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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF CROSS RIVER NATIONAL PARK

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Abstract

This study investigated the level of participation of the local communities in the management of the Cross River National Park. The primary data for this study were obtained using structured questionnaires given to 348 randomly selected respondents. Descriptive statistical technique was used for analysis of the data. The result showed that majority of the respondents was married (83.97%). The respondents were moderate and had formal education (93.97%). Majority of them fell within the age bracket of 18-59 years (75.29%) and were mostly farmers (82.47%). Furthermore, 74.42% of the sampled respondents were made poorer due to the existence of the park, and 73.85% of the respondents were not involved in the management of the park. Majority of the respondents (88.79%) were willing to participate in the management of the park if given the mandate to participate. The provision of the social and economic needs of the local residents as well as their involvement in the park management will elicit support and ensure a harmonious co-existence and the accomplishment of the goals of the park project.

Key word: Protected area, Development, Management, National Park, Participation

Introduction

Protected area is one of the most important tools for biodiversity conservation. It is the most promising and effective response strategy to mitigate biodiversity loss worldwide (MEA, 2005). The first protected areas were established during the nineteenth century, and the criteria used for selection were aesthetic and recreational qualities (IUCN, 1994; Pimbert and Pretty, 1995). Presently, protected areas cover more than 12% of the total terrestrial surface worldwide. From the more than 117,000 protected areas worldwide, over 60% are classified under the IUCN system (Susan and Hubert, 2008). This figure shows that there has been a steady increase in the number and coverage of protected areas in the last two decades but many are plagued with conflicts and management inefficiency. Many of these conflicts emerge from the fact that most of the protected areas including marine protected areas overlap with lands, territories and resources of indigenous, traditional and rural peoples who are dependent on these resources for their livelihood and sustenance.

The vision of achieving a sustainable use of our natural resources cannot be attained through isolation of the local communities from the management of the protected areas (IUCN, 1994; Van Orsdol, 1984). Unless there is a fair access and control of natural resources by the local people without discrimination based on gender, class, ethnicity, age or other variables, the goal of achieving a sustainable use of our natural resources would be a mirage. Adopting a participatory approach in the management of our protected areas will therefore empower the local communities and local users, recognize their rights and responsibilities, and also ensure their

means to sustainable livelihood and human development. A fair and safe tenure system for land and local resources will also increase the social stability and local user incentives and ability to participate in management decisions effectively.

This study is aimed at determining the level of participation of the local communities in the management of the park, the effects of the park management on their economic status and to ascertain their willingness to participate in the management of the National Park. These became necessary in view of the fact that government is initiating radical economic reforms, which seeks ways of boosting all sector of the economy, rather than depending solely on crude oil – a non-renewable resource. Such drastic but positive change will bring about the success in conservation of wildlife resources. This in turn will compel development in the area of tourism, which is one of fast growing sectors of the world economy today. By implication, a sequence of economic transformation will be generated which will impact on the protected areas neighboring communities positively.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Oban Division of the Cross River National Park located on longitudes 5°05' to 6°29' East and latitude 8°15' to 9°80' North with total land area of 3000 Km². The region is ecologically contiguous with Korup National Park in Cameroon (Ezealor, 2002). The people in the catchments area are mainly subsistence farmers and engaged primarily in farming, hunting, fishing and craft making. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 25 percent of the park neighboring communities making it twelve communities from the forty eight identified communities. The communities selected were; Ntebachot, Orem, Akor, New Ndebiji, Osomba, Aking, Oban, Nege, Owai, Ifumkpa, Mangor, and Ekong. Thirty questionnaires were randomly distributed among thirty respondents in each community making a total of 360 respondents. Out of these, only 348 questionnaires were retrieved. The data obtained was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis of variance in accordance with Akindele (2004).

Results And Discussion

Demography of the Respondents

The result of the demography of the respondents obtained showed that majority (75.29%) of the respondents was within the productive age bracket of 25-49 years (Table 1). This is an indication that the population is active. The low level of industrialization in the study area and coupled with their limited source of income might be responsible for the involvements of the people in the exploitation of the park resources for their livelihood.

The level of literacy in the study area is relatively high. Table 1 shows that 7.76% of the respondents had tertiary education while, 49.71% and 36.50% of the respondents had secondary and primary education respectively. Formal education according to Njoku (2000) and Adam (1982) has the potential for making up of some of the deficiency in non-formal education and positively influence the adoption of innovation. With their level of education the respondents possesses the ability to participate effectively in resource management decisions of the park.

The marital status of the respondents indicated that 83.97% of the respondents were married.

This therefore implies greater pressure on the park resources. This agrees with Bode(2006) observation in the relationship between population and resource conservation. Also, 82.41% of the respondents were engaged in farming as their main occupation. This indicates a pressure on the park area for more fertile lands for farming.

Table 1: Demography of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age distribution		
< 24 years	50	14.37
25 – 49 years	262	75.29
> 50 years	36	10.34
Educational status		
Primary	127	36.50
Secondary	173	49.71
Tertiary	27	7.76
Non-formal	21	6.03
Marital status		
Married	292	83.97
Un married	51	14.66
No response	5	1.47
Occupation		
Farming	287	82.47
Others	61	17.53
Total	348	100

Source: Field survey, 2008

Effect of the park on the economic status of the respondents

Table 2 reveals that 74.42% of the respondents were made poorer by the establishment of the park. This figure affirms Pimpert and Pretty (1995) assertion that tribal people, poor farmers, fishermen and pastoralist displaced by conservation projects usually find their needs and rights poorly met in their new, more risk-prone environments. As a means of alleviating the economic hardship of the people, there is need for the park to establish a cottage industry, subsidized and approved genetic crop species to enhance the livelihood of park communities.

Table 2: Effect of the Park on the respondents' economic status

Economic status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Richer	39	11.11
Poorer	259	74.42
No response	50	14.37
Total	348	100

The level of respondent's involvement in the park management

Table 3 indicates that majority of the respondents which made up 73.85% were not involved in the management of the park. This is an indication of the neglect of local institution and social organization in decision making (Pimpert and Pretty, 1995). As a result of this, local systems of decision making and resource management are eroded and local institutions are replaced by the bureaucracy and professional bodies, thus, leading to severe conflicts with the local populations attempting to maintain their customary rights to the resources of the park (Gadgil, 1992)

Table 3: Level of respondents' involvement in the park management

Level of involvement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Informants	26	7.47
Casual labor	43	12.37
Local committee	12	3.45
Not involved	257	73.85
No response	10	2.86
Total	348	100

Source: Field survey, 2008

Table 4: Willingness of respondents to participate in the park management

Participation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Willing	309	88.79
Not willing	24	6.90
No response	15	4.31
Total	348	100

Source: Field survey, 2008

Table 5: Ways respondents want to be involved in the management of the park

Commitment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Committee member	153	36.17
Permanent staffs	101	23.88
Casual labor	61	14.42
Informant	47	11.11
Decision making process	38	8.98
No commitment	23	5.44
Total	428	100

Source: Field survey, 2008

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of this study showed that the park's existence had a negative impact on the economic status of the people and their level of involvement in the park management is very low. However, majority of the people expressed their willingness to participate in the management of the park.

It is therefore recommended that the success of wildlife resource conservation can only be achieved by adequately involving the local residents in the management of the park resources. However, the mere fact of involving the local people in resource planning and management is not a guarantee of a successful outcome. Success is contingent on a framework within which participatory development can precede issues such as tenure. The authority taking effective management decisions is an important issue to be considered in participatory development

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