

Community Participation in Wildlife Conservation and Protection in Oban Hills Area of Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the nature and extent of Community-based Wildlife Management in Oban Hills sector, home to the Cross Rivers National Park, Nigeria. Community-based Wildlife Management (CWM) approach has been identified as an effective ethical way of integrating the goals of wildlife conservation with the needs of the rural poor in the tropics. CWM is premised on the notions that the stewardship over wildlife resides at the local rather than the state level, and that it is possible to improve rural livelihood, conserve the environment and promote economic growth at the same time. The Cross Rivers National Park (CRNP) located at Oban Hills, Nigeria, was created by the Federal Government in 1991. In-depth Interviews, Key Informant Interviews and the survey method were used to collect data. Five villages/ communities were selected purposively based on their proximity to the park and simple random sampling applied to select research participants. Findings from this research indicate that; community leaders and the youth play key roles of educating their members on the importance of wildlife conservation and guarding their forests from poachers respectively; they do not derive significant benefits from wildlife conservation efforts by the Federal Government; the implementation of laws prohibiting hunting in the protected area and harvesting of conserved animal species in forests in the buffer zone has negatively affected the livelihood of heads of households and male youth who were great hunters. This has inflamed feelings of neglect, deprivation and alienation which has generated different forms of conflicts between members of the communities and rangers of the Cross River National Park. The authors are of the opinion that Community institutions enforcing taboos and totem related to killing and eating of wildlife and non-governmental organizations or conservation societies, community leaders and youth should be strengthened and officially recognized as partners who derive significant benefits from wildlife management in Oban Hills, Nigeria.