

The Effects of Creating Access Roads on the Integrity of Conserved Areas: A Case Study of Okwangwo Rainforest in Cross River National Park, Nigeria

James Oshuo Ewah

*Department of History/International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Calabar,
Calabar, Nigeria*

E-mail: jamesewah@yahoo.com

KEYWORDS Spatial Development. Conservation. Protected Area

ABSTRACT The implications of the construction of Butatong-Okwangwo-Okwa road for vehicular transport across Okwangwo rainforest in Cross River National Park has been researched and documented. The study between January and March 2009, revealed an unplanned arrival of state sponsored Land Rovers and motorcycles in Okwangwo, Okwa I and Okwa II enclaved communities. This attracted an increased flow of traffic into enclave communities especially amongst indigenes in Diaspora. The study also proved that transporters were equally enjoying high patronage despite prohibitive fares. Notwithstanding, these seeming of advantages of a seasonal road, the negative impact of 'unplanned' presence of vehicles has brought to the fore, the contradictions between conservation and development. This has led to increased pollution of the Oyi river, expansion of farmlands and logging, thus reducing the size and integrity of the community forest as well as increased pressure and insecurity in protected park area. Can the contradictions between conservation and development amongst rural communities in protected area be transcended? The study reveals that the unplanned arrival of Land Rovers and motorcycles to Okwangwo enclave community pose serious environmental challenges that will threaten the integrity of the rainforest area. The study posits that to maintain the rainforest integrity, training and empowerment in non-agro forestry, means of livelihoods, programmed resettlement, recognition of community rights and partnership in the management of protected areas, should precede spatial development, especially construction of vehicular roads. These pre-conditions will move protected areas from fortress conservation towards sustainable agro-forestry insurance policy for local custodians, the state and the international community.