

Legal Examination of Benefit Sharing and Livelihood Improvement in Protected Area Managements: The Case of the Bakossi National Park

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Abstract

This study examines the interplay between benefit sharing and livelihood improvement within the Bakossi National Park (BNP) within the legal perspective. Traditionally, conservation efforts often placed local communities at odds with protected areas. However, through a doctrinal methodology, this research argues that a well-designed benefit-sharing program can foster collaboration and improve the lives of local communities. By analyzing the BNP as a case study, the research explores how initiatives like revenue sharing from timber exploitation, tourism, employment opportunities within the park, and community driven projects can generate income and empower local communities. The effectiveness of these programs hinges on understanding the specific needs of the communities and ensuring their equitable participation in decision-making processes. Ultimately, this study contends that successful benefit sharing in PAs management, like the BNP, can create a win-win situation, where biodiversity is preserved, and local communities thrive. The work concludes with robust recommendations that if complied with and enforced, it would go a long way to improve on the livelihood of local communities in the Bakossi National Park of Cameroon.

Keywords: Legal, Benefit Sharing, Livelihood, Improvement, Protected area, Management, Bakossi, National Park.

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INTRODUCTION

Roughly 50% of the planet's original forest cover has now disappeared. The reason for this degradation of the forest is shifting management goals [1]. Since 1990, the world's natural forest has declined by 3% [2]. An estimated 18 million acres (7.3 million hectares) of forest are lost annually [3]. An estimated 18.7 million acres of forest land are lost per year [4]. The number of forest areas designated for sustainable forest use and biodiversity conservation has significantly increased recently. However, there are still significant difficulties faced by forest managers and exploiters in these protection areas. To save the disappearing forest,

there is still a need to establish new protected areas (PAs).

With the establishment of Wyoming's Yellow Stone National Park, the United States of America marked the beginning of the global protected reserve movement. The Sabie Game Reserve in South Africa, established in established in the 20th century in different parts of the continent. Main PAs were established in the 20th century in different parts of the continent. The first Cameroonian protected areas were established in 1932, under French colonial control [5]. The country's northern region contained those areas [6]. FAO (2005) estimates that forest in Cameroon cover 21 million hectares or

¹Birdsey, R. and Pa, Y. (2015), *Trends in Management of the World's Forest and Impacts on Carbon Stocks*, Forest Ecology and Management, Vol. 355, pages 83-90.

² Styger E. (2007), Influence of slash-and-burn farming on fallow succession and land degradation in the rain forest region of Madagascar. *Agric Ecosyst Environ.* 119:257–269.

³Bradford, A. (2018), Deforestation: *Facts Causes and Effects*. Live Science, Planet Earth.

<https://www.livescience.com/27692-deforestation.html>. Last accessed 30.04.2020.

⁴Ibid.

⁵ Mesmin Tchindjang. (2000), Mapping of Protected Areas Evolution in Cameroon from the Beginning to 2000: Lesson to Learn and Perspectives..University of Yaounde I, Department of Geography PO Box. 30464 Yaounde Cameroon mtchind@yahoo.fr

⁶Ibid.

about 46.6 percent of the national territory [7]. The Congo Basin forest, which is the world's second-largest dense tropical forest area after the Amazon basin, includes a major portion of this forest cover [8]. In terms of Africa's forest cover, Cameroon is in second place, right after the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Comparably, Cameroon ranks fourth in terms of biodiversity richness with a high degree of endemism, behind the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, and Madagascar [9]. Nine thousand species of plants have been registered in Cameroon, of which 156 are indigenous. Similarly, cataloged species include 297 mammals (10 endemic), 849 birds (11 endemic), 373 reptile and amphibian species (19 endemic), and 451 fish species [10]. Measuring Cameroon's success in establishing PAs to preserve its biological richness is so essential.

A designated or controlled area that is managed to accomplish particular conservation goals is referred to as a protected area (PA) [11]. A protected area (PA) is defined by the IUCN [12] as "a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values." This is a precise definition provided by the organization. PAs play a crucial role in protecting biodiversity. In 2008, there were around 3,482,741 hectares of forest preserved as National Parks, Botanical Gardens, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Forest Reserves, and Zoological Gardens [13]. The total area under protection excluding 18% Safari hunting zones is 11% of the national territory [14]. The protected areas have been designated in accordance with the CBD, which mandates that state parties create areas where

specific actions are to be conducted in order to conserve biodiversity [15].

Forest Protected Areas (FPAs) and Wildlife Protected Areas (WPAs) are two divisions of PAs, which are further subdivided into fifteen categories. There are certain protected places that fall under IUCN categories II, IV, and VI. This suggests that their legal standing is unambiguous, particularly with regard to conservation and management. These protected areas include; national parks (II), wildlife and related reserves (IV), production forests (VI) [16]. The primary purpose of creating wildlife protected zones is to preserve wildlife. The primary purpose of national parks under wildlife PAs is to conserve biodiversity. There are currently eighteen national parks in Cameroon [17].

The Bakossi National Park (BNP) is a protected area in the heart of the Bakossi Forest Reserve, established by decree from early 2008. The theme park passed under the guise of being a means to protect species diversity. Bakossi is important not just because of its status as a primate hotspot (home to species such as Drill *Mandrillus leucophaeus*, one of the most endangered primates in the world, and Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes*) but also for other taxa like Millipedes *Chilognathans* [18]. Other primates include Preuss's red colobus, Red-eared guenon, Preuss's guenon, Putty-nosed monkey, Mona monkey and other important mammals like Blue duikers, Red river hog, Red-fronted duiker, Black-fronted duikers, Sitatunga, and Long tail pangolin [19].

The park was created by Prime Ministerial Decree N° 2007/1459/PM of 28 November 2007 [20], the Bakossi National Park [21] covers a surface area of

⁷ B.M. Takem Mbi & Humphrey Ngala Ndi (2010), "Protected area" coverage in Cameroon on the eve of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2010 target. *International Forestry Review* Vol.12(3).

⁸ Central African Regional Programme for the Environment-CARPE (2006), Available at <https://www.usaid.gov/central-africa-regional/central-africa-regional-program-for-the-environment>. accessed 9/07/2024. at 6:40AM.

⁹ Ministry of the Environment and Forestry-MINEF (1997).

¹⁰ MINEP.(2005), *Convention on Biological Diversity*. Third National Report. 2005. 144pp.

¹¹ See Article 2 of the CBD.

¹² Protected areas are classified by the IUCN into six categories and the classification is done according to their management objectives. The six categories include I Strict Nature Reserve/ Wilderness Area, II National Park, III Natural Monument or Feature, IV Habitat/Species Management Area, V Protected Landscape/ Seascape, VI Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources.

http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/pa/pa_products/wcpa_categories/. Last accessed 13.02. 2024.

¹³ Terence O.E. Op.Cit, P.42.

¹⁴ Republic of Cameroon (2009), Cameroon fourth national report to the CBD. Yaounde, Cameroon.

¹⁵ See Article . 8 (a) of CBD.

¹⁶ Foahom, B. (2001), Biodiversity planning support programme: Integrating biodiversity into the forestry sector. Cameroon case study. Paper Prepared for an International Workshop on Integrating Biodiversity into the Forestry Planning Programme held in CIFOR headquarters, Bogor, Indonesia on 13-16 August 2001.

¹⁷ Waza, Kalamaue, in extreme north; Faro, Bouba Ndjida, Benoue in Adamawa; Mbam et Djerem, Deng Deng, Mpem et Jim in the center; Korup, Bayang Mbo, Rumpi in south west; and Douala Edea in Litoral.

¹⁸ https://cameroon.panda.org/places_landscapes/coastal_forests_programme/bakossi_national_park/. Accessed 05/07/2024 at 5:30 AM.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Decree N° 2007/1459/PM of 28 November 2007.

²¹ This park is the only National Park in the Cameroon Highlands Forests Ecoregion.

29,320 ha, and straddles 3 sub-divisions [22] of the Kupe-Muanenguba Division, and South West Region. The Park was created to protect a range of plants and streams. Soaring over the communities of Muandelengoh, Ndun, and Mualong south of the Mbwe river, Bangem offers a clear view of the highest peak of the range, the Muandelengoh (1895 m). The park boasts a wide variety of plants and animals, as well as a high endemism rate. The National Park's sacred forests and groves, which are held by the inhabitants, have a significantly higher species diversity of plants than Mount Cameroon, which is nearby [23].

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BAKOSSI NATIONAL PARK

A PROGRAM FOR FIELD consultation was finished in 2004 in preparation for the gazettelement of Bakossi National Park [24]. More than eighty villages signed the legislation endorsing the Park's construction, demonstrating the active participation of the local people in the process. It was suggested that certain boundary adjustments be made, as well as that the communities' legal rights be clearly defined and protected. It was anticipated that holy forest regions, which were supposed to be formally established in 2005, would be included into the park [25]. Following a few setbacks, the Bakossi National Park was established in 2007 and formally opened at the beginning of 2008 with an official proclamation signed by Minister of Forests Elvis Noelle ngolle and Prime Minister Ephraim Inoni [26]. Shortly after the film "The Mists of Mwanenguba" (which highlights the value of conservation in the Bakossi highlands) was released in December 2007, the signature was made. In January 2008, the Paramount Chief of Bakossi and the Minister of Forests watched the movie [27]. The primary rationale was to preserve plant diversity, which is unusual for national parks in the area.

The park's creation led to an increase in the region's financing from WWF Sweden in the middle of 2008. A plan for implementing conservation-based revenue-generating initiatives was unveiled by the WWF-CFP. This was hampered by the local communities' disorganization and poor record-keeping, improper agricultural practices, improper benefit sharing, gender insensitivity, and other problems [28]. However, as long as the villagers' requirements were taken into consideration, it was hoped that the Village Forest Management Committees would eventually become crucial to the establishment and upkeep of sustainable forestry management techniques in the park conservation education [29].

The Bakossi Mountains are located northeast of Mount Cameroon and are a component of the Cameroon Line. The mountains are roughly 230,000 square kilometers (89,000 square miles) in size, with an average elevation ranging from 800 meters (2,600 feet) to 1,900 meters (6,200 feet). Mount Kupe, at 2,064 meters (6,772 feet), is the highest point. Perhaps the greatest area of cloud or submontane forest in West-Central Africa is found in the mountains [30]. The region consists of the national park, the Kupe ecological reserve to the south of the park, and the projected Muanenguba ecological reserve to the east. The Cameroon Highlands ecoregion includes the Bakossi Landscape Area [31]. There are many distinct habitats in the Bakossi landscape area, all at varying elevations. Between 1995 and 2005, personnel from Kew Gardens and the IRAD-National Herbarium of Cameroon prepared an inventory of the plants found in the Kupe-Bakossi region. It had not been known that the plant diversity in the area was especially high. A staggering 2,440 plant species were discovered by the botanists. Among them, ten species were unknown to science. 232 were under threat of extinction and 82 were strictly localized, as defined by the 2001 standards of the

²²That is Bangem, Tombel and Nguti. These are the three sub-divisions which makes up Kupe-Muanenguba Division with Bangem as the divisional headquarter.

²³Mount Cameroon is an active volcano in the South West region of Cameroon next to the city of Buea near the Gulf of Guinea. Mount Cameroon is also known as Cameroon Mountain or Fako (the name of the higher of its two peaks) or by its indigenous name Mongo ma Ndemi ("Mountain of Greatness"). Mount Cameroon is ranked 22nd by topographic isolation. It is the highest point in sub-Saharan western and central Africa, the fourth-most prominent peak in Africa, and the 31st-most prominent in the world. The mountain is part of the area of volcanic activity known as the Cameroon Volcanic Line, which also includes Lake Nyos, the site of a disaster in 1986. The most recent eruption occurred on February 3, 2012.

²⁴It was jointly supported by the World Wildlife Fund's Coastal Forests Programme and the San Diego Zoo's Center for Conservation and Research for Endangered Species.

²⁵ Gran Chaco Conservation Program" .(2004) CRES Annual Report. Accessed 05 /072024.

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bakossi_National_Park#cite_note-5. Accessed 15/06/2024 AT 12 AM.

²⁷ Martin Cheek (2008), "Darwin Initiative Annual Report".

²⁸Janet Molisa Mbella (2008), "Cameroon: Promoting conservation-based income generating act". Africa News.

²⁹Morgan, B. J. (2011),"Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of the Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee (Pan troglodytes ellioti)". Primate Specialist Group and Zoological Society of San Diego, CA, USA.

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bakossi_National_Park#cite_note-KewKupe-2. Accessed 05/07/2024 at 6:20 AM.

³¹ https://web.archive.org/web/20111005064324/http://voicesofafrica.africanews.com/site/page/cameroon_livelihood_initiatives_for_mbor

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) [32].

As a novel species of saprophyte with no photosynthetic tissue at all, *Kupea martinetegei* (Triuridaceae) is one of the most intriguing recently discovered species in the park. The species belongs to a recently formed tribe and genus. It is extremely endangered and is only currently found in two locations that are only a few square meters each [33]. The area is home to important large mammals that include the drill, African forest Elephant, chimpanzee, and Preuss's red colobus. The WWF [34], which facilitated creation of the park, has engaged in geospatial mapping of the distribution of key large mammals in the park [35]. They are concentrated in the park's north and south, maybe because there is more food and shelter available there and there is less hunting and agriculture encroachment.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND POLICY ALIGNMENT GOVERNING BENEFIT SHARING IN PAS

Cameroon, a country known for its amazing biodiversity, has created a wide network of protected areas that includes forest reserves, national parks, and wildlife sanctuaries. These sanctuaries are vital to the preservation of the ecosystem because they provide refuge for a wide variety of plants and animals. But managing protected areas effectively depends not just on preserving wildlife but also on developing a mutually beneficial relationship with the local inhabitants. Acknowledging this interconnectedness, Cameroon has passed a strong legal framework allowing benefit sharing and enhancing these people's means of subsistence. This legislative framework encourages communities to take an active role in conservation rather than just being spectators. Cameroon seeks to establish a win-win scenario by making sure communities benefit directly from protected areas, so fostering improved lives and environmental sustainability.

This study explores the fundamental national laws and international agreements that enable benefit-sharing methods and strengthen communities. We will look at how these rules open doors to more community involvement in decision-making, sustainable resource use practices, and the creation of initiatives that improve

livelihoods directly. We can better appreciate Cameroon's dedication to striking a balance between community well-being and conservation by looking at the legal framework.

National Legislation Regulating Benefit Sharing in PAs

According to Articles 24, 25, and 27 of Law No. 94/01 of January 20, 1994 on Forestry and animal Management, Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are a type of protected territory where the sustainable use of animal resources is allowed [36]. This article establishes the framework for neighboring communities to reap the benefits of conscientious resource use via methods such as trophy hunting fees or ecotourism projects [37]. It further empowers the government to establish buffer zones around national parks [38]. These areas are designed to lessen the detrimental effects that the establishment of parks has on the local population. It is possible to define buffer zones for sustainable resource use activities that will both protect the core park area from invasion and benefit local populations economically. Additionally, it emphasizes community involvement in wildlife management. Within WMAs, it requires the establishment of Local Committees for Wildlife Management (LCLFs) [39]. These community-represented committees are essential to the decision-making processes pertaining to the utilization of wildlife and benefit-sharing arrangements.

There is also Law No. 2011/001 of January 3, 2011, on Environmental Management, in addition to the 1994 forestry law. Article 66 of this law encourages local communities to be included in environmental management procedures [40]. The significance of involving communities in the creation and execution of management plans for protected areas is emphasized in this article. It guarantees that communities have a say in determining how these places are run and how the advantages are divided. It also particularly addresses benefit-sharing agreements [41]. It requires the creation of procedures for distributing to nearby populations the advantages derived from the administration of protected areas. This clause establishes the foundation for programs like revenue sharing from park entrance fees or donating a percentage of conservation project profits to community development efforts.

³² Kew Plants People Possibilities Press Information, (2010), Use of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew's Herbarium Collection.

³³ https://www.kew.org/science/wta/kupe_bakossi.htm. Accessed 05/07/2024 at 8:00 AM.

³⁴ Herein after referred to as the World Wide Fund for Nature.

³⁵ WWF Coastal Forest Programme - Project achievements Balancing Conservation & Livelihoods. Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20121003022116/http://wf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/project/proj

[ects_in_depth/cfp/project/achievements/](#). Accessed 05/07/2024 at 8:08 AM.

³⁶ See Law No. 94/01 of January 20, 1994 on Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Management Article 24

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid Article 25.

³⁹ Ibid Article 27.

⁴⁰ See Law No. 2011/001 of January 3, 2011 on Environmental Management. This law in article Article 66

⁴¹ Ibid Article 67.

The Law No. 2019/007 of December 18, 2019, on the Protection of Wildlife, is another piece of national legislation. This law's Article 21 emphasizes how crucial community involvement is to the management of wildlife. It underlines the role of local communities in animal conservation and underscores their right to participate in decision-making processes [42]. The commitment to involve communities in conversations about benefit-sharing systems is reaffirmed in this piece. The establishment of Community Management Forests (CMFs) is the main topic of Article 80 [43]. CMFs are designated forest areas with user rights and sustainable resource management available to local people. By establishing CMFs as a source of resources and revenue, this provision helps people that are close to protected areas become less reliant on park resources.

Other National Legislation of Benefit Sharing in PAs

Although the aforementioned laws serve as the cornerstone of Cameroon's benefit sharing legislative framework, other laws also contribute to this all-encompassing strategy. These supplementary laws are essential to the main legislation's backing. Cameroon has established a legislative framework that is complex, collaborative, and guarantees that communities benefit from conservation activities by respecting customary land rights, supporting sustainable land management, and empowering local populations.

The Land Tenure statute No. 96/12 of August 19, 1996 is one such statute. Local communities' customary land rights are recognized under Article 10 of this law, especially for those who live close to protected areas [44]. In addition to guaranteeing that their interests are taken into account when creating buffer zones or designating Community Management Forests (CMFs), as described in Law No. 2019/007, this gives communities the ability to engage in land-use planning decisions within these regions. The sustainable management of rural areas is encouraged by Article 11 [45]. In order to promote cooperation and guarantee sustainable resource use both inside and outside of protected areas, this article establishes the foundation for incorporating community-based natural resource management techniques into protected area management plans.

Moreso, Law No. 2019/013 of December 18, 2019 on Decentralization further strengthens the role of local communities in managing their own affairs [46]. By giving communities the ability to influence decisions

about protected places under their control, this promotes a sense of community ownership and benefits-sharing initiatives led by the community. Article 15: Offers a structure for giving local government's access to resources and expertise. This makes it possible to transfer some management duties for protected areas to nearby communities, which may enhance community participation in benefit-sharing schemes [47].

These laws offer a thorough framework to guarantee that communities in Cameroon gain from protected area management, along with pertinent decrees and recommendations. The focus on benefit-sharing arrangements, sustainable resource use, and community involvement opens the door to better livelihoods and more funding for conservation initiatives.

International Agreements on Benefit Sharing in PAs

Beyond national law, Cameroon is dedicated to benefit sharing and enhancing the standard of living for the local populations that surround protected areas. The country takes an active part in international accords that support these methods and give sustainable conservation initiatives a more expansive legal framework. This is a summary of the main international laws that apply to Cameroon. First, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is in effect. In-situ conservation, or the preservation of biodiversity within natural environments, is emphasized in Article 8(j) of the document [48]. The engagement of local and indigenous groups in the creation and execution of conservation measures is especially mentioned. This clause gives Cameroon's strategy for including communities in protected area management and making sure they gain from such practices a solid international basis. By Article 19, which focuses on the transfer of technology and knowledge? It requires that the advantages gained from using genetic resources including those found in protected areas be distributed fairly and equally [49]. This article encourages initiatives that allow communities to benefit from bioprospecting or other activities that utilize the natural resources within protected areas.

Another international law is the Nagoya Protocol on Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Resulting from the Use of Genetic Resources and Access to them. By creating a legislative framework for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits (ABS) and the access to genetic resources, this protocol in Article 5 expands upon Article 19 of the CBD [50]. This article guarantees community's control over the use and accessibility of

⁴²Law No. 2019/007 of December 18, 2019 on the Protection of Wildlife: Article 21.

⁴³Ibid Article 80.

⁴⁴Law No. 96/12 of August 19, 1996 on Land Tenure. Article 10.

⁴⁵Ibid Article 11.

⁴⁶Law No. 2019/013 of December 18, 2019 on Decentralization in Article 14

⁴⁷Law No. 2019/013 of December 18, 2019 on Decentralization in Articles 14 and 15.

⁴⁸Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Articles 8(j).

⁴⁹Ibid Article 19.

⁵⁰Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization Article 5.

genetic resources located within their borders, including protected regions. It encourages benefit-sharing arrangements that can immediately raise living standards. The subject of Article 6 is national implementation. It requires nations to take action to guarantee the implementation of ABS agreements and the equitable distribution of benefits to local communities [51]. This article requires Cameroon to create national policies and processes that implement the Nagoya Protocol's tenets in practical ways for local populations living close to protected areas.

In addition, Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNCRIP) acknowledges indigenous peoples' rights to establish and prioritize the social, cultural, and economic development of their own lands [52]. Although indigenous peoples are not officially recognized in Cameroon, some groups that live close to protected areas may have customary land rights and traditional knowledge that is important to conservation efforts. The significance of upholding these rights and including these people in the decision-making process about the administration of protected areas and benefit-sharing programs is emphasized in this article. It also emphasizes indigenous peoples' entitlement to meaningful participation in processes of decision-making that impact them [53]. This article reinforces the importance of ensuring that communities have a voice in how protected areas are managed and how benefits are distributed.

These international treaties, together with others like the World Heritage Convention [54] and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands [55], establish a strong international framework that supports Cameroon's domestic legal system. Cameroon exhibits its commitment to appropriate conservation techniques that take into account the interests and rights of local communities by upholding these agreements. The collaborative approach to protected area management, which is encouraged by the emphasis on information sharing, equitable benefit sharing, and community participation, ultimately results in a more sustainable future for local communities and conservation. There are

other tools available to encourage benefit sharing in Cameroon besides international agreements. Here are a few more noteworthy projects:

Goal 15 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), "Life on Land," The significance of incorporating ecological and biodiversity values into national and local planning, as well as encouraging methods for benefit sharing resulting from genetic resources and related traditional knowledge, are expressly mentioned in this SDG [56]. This global framework aligns with Cameroon's national policies on benefit sharing and protected area management. Again the UNFCCC [57] REDD+ [58] (This program provides financial incentives for developing countries to conserve their forests and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. REDD+ projects can help communities living near protected areas, especially those that border forest reserves, by promoting sustainable forest management techniques and offering alternate forms of income that lessen the strain on park resources.

In advancing a rights-based approach to conservation, Cameroon exhibits leadership by actively participating in international accords and initiatives. These tools strengthen the legislative framework that governs Cameroon and promote the goal of protected area management and community well-being working together in the future.

BENEFIT SHARING AND LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT OF THE BNP

A beautiful mosaic of montane forests and volcanic landscapes, the Bakossi National Park is a prime example of Cameroon's dedication to benefit sharing and enhancing the standard of living for local populations living close to protected areas.

Income Generation and Alternative Livelihoods

Initiatives promoting ecotourism have changed how locals engage with Bakossi National Park. Nowadays, the locals oversee eco-lodges, lead tourists on nature hikes, and provide traditional shows that highlight their cultural history. Communities benefit financially

⁵¹Ibid Article 6.

⁵² Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNCRIP)Article 19.

⁵³Ibid Article 20.

⁵⁴ World Heritage Convention was adopted in 1972, ratified in 1975 and laid its operational guidelines in 1978. The most significant feature of the 1972 World Heritage Convention is that it links together in a single document the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural properties. The Convention recognizes the way in which people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.

⁵⁵The Convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.The

Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

⁵⁶See Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 15, "Life on Land".

⁵⁷United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

⁵⁸It was first referred to as RED which stands for Reducing Emission from Deforestation. It later metamorphosed to REDD with the "Degradation" added to the previous and finally to REDD+ which stands for a complete Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and the Enhancement of forest stocks.

from their direct involvement in tourism, which also opens up new business prospects and lessens their reliance on park resources for subsistence. Programs that encourage the sustainable gathering and sale of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), such as honey and medicinal plants, also give local communities a means of subsistence while guaranteeing the park's responsible use of its resources. Programs for skill development can give community members new abilities in fields like sustainable agriculture, beekeeping, and handcraft creation. This encourages a more diverse economy by enabling people to seek alternate livelihoods that are less dependent on park resources.

Through the Programme for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the South West Region (PSMNR), the BNP service has supported many community members who actively engaged in poaching to give them alternative incomes generating activities including piggery and goat farming. About fifty poachers were empowered on this activity and there are producing and selling pigs and goats thereby have abandoned poaching according to Apella Magellan [59].

There is also the provision of improve cocoa seedlings provided by the Park service to community members for them to rejuvenate their ageing farms. More than 100,000 seedling of improve cocoa varieties, 50,000 improve cassava cuttings have been provided to famers. Notably 17 persons have been trained and supported in bee farming and many of the beneficiaries are generating income from their activities and improving their livelihoods [60].

Community Participation and Park Management

One example of a change from a top-down conservation paradigm to one that actively incorporates local communities is the Bakossi National Park. Local communities work with park rangers to patrol park boundaries and stop poaching activities through joint community base surveillance (patrolling) initiatives, community bio-monitoring trap removal within the park placing traditional injunction orders by chief and notable against illegal activities. This gives people a sense of pride in the park's assets and gives them the ability to actively participate in conservation efforts. Locals can earn money by working as park guides, research assistants, or park boundary maintenance as local conservation support staff within the park, which also strengthens the bond between local communities and conservation. Lastly, revenue sharing arrangements guarantee that a part of park admission costs goes toward community development efforts like education programs or infrastructure upgrades. This incentivizes communities to support park protection efforts, creating

a virtuous cycle where conservation success translates to tangible benefits for communities.

Improved Infrastructure and Social Services:

In the Bakossi National Park, benefit-sharing schemes go beyond merely generating revenue. Infrastructure in the towns that border the park can be improved with funds raised from ecotourism and other activities. This could entail constructing educational institutions, medical facilities, or supplying clean water. A case in question is the rehabilitation of pipe borne water systems in Elum II Muetan-Aku, Nzimbeng, Kodmin, Mbwogmut I and Mbwogmut II communities in 2023. Communities' quality of life is directly improved by improved infrastructure, which also highlights the practical advantages of conservation. Conservation education programs have also been carried out in the area with the first Bakossi Eco race that held in Kodmin village in late 2023. This conservation education has increase public knowledge of the value of protecting the environment and the advantages of sustainable resource usage. This fosters a culture of environmental stewardship within communities; ensuring future generations understand the value of the Bakossi National Park and its role in their well-being.

Participatory Management

With assistance from the Green Heart of Africa's Civil Society Support Project (GHoA), a project known as The Food and Rural Development (FORUDEF) is operating quickly to allow the creation of a cooperative management plan for the Bakossi National Park in Kupe-Muanenguba Division. Funded by SIDA Sweden, the GHoA and later leading the Change Civil Society assistance initiative is a WWF assistance initiative. The preservation of natural resources inside and surrounding the Bakossi Landscape is the focus of this initiative. The project's Protected Area component is being carried out in the Bakossi National Park by FORUDEF. The initiative aims to establish partnership in the management of natural resources.

The Park Service through PSMNR has actively engaged in implementing co-management in the Bakossi National Park. The Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife has consented to implement collaborative management in the Bakossi National Park as a result of this proposal. The 36 communities that comprise the park have complete role over the national park's administration [61]. The management of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), one of the park's primary resources, is another. NTFP management must adhere to a set of regulations and policies. In order to gather information and develop NTFP commercialization guidelines for the park, a consultant with experience in the field has been hired. Ten pilot villages, namely Muaku, Muetan-Aku,

⁵⁹ Apella Magellan, the Community Development Technician (CDT).

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹ <https://www.greenvision.news/forudef-facilitating-joint-management-of-bakossi-national-park/>

Muandelengoh, Ekanjoh-Bajoh, and Boka-Bajoh, would be served by the consultant. According to the Project Development Officer, the consultant is also expected to lead the commercialization of NTFPs.

CHALLENGES BENEFIT SHARING AND LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT OF THE BNP

A pillar of Cameroonian conservation, the Bakossi National Park (BNP) faces difficult obstacles in maintaining both park protection and the welfare of surrounding communities. Because their livelihoods have historically depended on the park's resources, locals may feel pressured to take advantage of them if they aren't given enough control over park management or receive concrete benefits from its maintenance. Achieving a sustainable equilibrium is crucial for both the BNP's enduring triumph and the well-being of the neighboring communities.

High Encroachment into Park Boundaries

There hasn't been a management plan for the BNP since it was established in 2007. Although the park boundary are properly marked on the ground, the park's boundaries have been georeferenced have been seriously encroached into with farming activities. Therefore, there is a lot of encroachment into the park since people in the neighborhood are unaware of its borders [62].

According to Tchapda Sidoine Conservator and Apella Magellan [63], Community Development Technician (CDT) FORUDEF is working to see that the natural resources in the area are managed sustainably despite the fact that there is no management plan yet and no boundaries demarcated physically" [64].

Unsustainable rise in Illegal Logging and Hunting

Around 70,000 hectares (270 square miles) of unprotected land in the area were to be turned into oil palm plantations as part of a project that was planned as of 2011. The proposal has been justified by showing how it will give the locals a reliable source of income. There are worries that clearing forests for plantations will negatively impact the livelihood of the locals who depend on forest products, and that a large influx of low-paid plantation labourers will cause illegal hunting and logging in protected areas like the BNP to raise sharply and uncontrollably [65]. Critics of the "Cameroon

deforestation drive" claim it will be an ecological disaster and point the finger at the Blackstone Group as one of the major investors in it [66]. Actually, Blackstone's affiliate, SG Sustainable Oils in Cameroon, was fully acquired by the US-based Herakles Farms, and Blackstone stepped away from the business [67]. Herakles Farms is moving forward with the project, which originally included 132 hectares (330 acres) of the national park itself [68]. Herakles stated that "the plantations will follow the highest environmental and social standards, complying fully with Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) Principles & Criteria".

Poverty and a consistent drop in the prices of cash crops

Widespread poverty in the local communities surrounding BNP is a major barrier, even with well-designed benefit-sharing schemes. The lack of resources and information makes it difficult for community members to engage in park-related activities like ecotourism or sustainable resource management schemes. In addition, communities' ability to create their own revenue-generating ventures to supplement park advantages is limited by a lack of financial investment. Ensuring that all community members may meaningfully engage in and benefit from park activities requires addressing poverty through community development programs and microfinance initiatives.

More than 200 of the plant species in the park are at risk of extinction. Kew Gardens has collaborated with the local community to raise awareness of the need of conservation [69]. In order to protect the forest from illicit logging and clearing for farmland, the locals have taken the initiative. The ecology has been preserved in part by traditional beliefs. Compared to neighboring Mount Cameroon, the national park's sacred forests and groves have a noticeably greater diversity of plant species. Nonetheless, the majority of the locals remain impoverished subsistence farmers. They are using more non-timber forest products to make money as a result of drops in the price of their cash crops, coffee and cocoa, which is putting a great deal of strain on the forest [70].

⁶² Green Vision (2015),FORUDEF Facilitating Joint Management of Bakossi National Park.

⁶³ Apella Magellan, the Community Development Technician (CDT).

⁶⁴ <https://www.greenvision.news/forudef-facilitating-joint-management-of-bakossi-national-park/>. Accessed 05/07/2024. At 10:50 AM.

⁶⁵ "Stop Blackstone Deforestation in Cameroon". African Conservation Foundation, (2011),Accessed 08/07/2024. At 10:00 AM.

⁶⁶ US Investors Want A 72,000 Hectare Palm Oil Plantation in the Middle of the Rainforest". Intercontinental Cry. 9 July 2011.

⁶⁷ Herakles Farms Develops Sustainable Palm Oil Plantations in Cameroon and Ghana"(2011). Accessed 019/06/2024. At 10:00 AM.

⁶⁸Cameroon: peoples territories being targeted for oil palm plantations". World Rainforest Movement.

⁶⁹ "Sustainable Management of Non-Timber Forest Products"(2017), Action-Learning Pilot Program in Shivamogga Landscape.

⁷⁰Ibid.

Unsustainable Resource Use and illegal hunting of Protected Species

The human population has grown rapidly during the past few decades. Small-scale logging is done by the native people, who utilize the wood for building houses, creating furniture, and gathering forest herbs. The environmental effect of this is negligible. In addition to growing plantains, cocoyams, cassava, beans, and pepper for their personal use and to sell, they also grow cocoa and coffee as cash crops. There is a problem with habitat degradation for wildlife. The majority of people hunt for bush meat, which is a valuable protein source. According to a 2003 assessment, this behaviour was endangering huge mammals and had reached unsustainable proportions.

Anglophone Crisis as a Hindrance

Benefit-sharing schemes in the Park are long-shadowed by the continuing Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon. The region's instability and insecurity make it difficult to enter the park, which hinders both tourist and park operations. This deters prospective investors from investing in ecotourism projects and stymies the flow of income required to support benefit-sharing schemes. In addition, the crisis makes it challenging for community people and park officials to collaborate and communicate openly, which are crucial for benefit-sharing projects to succeed. It is critical to find peaceful solutions to the Anglophone Crisis in order to provide a secure and stable climate that will allow benefit-sharing initiatives to thrive.

CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

In summary, fair benefit-sharing between the BNP and the local communities is essential to long-term conservation. Legislative frameworks are essential because they define rights and obligations for communities and park authorities, as well as provide explicit instructions for access to resources and benefit-sharing arrangements. These strategies may include revenue-sharing from ecotourism endeavors, courses that teach people how to use resources sustainably, or infrastructural initiatives that directly enhance people's quality of life. But there are still difficulties. It might be difficult to design a just and inclusive benefit distribution system that takes into account the many requirements of the community.

Additionally, careful planning and unshakable dedication are needed to guarantee that communities see a true improvement in their standard of living while abiding by stringent environmental standards. Collaboration and open communication between park authorities, locals, and non-governmental organizations are essential to overcoming these obstacles. The establishment of clear monitoring and assessment procedures, capacity building programs within communities to manage benefits efficiently, and fostering transparency throughout the process are all key

to finding solutions that guarantee benefits meet their intended goals. In the end, the BNP can succeed in long-term conservation while guaranteeing the welfare of the populations around it by establishing a legislative framework that enshrines benefit-sharing and encouraging a cooperative approach to park management.

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