Cross River State, Nigeria (Figure 1). The park region is subdivided into two divisions, namely, the Oban Hills and the Okwangwo Both Divisions of the National Park host diverse floral and fauna species and hence is the leverage behind the concerted efforts at the conservation scheme (Obot 1996). The Cross River National Park harbours and is bounded by various communities which have inhabited the lands prior to the establishment of the National Park. The traditional occupations of the people inhabiting the communities of the Cross River National Park are dominantly farming, collection of forest produce, and hunting.

Figure 1: Map Showing Location of the Two Divisions in the Cross River National Park, Nigeria

Method

The Questionnaire and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) were the major means used for data collection. These served the significant role of guiding the systematic collection of data and the elicitation of quantifiable data, which can be statistically analyzed in order to provide empirical readings for data interpretation. A total number of two hundred and eighty-one questionnaires were distributed to the study communities. Five focus groups were selected for appraisal and they consisted of community leaders, hunters, farmers, Non-Timber Forested Products (NTFP) gatherers, and loggers. Questionnaire analysis data for this study was collected from a two-point perspective involving the National Park management and eight randomly



selected communities namely Abung, Okarara, Neghe and Oban, Butatong, Bamba, Okwabang, and Okwangwo from the enclave and boundary regions of the Park.

Result

Development Options provided by the Cross River National Park

The findings of the study reveal that the Cross River National Park, in recognition of the restrictions imposed upon the surrounding communities, put in place various development measures to enhance the survival of the communities. These include amongst others, the provision of indirect compensation for the loss of access to the park resources, infrastructures development, improved traditional farming systems (such as agro-forestry, livestock,) people education in forest management, the development and funding of small scale industries as well as participation of communities in the park management. These are all incentives that are meant to enable the development of the surrounding communities into the conservation scheme. However, the frequent spates of conflicts between the communities and the park management are clear indications of the existence. The performance of the park in meeting the development needs of the communities was rated (Table 1). Six (6) or two percent (2%) of respondents indicated the option excellent; five (5) respondents or one percent (1%) of the sampled

population regard the park's effort at meeting the development needs of communities as good. With respect to their efforts being considered fair, one hundred and twenty-six (126) respondents, which represent forty-four percent (44%), are in support. Thirty-six respondents (36) or twelve percent (12%) regard the park efforts as bad while the remaining forty-two (42) respondents or fourteen percent (14%) perceive their contributions in meeting the needs of the communities to be poor.

Table 1 showing an assessment of the Park in meeting the development needs of the communities

Development Rating	Respodents (No.)	Percentages (%)
Excellent	6	2
Good	5	1
Fair	126	44
Poor	36	12
Very Poor	42	14

Respondents Preferred Development Options in the Cross River National Park

To get a clear perspective of community needs, some development options that the respondents may perceive as being appropriate to reduce conflicts in the park zone were identified for selection. The development options were given as continuous education of the people, provision of alternative sources of livelihood, employment generation, fulfilling promises made by Park management, and the provision of skill acquisition programmes to suit communities' need. From table 2, it is observed that sixty – two (62) respondents, which account for twenty-two percent (22%), preferred that alternative livelihood development options be developed if conflicts were to be reduced within the park environment. Seventy (70) or twenty-four percent (24%) of respondents opted for the need to promote and give educational incentives. The highest sector of the sampled population making seventy-five (75) respondents, which is represented by twenty-six percent (26%), ascribed to the need for the establishment of skill acquisition programmes. Forty-two (42) respondents or fourteen percent (14%) preferred the generation of employment for community residents as park decision and management team.

Table 2: Residents preferred selection of Development Options in the Park

Development Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
1. Education	70	24
2. Alternative sources of livelihood	62	22
3. Employment	42	14
4.Skill Acquisition Programmes	75	26
5 Fulfillment of promises made to communities	32	11

Discussion

In order to fill the gap highlighted by the study that management within protected areas do not frequently consider the preferred development needs of the communities, this paper examined the preference of indigenous people in selecting their development options in the Cross River National Park as a strategy that can serve to reduce the incidences of conflicts within the area for enhanced conservation of natural resources.

As seen from the communities’ perspective, the performance of the park in meeting the development needs of the park is rated fair, an indication that the park management of the Cross River National have been attempting to ensure the development of the communities. The existence of frequent spates of conflicts however, may be a clear pointer that there is a high level of dissatisfaction with the existing development options.

However for conflicts to be resolved in the Cross River National Park, the preferred development options of the communities must be duly considered and given foremost priority in the implementation process. The preferred development options as highlighted from the focus groups discussion include skills acquisitions, establishment of small agro-allied industries, and indigenous participation in the administration and operation of the park management. There is the urgent need for the park management and the support communities of the park environment to have a stakeholder’s forum for the reconciliation of the various development options and the prioritization of the options in order to establish and implement the pressing developmental needs of the communities. It is only when this has been fully achieved that the management of the Cross River National Park can be assured of a conflict-free conservation effort that is result-oriented, not merely for the present generation, but also for the future generations to come, and the maintenance of the ecological integrity of the Cross River environment.

Conclusion

Protected areas such as the Nigerian National parks harbour communities that have a high prevalence of poverty, concentration of the uneducated and rural poor as characterized by landless workers, small tenant farmers, small farm owners, the rural unemployed and so on, in which the high level of dependent population ultimately rely on the natural environment for their sustenance. For the conservation of these areas to be effectiveness, it is imperative that the communities be major stakeholders and determinants of the establishment of development options that can serve to enhance rural development. The mitigation of conflict is largely dependant on meeting the development needs of the local surrounding population who are often restricted from gaining access to the natural resources. In addition to this, local communities must be accepted and involved in the conservation program of their area. This is because indigenous involve and development will present the much needed background for the socio-economic, cultural, political and psychological integration of the people into conservation, not just for the present, but also for the future. Based on this, it is imperative that selected options for development made available to the local community be established in line with the preferred needs of the communities. This will enable a peaceful co-existence to prevail between the communities and the park management.

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