CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY BASED CONSERVATION OKWANGWO DIVISION OF CROSS RIVER NATIONAL PARK

BY

Louis Nkonyu & Egere Miriam
Department of Environmental Education,
University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

Abstract

Many conservationists attest to a paradigm shift in biodiversity conservation, away from exclusive protected areas towards more people-centred or community-based conservation. This has been referred to as 'new conservation'. However, new conservation could be thought of as an attempt to re-name and re-package conservation and to 'get forest communities on board'. According to its critics even so-called new conservation policy, practice and institutions remain expert-driven, top-bottom approach, undemocratic, and autocratic. We argue that for new conservation to become reality, then more fundamental changes in priority-setting, decision-making and organization are required. This paper presents three challenges of community-based Conservation in Okwangwo Division of Cross River National Park: a more pluralist approach to understanding knowledge and values of different actors, greater deliberation and inclusion in decision-making, and a remodeling of stakeholders to support conservation.

Key words: community conservation, conservation policy, decision-making, institutions, protected Area, biodiversity.

Introduction

Popular interest in protecting the world biodiversity diversity including its amazing range of species, its complex biological communities, and the genetic variation within species has intensified during the last few decades. Both scientists and general public understand that we are living in a period of unprecedented loss of biodiversity. Thousands, if not tens of thousands of species and millions of unique populations are predicted to go extinct in the coming decades (Lawton and May 1005, Levin 2001; Jaackson 2002).

The tropical rainforests of Cross River State, Nigeria are recognized as a biodiversity hotspot of global significance significance (Myers *et al* 2000. Oates *et al* 2004), supporting numerous endangered primates most notably the Cross River gorilla. The unique nature of Okwangwo forest is due part to it high annual rainfall of over 4000mm, and it relatively short dry season. Consequently, this forest, together with that immediately adjacent in southwest Cameroon, is classified as the only true evergreen rainforest in Africa. Over 60% of Nigeria endangered plant and animal species are found only within these forests. These include 132 tree species listed by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre as globally threatened. As many as 200 species have been recorded from single 0.05ha plot, a diversity matched only in exceptionally rich sites

in South America. These trees also attract butterflies, and the forest are richer in butterflies than any part of Africa. Okwangwo is home of all the wild primate species in Nigeria, is where Cross River gorilla share the same habitat with other primates including chimpanzees and drills. Other rare species include leopard, small antelopes, a variety of monkeys, as well as buffalo and forest elephants. The gorilla which had been declared extinct 40 years earlier, was rediscovered in 1987, and the huge amount of international publicity that has generated help to persuade the government to gazette the area as part of Cross River National Park in 1988. The Okwangwo Division of the park has an estimated 1,545 plant species, 77 of which are endemic to Nigeria, emphasize the extreme biodiversity richness of the area. However, there are increasing threats from uncontrol farming, logging, and hunting by the enclave and surrounding communities. It was on this note that many conservationists suggested a more pluralist approach including a bottom-up approach for the conservation of these unique ecosystem. The struggle over ownership of resources in the protected area has generated a lot of conflict between Protected Area Authority (PAA) and enclave communities (Okwangwo, Mukwanda and Ukwonde) of Okwangwo Division of Cross River National Park.

The conflicts between biodiversity conservation and human development continue to be the subject of debates as articulated by some activists, for example, in recent exchanges in the journal Conservation Biology about the role of forest communities in forest conservation and long-term opportunities for sustainable development in Amazonia (Redford & Sanderson, 2000; Schwartzman et al., 2000; Terborgh, 2000) and in Science on human populations and species richness in Africa (Balmford et al., 2001; Faith, 2001; Huston et al., 2001). There is a general agreement that conservation policy and practice has changed significantly in the past two decades or so, and people-oriented approaches have been widely accepted and adopted. Authors disagree, however, about the extent to which this represents a meaningful paradigm shift or mere window-dressing by major conservation interests and players (Jeanrenaud, 2002). Although there is evidence of a resurgent protection paradigm (reviewed and critiqued by Wilshusen et al., 2002) it seems likely, as Adams & Hulme (2001, p. 198) have commented, that the new conservation narrative, characterized as community conservation, is ‘here to stay’. According to Hulme & Murphree (1999), so-called new conservation represents three major shifts in thinking and practice. These include a move away from a state-centric to a community level focus; a reconceptualization of conservation based on ideas of sustainable development, utilization, and ecological dynamics; and incorporation of neo-liberalism ideas and market forces to ‘make conservation pay’. According to this description, new conservation is manifest in a range of approaches and practices in all continents of the world since the 1980s. These include integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs), community-based conservation, community-based natural resource management, creation of buffer zones for extraction of resources, and initiation of ecotourism programs. These activities take place both within and outside existing protected areas. They can broadly be characterized as ‘communities-based’ conservation. The people of enclave villages of Okwangwo Division of Cross River National Park have experienced various results in terms of success and

effectiveness in reaching their dual objectives. We propose that if these Community-based conservation approaches are to be successful in meeting both conservation and development objectives, such as access road, then more fundamental changes in their development, design and practice are necessary. In this short paper we identify the need for more pluralist understandings of different knowledges, values, and worldviews to inform conservation; for the adoption of deliberative inclusionary processes to decide and implement conservation; and for the need to transform conservation institutions to support a more dynamic, adaptive, and integrated approach to conservation and development. This recognizes conservation as a social and political process that necessitates full consideration of the economic, political, and social, as well as ecological and environmental, impacts of different courses of action and that there exist a wide range of stakeholder and societal interests in conservation decisions (Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Song & M'Gonigle, 2001; Brechin et al., 2002).

The first Challenge of community-based conservation

The first challenge for community-based conservation concerns the ways in which different understandings, meanings and values of biodiversity, the environment and nature are integrated and applied in devising conservation priorities and action. More pluralist understandings of value systems can support conservation in several ways, as outlined by Gadgil et al. (1993). The concept of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is particularly useful as it differs from the way local or indigenous knowledge is normally conceptualized and used to support conservation, which is a very static perspective of knowledge as an input into externally defined strategies and priorities. A TEK approach, as developed by Berkes (1999), requires that we take account of how knowledge is embedded within the management strategies, social institutions and ultimately the worldviews of different actors. Thus, it links traditional or local knowledge more directly to value systems and is therefore more useful in supporting both policy and practice for conservation and development of Okwangwo Division of Cross River National Park. It also views knowledge and practice and institutions as evolving and adapting to changes in context and circumstances (Berkes et al., 2000).

We suggest that a form of 'fusion knowledge', neither strictly local or traditional, nor external or scientific, may be most useful in developing locally appropriate (in terms of culture and resources) and adaptive systems of managing diverse biological resources. It is often at the interface between different ways of knowing and different forms of knowledge that innovations in resource management and practice can be made. For example, in the case of non-timber forest domestication women group in Abo Mkpang, support for the development of institutions, such as these farmers' groups, to manage forest biodiversity could potentially make significant differences to the evolution of more sustainable natural resource management practices at the forest frontier in Okwangwo Division of Cross River National Park. These opportunities to bring together outsiders' and local knowledge to develop new management practices constitute fusion knowledge, which is close to what we have described earlier as 'knowledge-in-action' (Blaikie et al., 1997), and which is potentially an important focus for conservation.

The Second Challenge of Community Based Conservation

The second challenge for community Based conservation is to find fair and just means of including the plural values, knowledge and interests of the different stakeholders recognized above. To do this, we need to move beyond 'participation' as practiced normally in attempts to integrate conservation and development. Many forms of participation practiced are still passive and sometimes even coercive, and a few recent publications have criticized and dissected the application of participation in conservation projects. We need to apply methods and tools for deliberative inclusionary processes that radically transform decision-making and management processes and open co-management frameworks to allow for learning and collective action. 'Deliberation' means careful consideration or discussion. Decision-making and planning thus require social interaction and debate. Deliberation implies that different positions of stakeholders are recognized and respected. Participants are expected to reflect on and evaluate and re-evaluate their and others' positions, and the process of deliberation aims to bring about some kind of transformation of values or preferences and to foster negotiation between participants to reach a decision. 'Inclusion' is the action of including different participants in these processes. A broad range of procedural techniques, mechanisms and methods have developed under the broad umbrella of 'deliberative inclusionary processes. These have developed and are applied in many different areas of environmental management and local governance, in both developed and developing countries. They include, for example, citizen's juries, focus groups, issue forums, participatory rural appraisal, visioning exercises, and various types of workshops and working groups. These methods typically put an emphasis on working with small groups of people; focusing on the future and on common ground; urging full attendance and participation; incorporating the widest possible range of interests; and seeking public commitments to action (Holmes & Scoones, 2000). They are seen widely as being important in leading to fairer processes and 'better' decisions (meaning more efficient, effective, equitable and legitimate) and to the empowerment of marginalized actors, for example women, which is sometimes viewed as an end. These methods provide a means of accommodating local actors and their values and knowledge into decision-making and management. In the case of Mbe Mountain protected area in Eastern Boki, a range of techniques were employed to facilitate conflict resolution among communities and instigate consensus based decision-making and management (Imong. 2001). Several methods, including stakeholder analysis, focus groups, surveys, workshops and assigning responsibilities to community leaders, were used to include all relevant stakeholder groups and enable debate and transparent decision-making. The key lessons from this process were threefold. First, inclusion of all relevant actors: it requires that many different techniques are used to encourage people to participate and to articulate their views. Secondly, building trust in the process and between different stakeholders takes time but is vital for the success of both process and outcome. Participants must be confident that their views are heard and noticed, and decision-making and priority setting must be transparent and accountable. Thirdly, this is an ongoing, adaptive, and learning process. Consensus and agreement are not an end-point nor necessarily desirable. Rather, the process must evolve as necessary and find ways of dealing with conflicts and

disagreements that do not impose 'consensuses. At Mbe Mountain, this approach, which was termed 'Bottom-up approach', was developed as a means of enabling the 9 villages that surround Mbe mountain to evaluate options and debate and discuss their priorities in an open and transparent decision making framework that engaged local communities and Environmental non-governmental Organization (NGOs) in a co-management process. However, these approaches can only go so far and enabling institutional and legal frameworks are necessary to support the decisions made through such deliberative and inclusionary processes, otherwise the processes and the stakeholders become undermined and disempowered (Tompkins et al., 2002).

The Third Challenge of Communities-Based Conservation.

This third challenge is to create new institutions for conservation and development that are flexible and adaptable, and which can manage complex ecological systems and accommodate diverse stakeholder interests and values. Institutions provide both the backdrop for, as well as the venue of, all conservation actions. Institutions in the broadest sense mean the formal and informal rules that govern human behaviour. They are made up of formal constraints (rules, laws, constitutions) and informal constraints (norms of behaviour, self-imposed codes of conduct) and their enforcement characteristics.

They are often referred to as 'rules in use'. Clearly, then, the institutional characteristics of conservation initiatives range from the designation and constitution of protected areas, relevant legal and organizational frameworks, the formal and informal property rights and rules that govern the management of biodiversity; and the norms and traditions of the different stakeholders and actors who impact on it. We have used the notion of institutional fit in analyzing the appropriateness of the conservation institutions trying to improve the integration of human needs with biodiversity. The concept has been developed from the work of writers such as Berkes, Folke and Holling (see Pritchard et al., 1998), drawing on insights from ecology, political science and institutional economics. Institutions do not 'fit' the ecosystems they seek to manage for several reasons. These include the complexity and dynamics of ecosystems; uncertainty over future changes; factors such as irreversibility and resilience and disturbance. Furthermore, there are also problems of fit between the different institutions involved, in terms of their objectives, interests and worldviews, and their scale of operations. Even in a relatively successful initiative in communities-centred conservation, such as the development of extractive reserves in Brazilian Amazonia, these problems of institutional fit have constrained the benefits, both to local people and in terms of biodiversity conservation (Brown & Rosendo, 2000). Even these innovative institutions have problems in dealing with and reconciling external pressures such as those imposed by markets, and because of the different worldviews of key actors in conservation and development, ranging from the World Bank and international environmental organizations to grassroots movements of migrants and farmers. Thus, significant innovations in institutions are necessary for communities-centred conservation. Institutions must work across scales in both spatial and organizational or social

terms. They have to link global and international interests with local needs and development priorities. They must evolve and adapt and be based on principles of social learning in order to cope with ecological and social complexity. Most institutions are not good at this; they are often based on tradition and on applying constraints to behaviour rather than being flexible and facilitating. However, we do have successful examples, and the evolution of the co-management arrangements in places as diverse as southern Africa and Caribbean islands demonstrate that better-adapted, appropriate, 'well-fitting' institutions are possible. A concern for social and environmental justice and a much more dynamic and adaptive ecological understanding are necessary prerequisites for institutions to meet the dual demands for conservation and development.

Statement of the Problem

There is no simple answer to environmental Problem affecting man, this is because people living in and around the protected areas need to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves, which means resources must be consumed. However, simple ignorance, that is lack of information can lead to overused of resources by forest dwellers. On the other hand, conservation is less achievable without the people involvement. It is on this note that many experts and conservators have advised for more hands to be on desk if biodiversity conservation is to be achieved. Forest Communities have suffered untold hardship as a result of various contradictions. From human-wildlife conflicts, prevention of access road through protected area to enclave villages where agricultural products can be transported to nearby markets, to prevention of farming activities and collection of non-timber forest Products (NTFPs). These issues generated conflict with Protected Areas Authority and has made it difficult to manage forest communities alongside with conservation programs effectively. It is on this note that many conservationists have advocated for community based conservation or any programs that will motivate forest communities to make policies that will protect their forest based livelihoods and biodiversity conservation in general.

Conclusion

The policy and institutional landscape of conservation and development is rapidly and quite significantly changed and changing. A wide range of different strategies and approaches will be necessary in the future to reconcile and trade-off the needs and demands of global to local communities. These will include traditional protected areas but increasing more integrated and Communities-based approaches to biodiversity conservation. We have outlined only three of the challenges for more successful, meaningful Communities-based conservation. These are not exclusive and are not the only challenges. Very serious issues such as economic and cultural globalization and climate change provide the backdrop against which resilient and adaptive policy will evolve. Furthermore, issues of power inequalities and government policies may act as serious constraints to these new approaches. However, integrated and engagement approaches to new conservation are necessary if it is to bring benefits both to society and to biodiversity conservation in Okwangwo Division of Cross River National Park. If this new

conservation is really to make a difference, then more novel approaches to priority setting and implementation are needed.

References:

Adams, W.M. & Hulme, D. (2011) If community conservation is the answer in Africa, what is the question? Oryx, 35, 193–200.

Berkes, F. (2009) Sacred ecology: traditional ecological knowledge and resource management. Taylor & Francis, Philadelphia.

Berkes, F., Colding, J. & Folke, C. (2013) Rediscovery of traditional ecological knowledge as adaptive management. Ecological Applications, 10, 1251–1262.

Blaikie, P.K., Brown, P., Dixon, P., Sillitoe, M., Stocking & Tang, L. (2012) Knowledge in action: local knowledge as a development resource and barriers to its incorporation in natural resource research and development. Agricultural Systems, 55, 217–237.

Brechin, S.R., Wilshusen, P.R., Fortwangler, and C.L. & West, P.C. (2014) Beyond the square wheel: toward a more comprehensive understanding of biodiversity conservation as a social and political process. Society and Natural Resources, 15, 41–64.

Brown, K., Adger, W.N., Tompkins, E., Bacon, P., Shim, D. & Young, K. (2001) Trade-off analysis for marine protected area management. Ecological Economics, 37, 417–434.

Brown, K. & Rosendo, S. (2009) The institutional architecture of extractive reserves in Brazil. Geographical Journal, 166, 35–48.

Faith, D.P. (2012) Overlap of species richness and development opportunity does not imply conflict. Science debate responses to Huston, et al., http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/eletters/293/5535/ 1591, October 2009.

Gadgil, M., Berkes, F. & Folke, C. (2016) Indigenous knowledge for biodiversity conservation. Ambio, 22, 151–156.

Holmes, T. & Scoones, I. (2014) Participatory environmental policy processes: experiences from North and South. IDS Working Paper 113. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton UK

Hulme, D. & Murphree, M. (2008) Communities, wildlife and 'new conservation' in Africa. Journal of International Development, 11, 277–285.

Tompkins, E., Adger, W.N. & Brown, K. (2002) Institutional networks for inclusive coastal management in Trinidad and Tobago. Environment and Planning A, 34, 1095–1111.

Jeanrenaud, S. (2002) People-oriented approaches to global conservation: is the leopard changing its spots? IIED,

Inaoyom, I. & Francis, O. (2009) Gorilla Census of the Mbe Mountain Community Wildlifr Sanctuary, Cross River State Nigeria.

Chris, Wright (2015) Future food for thought: Duiker Hunting and Sustainability in Ikot Esai Nigeria

Richard, B (2014) A Primer of Conservation Biology: Third Edition