
Evaluation of Community-Based Conservation Policy for Wildlife Management in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study evaluates community-based conservation policy for wildlife management in Nigeria. The research focuses on the laws, policies and act promulgated to protect and preserve our environmental landscape from degradation by identifying National Park Act as the most suitable law for the study. The research relies extensively on secondary data sources especially articles on community based conservation. Findings reveal that, though community based conservation has been integrated into the National Park Service Act, it is yet to be fully implemented in all the parks. Records have it that the Act is in operation in Cross River National Park, Old-Oyo National Park, and Kainji Lake National Park. However, even in places where the Act is being implemented, hunters, poachers, farmers and livestock farmers still encroach and cause degradation in these protected areas. The study concludes that community based conservation policy has proved to be a framework which can guide conservation and incorporate host communities in the administration of the protected areas. The policy further enhances community participation and the involvement of the locals in the management and conservation of natural resources. This form of community participation is a vital instrument in environmental resources management. The study therefore recommends that community-based conservation policy should be implemented to the letter to curb environmental degradation and promote community involvement. Also, community members should be involved in the planning and conservation of natural resources. In addition, empowerment programmes should be provided as an alternative means of livelihood for the local people in order to reduce over dependence on environmental resources.

Keywords: Community-Based Conservation, Wildlife Management, Ecotourism, Nigeria; Africa.

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Introduction

Ecotourism has become popular, making it the fastest-growing segment of the tourism industry. Indeed, promoting natural wonders has proved very profitable. In many countries, nature-based tourism has become the largest foreign exchange earner, surpassing, for instance, bananas in Costa Rica, coffee in countries like Tanzania and Kenya, and textiles and jewelry in India. Therefore, tourism has provided a valuable financial incentive to save plants and animals. In Kenya, it is estimated that the lion is worth \$7,000 per year in income from tourism, and an elephant herd is valued at \$610,000 annually. Hawaii's coral reefs are estimated to generate \$360 million each year from nature-based tourism (Watchtower Online Library, nd; Awake, 2005, Olokesusi, 2017).

Wildlife tourism refers to the observation and interaction with local animal and plant life in their natural habitats. It encompasses segments such as ecotourism, safari tours and mountain tourism, among others. Wildlife watching tourism occurs mainly in protected areas. Nature, national parks and wildlife are considered the most important tourism assets for tourists travelling, for instance, to Africa. A World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report shows that 93% of all natural heritage sites support recreation and tourism and 91% of them provide jobs. For instance, in Belize, more than 50% of the population is supported by income generated through reef-related tourism and fisheries (WWF, 2012). In the same vein, various researches have revealed that wildlife viewing and other related ecotourism are the key drivers of tourists visit to Africa. Wildlife Watching Tourism in Africa, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Report (2015) 7% of world tourism relates to wildlife tourism: a segment that is growing annually at about 3%. The same document shows that a total of 14 countries in Africa are generating an estimated US\$ 142 million in entrance fees into their protected areas (UNWTO, 2015).

Wildlife represents biodiversity, which is essential for the health and well-being of the whole planet. Humans live in an interconnected ecological system, where each macro and microorganism, whether animal, plant or fish, affects the other (Mathew et al., 2017). Any alteration of the natural habitat of an(y) organism would trigger a dynamo effect. Therefore, non-equilibrium in the ecological system as a whole endangers the life cycle of many species. Wildlife remains a major concern for the international, regional and local communities. Among the multiple risks that menace wildlife are: diseases, climate change and actions of human nature, such as poaching and illegal trafficking (Atuo et al., 2020; Ntuli et al., 2019; Bello et al., 2017). Community-Based Conservation (CBC) has emerged as the theme of the new strategy for wildlife management, which attempts to address the need of local communities (Tijani, 2007). Thus, conservation does not mean

restriction of use but rational utilisation of the resources to ensure continuous use, which is perfectly in support of the sustainable development of the 1987 Brundtland Commission Declaration.

CBC is a bottom-top participatory approach to conservation. It has been described as an advanced way of improving the socio-economic standards of locals and rural communities. But for local communities to effectively manage their ecotourism resources, they must be assured of their full participation and sharing from the benefits accrued from ecotourism (Sirivongs and Tsuchiya, 2012). An additional compelling aspect of CBC is its emphasis on achieving conservation goals through economic and social incentives; and by incorporating the traditional knowledge and wisdom of local peoples encapsulated in accumulated knowledge over generations of intimate interaction with the natural environment (Adeniyi, 2020). This paper therefore evaluates community-based conservation policy for wildlife management in Nigeria.

The Need for Conservation

Humanity is gradually losing sight of the limited character of our resources as we go inexorably towards the modern era. To put it differently, the naturally endowed resources are dwindling (Toyobo, Raheem and Oyeleye, 2014). Resources are limited; both renewable and nonrenewable natural resources are quickly depleting due to the enormous pressures placed on them by human activities. The fundamental question of ‘why should we conserve?’ has been at the heart of several works such as Saez (2019) and Toyobo, Raheem and Oyeleye (2014). That fundamental question draws attention to the value of animals to humans. As pointed out by Wilson (2019); Izah et al. (2018) Nwankwo and Halilu (2016), Agrawal et al. (1997) and Nest (1991), endangered species will become extinct if humans overlook the necessity for conservation. If this were to occur, humanity would lose a tremendous deal of immense worth that will be difficult to replace.

Wildlife resources are very important to the economies of nations and their importance calls attention to the need for conservation. The following are the benefits of wildlife resources:

1. **Economic Value:** Tourism that is based on wildlife is an important source of foreign exchange. It provides jobs and generates incomparable goods, such as hides and skin, fur, and pharmaceuticals, among other things.
2. **Recreational Value:** Viewing games in their natural habitat gives individuals a lot of joy.
3. **Educational Value:** Schools plan field trips to National Parks to give students chance to witness biological processes that are difficult, if not impossible, to be seen in traditional classroom laboratories.

4. **Scientists and Research Value:** Researchers employ animals in their experiments, which have scientific and research significance. Newly developed medications, for example, are first tested on animals, such as monkeys, whose bodily systems are comparable to those of humans.
5. **Aesthetic and Cultural Value:** Wild animals contribute to the natural beauty of the forest and grassland where they live. They're also found in a lot of traditional folklore, where they're used to teach morals and values.
6. **Food Sources:** Wildlife resources are a valuable food source. Indeed, it makes up a larger proportion of locally produced animal protein.
7. **Survival Value:** Each species of wildlife contributes to the earth's balanced ecosystem by assisting and maintaining it. If life would continue to exist and survive, the current wildlife system must continue to function. As a result, the extinction of any species can put all forms of life, including humans, in jeopardy (Toyobo, Raheem and Oyeleye, 2014).

An Overview of Government Regulations on Conservation in Nigeria

Over the years, government has provided leadership on protecting and preserving our environment. Current environmental law(s) in Nigeria would most likely support biodiversity conservation action. The basis of environmental policy in Nigeria is contained in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Pursuant to section 20 of the Constitution, the State is empowered to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air and land, forest and wildlife of Nigeria. In addition to this, section 2 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Act of 1992 (EIA Act) provides that the public or private sector of the economy shall not undertake or embark on or authorise projects or activities without prior consideration of the effect on the environment.

The Federal Government of Nigeria has promulgated various laws and regulations to safeguard the Nigerian environment. The key conservation laws include:

- ❖ National Park Service Act.Cap.L65.
- ❖ Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act of 1988 (FEPA Act).
- ❖ National Environmental Protection (Effluent Limitation) Regulations:
- ❖ National Environmental Protection (Pollution Abatement in Industries and Facilities Generating Wastes) Regulations; and
- ❖ National Environmental Protection (Management of Solid and Hazardous Wastes) Regulations.

- ❖ Environmental Impact Assessment Act of 1992 (EIA Act).
- ❖ Harmful Wastes (Special Criminal Provisions etc.) Act of 1988 (Harmful Wastes Act).
- ❖ Endangered Species Act (2016): The Act contains very stringent penalties for illegal activities/trade in wild (Flora and Fauna)
- ❖ National Environmental (Protection of Endangered Species) in International Trade Regulations (2011).

Despite the Federal Government concerted efforts in promulgating laws, acts and policies that seek to protect and preserve the environment, the National Park Service Act is the most relevant policy document for this research.

Twelve years after the establishment of Kainji Lake National Park, Nigeria repealed the law and replaced it with Decree 36 of 1991, which effectively established five new national parks. The Federal Executive Council (FEC), under a special request, later added Yankari Games Reserve, Bauchi State to the family of national parks. The Yankari National Park Order of 1993, bringing the number of national parks in Nigeria to six, gazettes it as a national park. The six parks are: Kainji Lake, Chad Basin, Cross River, Gashaka-Gumti, Old-Oyo and Yankari. In 1999, yet another law was passed repealing Decree 36 of 1991 and replacing it with Decree 46 of 1999, which created two additional national parks (Kamuku and Okomu). The current National Parks Law in Nigeria is perhaps one of the most progressive laws on the subject in any country in the world. The law has not only removed many shortcomings apparent in the first decree, but it also introduces some pro-active and pro-people clauses as well as avoidi costly mistakes made by older national parks in many part of the world.

Thus, although Nigeria began the noble idea of park development rather late compared to the experiences in East and Southern Africa (Kruger and Nairobi National Parks were established 59 and 37 years respectively earlier than Nigeria's first National Park), it has achieved so much within so short a period. Nigeria is a federation with a three-tier system of government. Each of the levels of government has a responsibility to protect, control and manage specific types of protected areas. Thus, local government councils are responsible for Communal Forest Area (CFA); the State Governments are responsible for Forest Reserve, Game Reserve and Game Sanctuaries; while the Federal Government controls and manages National Parks under the exclusive legislative list. Under this arrangement, there are about 1,129 forest reserves, 29 game reserves, 4 game sanctuaries, 2 strict nature reserves and 8 national parks spread across the major ecological zones in the country.

Table 1: List of National Parks in Nigeria

National Park	Year of Establishment	Size (Km ²)	State	Ecological Zones
Kainji Lake	1979	5382	Niger, Kwara	Guinea Savanna
Chad Basin	1991	2258	Borno, Yobe	Sahel Savanna
Gashaka Gumti	1991	6731	Taraba, Adamawa	GuineaSavanna/Montane
Cross River	1991	4000	Cross River	Rain Forest
Old Oyo	1991	2512	Oyo, Kwara	Forest/Guinea Savanna
*Yankari	1991	2244	Bauchi	Guinea Savanna
Kamuku	1999	1121	Kaduna	Guinea Savanna
Okomu	1999	181	Edo	Rain Forest

*Yankari National Park now Yankari Game Reserve since 2006

Source: Ajayi and Eveso (2017); NNPS (2015); Ejidike and Ajayi (2012)

Community-Based Conservation Strategies and Prospects

According to Western and Wright (1994:7), “community-based conservation includes natural resources or biodiversity protection by, for, and with the local community.” They note that defining it more precisely would be futile since community-based conservation includes a range of activities practiced in various parts of the world, but that the central idea in the concept is the coexistence of people and nature, as distinct from protectionism and the segregation of people and nature (Mashenene and Campus, 2020; Norris et al., 2018; Ole Kileli, 2017; Ward et al., 2018). The definition of community-based conservation can yet be expanded to include natural resources or biodiversity protection by, for, and with the local community, taking into account drivers, institutional linkages at the local level, and multiple levels of organisation that impact and shape institutions at the local level (Berkes, 2006).

CBC is a strategy used throughout the world as a means to save wildlife. It has its modern roots in the experience of conservationists working in poorer countries during the 1960s and 1970s. Conservationists came to realise that local people, who are commonly hostile to wildlife conservation, had to be won over as supporters of their efforts (World Conservation Union, 1980; and Parker, 1982). They saw that without the cooperation of rural people, wildlife conservation efforts would be doomed. This is certainly true in Africa, where rural inhabitants often view wildlife conservation as misguided because it puts the needs of wildlife above those of people (Biggs et al., 2017; Moyo, 2018; Ruiz-Mallén et al., 2015; and Stamm, 2017). Although this response is primarily a reaction to people's present-day economic needs, it also has strong roots in the colonial legacy that alienated rural Africans from conservation efforts (Isiugo & Obioha, 2017).

CBC is a response to both the alienating protectionist policies of the past and to the economic concerns that many rural people face (Owen-Smith, 1993). Advocates of CBC argue that the approach can be effective because it harks back

to pre-colonial African conservation practices that used community-based constraints to regulate resource use and is a means by which rural Africans will benefit materially from saving wildlife (McNeely and Pitt, 1985; Metcalfe, 1995). Hence, the overall goal is to make rural people an integral part of conservation efforts (Western and Wright, 1994). In general, CBC programmes do this in three ways: (1) allowing people living near protected lands to participate in land-use policy and management decisions; (2) giving people proprietorship or ownership over wildlife resources; and (3) giving local people economic benefits from wildlife conservation (Hoole, 2010; Isiugo and Obioha, 2017; Mahajan et al., 2021; and Ole Kileli, 2017).

In its purest form, CBC changes the relationship between rural people and governing agencies. Its advocates stress that CBC is a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach: as it changes the usual way of doing things by giving local people a strong voice in land-use decisions instead of having them imposed from above (Mahajan et al., 2021). Decentralisation of resource management from the central authority to local communities is considered a linchpin for a successful CBC programme. This emphasis on participatory democracy gives CBC a somewhat revolutionary character (Western, 1994).

Oskarsson (2014) argues that in order to achieve a well-functioning community-based conservation programme, creating a feeling of togetherness and team spirit is important and to do so, it is vital that participants from all groups may attend and participate. People from all age groups, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic classes should be a part of this. It is essential that everyone shows commitment, get the chance to make their voices heard and have the opportunity to actively participate. This is to get every aspect of the situation put out in order to move forward towards the community-conservation goals, and in order to be able to deal with any possible issues (Oskarsson, 2014). In the same vein, Larson et al. (2017) stress that community-based conservation efforts are designed to foster local stewardship of important ecological resources. However, inequitable distribution of costs and benefits in the communities surrounding protected areas can negatively impact livelihoods, increase wealth disparities and create conflict (Larson et al., 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The community based conservation policy has proved to be a framework that can guide conservation and incorporate the host communities in the administration of the protected areas. The policy further enhances community participation and involvement of the locals in the management and conservation of natural resources. This form of community participation is a vital instrument in environmental resources management. The rate at which the forest, natural and wildlife resources are gradually being depleted and subsequently pushed towards extinction calls for

a more proactive measure to curb the ugly trend of resources destruction. Also, the policy provides rural inclusion that integrates the locals through livelihood packages, social security as well as prohibits environmental degradation as a succour to their displacement from their ancestral land. The study therefore recommends the following;

1. Community-based conservation policy should be implemented to the letter to curb environmental degradation and promote community involvement.
2. Community members should be involved in the planning and conservation of natural resources.
3. Empowerment programmes that will provide alternative means of livelihood should be made available for the local people to reduce over dependence on environmental resources.
4. Government should create incentives to boost resources conservation and management.

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