

Chapter 2

Biodiversity Conservation and Unmet Social and Health Needs in the Rural Communities of Niger State, Nigeria

Lawal Musediq Olufemi
Osun State University, Nigeria

Irhue Young Kenneth
Osun State University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The establishment that 70% of the world's poor residing in rural areas depends directly on biodiversity for their well-being has ignited the call for sustainable usage of biological resources. Biodiversity conservation has thus become a novel project with noble intention of providing a habitat and protection from hunting for threatened and endangered species and ecological processes that cannot survive in most intensely managed landscapes. Nigeria has created protected areas under the coordination of National Park Services in line with this. As a result, residents of communities surrounding the protected areas could not meet their basic needs like employment, water provision, educational facilities, medical services, energy supply, livestock grazing, and motorable roads. They have subsequently deviated from the extant rules that guide their conducts and by ensuing difficulties see biodiversity conservation as an elitist policy despite their understanding of the idea behind it.

BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Biodiversity, which implies then variety of all forms of life, from genes and species to ecosystem remains the living natural heritage to all. Biodiversity is crucial to the reduction of poverty, due to the basic goods and ecosystem services it provides. Globally, some 2.6 billion people worldwide draw their livelihoods either partially or fully from agriculture. More than 3 billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity, while over 1.6 billion rely on forests and non-timber forest products (CBD, 2016). Human

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societies have always relied on biological resources for physical and spiritual sustenance. Biodiversity ultimately provides people with a source of food, medicines, materials and opportunities. Indigenous peoples in common like every other individual have a right to derive a means of existence from the sustainable use of biological resources found within territorial borders according to cultural practices (Schnierer, 2002). This right is based on the long and close association between indigenous peoples and their traditional biological resources developed and, in many cases, maintained over thousands of years. This interdependence has created the diversity of cultures we see today and the diversity within biological systems commonly referred to as biodiversity. It is no small coincidence that the majority of the worlds remaining biodiversity reside in indigenous territories (Taylor et al., 2012). Around the world, human activities are taking a heavy toll on wild nature. Unsustainable agriculture, unregulated extractive industries, creeping urbanization, rampant coastal development and rapacious over-fishing are fragmenting and destroying natural environments (Rodney, 2012; Allen, 2011).

Loss of biodiversity thus poses a significant threat to their livelihoods. Biodiversity must therefore be protected and sustainably used for achieving poverty reduction and sustainable development (CBD, n.d.). In view of this, the fact still remains that conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the eradication of extreme poverty are two of the main global challenges of our time. It has been recognized by the international community that these two challenges are intimately connected and require a coordinated response. The protection of biodiversity is essential in the fight to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development most especially on the basis that 70% of the world's poor residing in rural areas depends directly on biodiversity for their survival and well-being. Meanwhile, failure to ensure sustainable use of biodiversity usually leads to environmental degradation (Sellars, 2009; Schnierer, 2002). The realization that many species within biodiversity system are getting depleted in the growing years has led to the setting up of regions to protect these species, landscapes, wild animals and their habitats by many countries. This concern for the loss of biodiversity increased in the early 1900s, and the international recognition of protected areas as a tool for conservation gained prominence in the 1950s.

Such place is referred to as National Park, which is a natural space that is dedicated for the purposes of preserving, enhancing, protecting and managing vegetation and wild animals therein. Different countries have their own national parks and the designation of National Parks across the globe depends on each individual country's system and judgment. But most National Parks have similar aims, to conserve wild nature in order to protect it for the future as well as allow people the chance to enjoy it. National Parks are often a symbol of national pride (Wikipedia, 2017). National Parks are really an important aspect in keeping the wildlife safe and secure. National Parks are almost always open to visitors (Gissibl et al., 2012). Most National Parks provide outdoor recreation and camping as well as enlightenment opportunities designed to educate the public on the importance of conservation and the natural wonders of the land in which the National Park is located. National Parks in Nigeria offered this opportunity hence their recognition as ecotourism service providers while still in the process of maintaining and sustaining the mission for their establishment. For effectiveness of conservation mission, buffer zones are created for every National Park. Buffer zones are areas peripheral to a specific protected area, where restrictions on resource use and special development measures are undertaken in order to enhance the conservation value of the protected area.

To complement this, the Nigeria National Park Service adopted the Support Zone Community Programme (SZCP) in 1981 as integral part of its solidarity with and contribution to the development of rural communities around the National Parks. The programme aimed at reducing or totally eliminating pressure on park resources and focuses attention on local people, their welfare and developmental needs

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