

Conservation initiatives and local responses around Korup National Park (Cameroon)¹

“Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest.”
Joseph Conrad (1988: 35)

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Abstract: The perception of Africa as a continent of a vast wilderness with abundant freely ranging wild animals waiting for tourists to enjoy is erroneous and based on myths. There is no ‘no man’s lands’ in Africa. The so-called wilderness is often communal land shared between villages. Thus any bio-diversity conservation project aimed at preservation of ‘nature for its own sake’ in an African wilderness is untenable and bound to fail.

Korup Project has been in action since February 3rd 1988 in a huge project area including 187 settlements. The project applied different approaches and strategies to achieve its main goals: the conservation of biodiversity in the area and especially in the Korup National Park. The Government of Cameroon and the different international donors (EU, WWF, ODA (DFID), KFW, GTZ, WCS and US DoD) have spent a lot of money: between 1988 and 2000 more than 15 Million Euro or around 1,2 Mill Euro a year. This amount is one of the highest conservation budgets (Euro per km²) in Africa.

In 2000, a research group surveyed 21 randomly selected villages and interviewed nearly 600 individuals. The main goal was to document the perception of Korup Project and its activities among the inhabitants of the project region. This included the question of how and in which way the interventions of Korup Project in pursuit of a more sustainable use of forest and wildlife resources were perceived.

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1. The Master(’s)plan for the Korup National Park

Tropical rainforest is highly endangered all over the world. The rainforests of Cameroon are to a certain extent destroyed, degraded or used for timber exploitation (this includes 60 % of the original tropical forest: Naughton-Treves & Weber 2001). The forests in the southwest of the Republic of Cameroon, which are seen as some of the oldest of their kind in Africa (Maley 2001), are the focus of the following paper. The area has been protected since 1937, as the Korup Native Administration Forest Reserve. Research has revealed that the Korup forest is home to more than 3000 species of trees, plants, insects and animals - including 25% of Africa's primate species (Gartlan 1984). Based on the research of Thomas Struhsaker (1970), Stephen Gartlan (1984) and Phil Agland (1981), the first conservation activities were carried out in the late seventies and early eighties by the Earthlife Foundation. Starting in 1971, the researchers continuously appealed to the Cameroonian government for the transformation of Korup Forest Reserve into a National Park (Oates 1999). The rising awareness of conservation and especially the willingness of international donors to support conservation of the tropical rainforest in Cameroon resulted in the creation of Korup National Park by Presidential Decree in 1986 (No. 86/1283 of October 30th 1986). The Park, which is larger than the former forest reserve (842.46 km²) and covers an area of 1,259 km², soon became famous. In 1986, the British Sunday newspaper “The Observer” introduced Korup National Park to the world with a special full-colour supplement entitled “Paradise lost?”

Here the paper could have ended, if the area had been solely inhabited and utilised by mammals, fishes, birds and insects; but the perception of Africa as a continent of a vast wilderness with abundant freely ranging wild animals waiting for tourists and researchers to enjoy is erroneous and based on myths. There is no ‘no man’s land’ in Africa. The so-called wilderness is communal land shared between villages and utilised by hunters, gatherers, fisher-folk and farmers for thousands of years. In the case of Korup National Park, the ‘no man’s lands’ is home to 1,400 individuals from the species homo sapiens assembled in 7 settlements (Schmidt-Soltau 2000a). But not only the national park is seen as an area in need of conservation. Based on the problems in other parks "conservationists have realised, that the strategy of locking up biodiversity in small parks, while ignoring wider social and political realities, has been an ineffective strategy" (Colchester 1997:107). In consequence, all land considered having an impact on the biodiversity of Korup National Park was included in the so-called “support zone”, an area of 4,700 km² (demarcated by the international boundary with Nigeria to the east and the major roads to the north, south and west). In the logic of the conservationists, the conservation of the Korup National Park can only be successful, if the forest of the support zone is conserved as well. This increases the number of affected people. 187 villages with nearly 30,000 individuals are situated in the support zone (Butcher 1997). In the following, the interaction between conservation projects and rural populace will be surveyed. The focus of this paper will not be on the villages inside the park (Schmidt-Soltau 2000a, 2002), but on the villages in the support zone.

Research holds that the creation of national parks do not automatically contribute to the conservation goals as long as the responsible national authorities are not capable of

managing the area due to inadequate training, staff, motivation, equipment or financial means and as long as the local population is not invited to participate in the project (Adams & McShane 1996). It is documented that conservation projects, which exclude the local population from decision-making do not function as envisioned (Cernea 1985). Integrating local communities into all phases of conservation projects is definitely not easy and requires a dedication to the principle that indigenous people are legitimate stakeholders. It also requires a significant commitment of time and resources on part of the governments, international lenders and donor organisations, NGOs and protected-area managers. Theory holds that conservation and development, which are mutually independent, must be linked in conservation planning to offer the effected communities compensations for their losses (Kiss 1990; McNeely & Miller 1984). In fact, to offer compensation is seen as essential to increase the effectiveness of conservation projects. Most authors do not recommend compensation in cash but compensation in kind such as rural development programmes, because they hold the view that long term benefits are 'better' for the rural populace (Gibson & Marks 1995, Barrett & Arcese 1995). These "compensations" should – according to the theory – be directly related to the benefits of the park (wages, income, sustainable access to meat and Non-Timber-Forest-Products – NTFPs), etc.) as well as related to social services and infrastructure (schools, roads, clinics, etc.) and are supposed to embody a political empowerment through institutional development and legal strengthening of local land tenure (Ghai 1992, Gibson & Marks 1995).

Funded by ODA and WWF - which took over from Earthlife after the charity went into liquidation in March 1987 - a first project proposal to 'secure' the Korup National Park was elaborated and signed on February 3rd 1988 by the Government of Cameroon and WWF. The main objective for the first phase was research and resulted in the development of a Masterplan, which was published and distributed in December 1989. Neither the initial planning of the national park, nor the elaboration of the Masterplan included the local population. The villages of the support zone were only informed, that they are expected to stop their hunting, gathering and fishing activities to contribute the conservation of Korup National Park. A local leader, whom I interviewed eleven years later, claimed that the populace experienced "the Masterplan as the plan of their masters".

Such an approach is contrary to any form of collaboration and it seems logical that it resulted in a very negative perception of the Korup Project. Infield documented in 1988 that only 50 % of the villages around the national park were prepared to cooperate with the conservationists (Infield 1988). To reduce these conflicts, Infield recommended the establishment of an integrated conservation and development project (Infield 1988). This was consistent with theoretical approaches, which at that time held that collaboration focuses on the premise that local populations must realise direct economic benefits that adequately offset the costs incurred from lost access to resources, because without alternative income generating activities, the impoverished forest dwellers are unable to reduce their hunting and gathering pressure on the forest (Curran & Tshombe 2001). Following this maxim, the Masterplan took the form of a letter from Father Christmas. Roads, schools, health centres, agricultural tools, training, fertilisers and even electrification were promised to "buy" the collaboration of the inhabitants

concerned. The problem is that meaningful collaboration and active participation are among the few things on earth, which cannot be bought with money.

But before focusing on the impacts of the conflict resolution pattern chosen by Korup Project, one should ask why and how such a conflict might develop in the first place. The most simplistic interpretation constructs modern conservationists as resurrected colonialists in search for native land. This interpretation does not satisfy me, because the recourse to similar phenomenon does not answer the question, why the colonialists went out to seize native land in the first place. It seems to me quite important, that most promoters of conservation in Africa and Korup Project in particular, were brought up in an Anglo-American environment, which conceptualises Africa as 'romantic wilderness' in contrast to the 'decadent metropolis' of capitalism (Nash 1982). It is principally this vision of Africa as earthly Eden, or - in the case of Korup - "paradise lost" that underpins the historical development of the National Park ideal in colonial Africa (Anderson & Grove 1987, MacKenzie 1990, Neumann 1998). In short, imperial nationalists sought "to annex the home-lands of others in their identity myths" (Daniels 1993:5). As inhabitants of the mythical Eden nobody else except the mythical noble savage could be tolerated. While some African societies such as the "pygmies" were conceptualised as remnants of the natural state of humanity² – the noble savage - that modern man gave up to take the path of civilisation (Torgovnick 1990), most Africans did not fulfil such expectations. They had to disappear. While eighteenth and nineteenth century artists 'removed' all signs of labour and man only from their landscape paintings (Clark 1984) conservationists try to 'remove' all signs of labour and man from the landscape itself. But the function for the 'actor' remains the same. While the aesthetic appreciation of nature as such was constructive for the moral and cultural superiority of certain social classes (Clark 1984), "*a national park is the quintessential landscape of consumption³ for modern society*" (Neumann 1998:24; emphasis in the original). If one is not able to see the need for their existence, one is acting against the interest of future generations - at least in the argumentation of conservation organisations, which promote, manage and capitalise "paradises" such as Korup National Park.

It is in this vein that American and European scientists "designate places, where a ravenous consumption picks over the last remnants of nature and of the past in search of whatever nourishment may be obtained from the signs of anything historical or original" (Lefebvre 1991:84). These places could be everywhere, but the best location is always there, where the conceptual map of the world 'locates' them. Since wilderness as such does not exist in Africa, it has to be manufactured. Conservationists transform the

² A colonial discussion paper on protected areas holds, that „the pygmies are rightly regarded as part of the fauna, and they are therefore left undisturbed“ (Report of the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference for the Protection of the Flora and Fauna in Africa 1933; in: Neumann 1998:125)

³ It is an ongoing discussion if one can characterise conservation as a form of consumption. The argument against is related to the word meaning of consumption as "the using up of a resource" (Oxford English Dictionary), while Lefebvre (1991) and others argue, that all forms of utilisation have to be classified as consumption, since the original nature is used up in the process of transforming the rainforest into a national park.

environment - the 'second nature' altered and spoiled by man - to portray a mythical 'first nature' - the paradise lost - (Smith 1984). In the end, after the 'removal' of all evidence of human agency, it becomes increasingly difficult "to decide whether such places are natural or artificial" (Lefebvre 1991:83).

While the motives to protect the faked wilderness - 'better than nature' - are evident in the American and European concept of the world, the question as to why African governments allow foreigners to build a manufactured reality on their territory remains open. Besides financial considerations - conservation is a sustainable source of income for government officials - it is also a strategy to impose power on their citizens in remote areas and to declare ownership over territory. In the case of Korup Project, the inhabitants were uncertain whether they were Nigerians or Cameroonians, before the arrival of the conservationists. 'State', 'government' and 'conservation' did not have a meaning in their concept of the world (Schmidt-Soltau 2000a). Life was definitely hard, but they could conceptualise it. They were not the ecologically noble savage living in harmony with their environment (Redford & Robinson 1990), but they had been utilising the land for many years and lived in the 'traditional knowledge' that this land was theirs. They did not know that in 1974 the Cameroonian government had declared all land to be state property, which was not officially demarcated. Since private land is taxed, hardly anybody outside towns has applied for demarcation, within the logic of the written law for landownership. This is especially true in remote areas. In the whole Ndiab Division, which covers most of the Korup Project and its surrounds, only one slice of land - a state-owned palm oil plantation - has applied for an official land title. Based on this vague construction, which is characterised by experts as an illegal violation of common and property law (Fisiy 1992), the government implemented - following the advice of conservationists - a new forestry and wildlife law in 1986, which bans all hunting, gathering and fishing activities on state-land, unless an exploitation licence is produced (MINEF:26 & 29/30). Since licences can only be issued by the central administration of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry in the capital, hardly anybody except expatriate sport-hunters is legally allowed to hunt, fish or gather in Cameroon.

The absurdity of these laws has resulted in the fact, that they are generally not obeyed. In the case of the research region, government officials never visited the region before the arrival of the conservationists. Since the implementation of Korup Project in 1986 rangers have come time and again to 'raid the villages' (village informants in: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b talking about confiscation of games and weapons), but in general one does not meet any patrol in the forest. During more than 3 month of fieldwork in the region, I never met any ranger 'on duty' outside of the park headquarters. This results in an 'out-law' situation, in which most of the time no laws - other than customary laws - are obeyed at all. The villagers - unlike government representatives - did not consider this as a problem. During village meetings and open discussion nobody expressed a desire for law enforcement. One informant expressed this common consent, when he stated "we do not see a need to follow any order from government. Government only takes and does nothing for us. We do not need government." Korup Project is perceived as

‘master’ or ‘government’: an alien institution, which tries to steal their land and their “traditional” user-rights in the name of something, which does not hold any meaning for them. One could understand it as an internal colonialism in the name of untouched nature, which extends the rules of post-colonial states to the remotest corners of a territory mind-mapped as country.

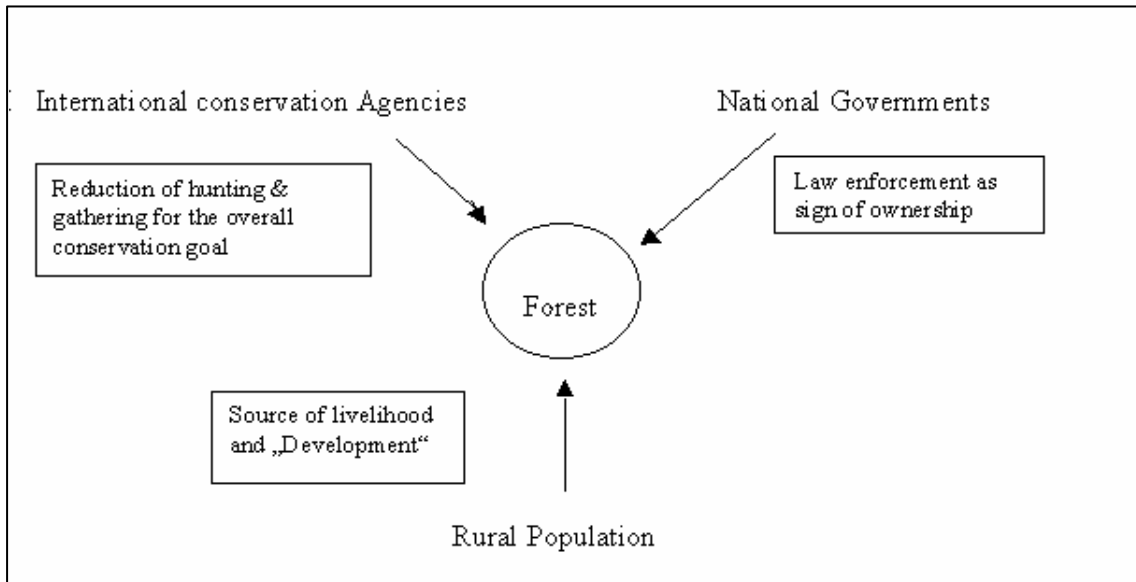


Fig. 1: The different actors and their reasons for consuming the forest

Whether one wants to follow this line of argument or not, the impacts remain the same: "The communities responded to the denied access to natural resources on which they had depended for their livelihood - an access they had come to regard as a historical right - with short-run 'survival-strategies' that amounted to no more than a plunder of these resources to meet immediate needs (...). Once the relationship between communities and surrounding resources was reversed - from custodianship to alienation - the stage was set for a real 'tragedy of the commons'" (Mamdani 1996:167). In what follows I want to outline how conservation agencies and the villagers conceptualise this conflict of interests and how their efforts to protect the Korup rainforest are perceived.

2. The ‘servants’ perception

Korup Project applied different approaches and strategies to achieve its main goal: the conservation of biodiversity in the area, and especially in the Korup National Park. The different international donors (ODA (DFID) 1986-1997, WWF since 1987, WCS 1989-1993, EU since 1992, KFW since 1992, GTZ since 1992, and US DoD since 1995) and the Government of Cameroon spent quite a lot of money: between 1988 and 2000 more than 15 Million Euros or around 1,3 Million Euros a year. This amount is one of the highest conservation budgets per km² of protected forest in Africa (James et al. 1997: 16, ARTS 1998: 1, Perrings 2000).

"The protection of old, undisturbed forest in Korup National Park area, through the improvement in living standards and economic conditions in the surrounding Support Zone, through the raising of environmental awareness among local communities, and through the protection of the National Park" (Mid-Term:133) can be seen as the overall

aim of Korup Project for its first ten years (1988-1997).⁴ While the management of the national park, including the controversial resettlement (Schmidt-Soltau 2000a, 2002), will not be discussed here, the main point of interest is the strategy employed to involve and convince the local population either to participate in or tolerate the conservation efforts. How this should be achieved was outlined in the financial agreement between the Delegation of the European Union to Cameroon - the major donor - and the Government of Cameroon. Korup Project should

- “build and implement a development programme directed towards the rural areas surrounding the Korup Park ('support zone') in order to help local people to find sustainable economic alternatives to the present hunting, trapping, gathering and deforesting practices in the park. The programme outside the park will be based on the development of appropriate, sustainable farming and extractive systems, the improvement of community social infrastructure and the development of small-scale economic activity.
- develop an environmental education and awareness programme that would assist the local people to take part in the decision making process, manage their own resources and address issues of poverty, population, health, environment and sustainable development” (Financial Agreement 1992:1/2).

In 2000 WWF commissioned an Impact Assessment as part of a general project review. A research group of 5 Cameroonian assistants and one European supervisor surveyed 21 villages and interviewed nearly 600 individuals with the help of a short questionnaire (3 pages). 577 individuals were selected following the stratified random sampling method, utilising geographical position (10 village cluster), sex and age as strata, on the basis of available census data for the 187 villages of the Korup Project area (Butcher 1997, Bijnsdorp 2000). Additionally data were collected in each village from strategic informants (chiefs, elites, teachers) and from the general public during a general village meeting, utilising open-ended semi-structured interviews. The main goal was to document the perception of Korup Project and its activities among the inhabitants of the project region. This included the question of, how and in which way the interventions of Korup Project were perceived.

To assess the impact of 12 years of ‘conservation efforts’, I will compare the data collected in 2000 during the impact assessment with data provided by the socio-economic baseline survey for the Korup-Region from 1988 (Devitt 1988) and with data gathered in an ‘un-conserved’ area (Takamanda forest reserve area) to the north of the Korup Project area. In 2000/2001 a research team (5 Cameroonian and 5 Nigerian assistants and one European supervisor) assessed the human activities in and around the

⁴ Based on a critical mid-term review the overall aim was changed in December 1997. According to the logical framework currently in action, the mission of Korup Project is to "conserve biodiversity of Korup Project Area." The project purpose is: "The Korup National Park and natural resources of the Support Zone are well managed" (Annual Planning 1999). Nevertheless, the interaction with the villagers remained very much the same – the only change can be seen, that with the departure of ODA, the rural development component and the environmental education component were closed down, but they were assessed as “ineffective and unknown among the public” (Mid-Term:216).

Takamanda forest reserve in 87 settlements assembled in 43 (31 in Cameroon and 12 in Nigeria) villages. The assessment was been carried out in accordance with the household-model. While the research was carried out in all villages (total sample), a third of all households were selected in each village for further interviews, utilising the simple random selection method (Schmidt-Soltau 2001:5). 1874 individuals from 840 households were interviewed (Schmidt-Soltau 2001:10) – or 29,7 % of the total adult (> 16) population. The result can be seen as comparable baseline data for a rainforest area in southwest Cameroon with little or no impact from conservation agencies.

2.1. “If the whites like the forest so much, they should live here. We are prepared to exchange homes” (Informant Baro)

In the following section I want to analyse which social and economic impacts result from the conservation efforts. In a first step, those economic activities, which are perceived by Korup Project as most serious threat for the biodiversity (Hunting & Gathering), were assessed in their importance for the overall livelihood and compared to the un-conserved forest area.

Activity	No Conservation Activities in %	Korup Project Activities in %	Change No CP = 100 %
Hunting	8.92	8.94	+ 0.02
Gathering of NTFP's	27.21	29.28	+ 2.07
Total	36.13	38.22	+ 2.09

Tab. 1: The ‘destructive’ economic activities in relation to the total number of economic activities - more than one option per person. Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:13 ; 2001:51.⁵

Activity	No Conservation Frequency in %	Korup Project Frequency in %	Change No CP = 100 %
Hunting	23.74	16.29	- 7.45
Gathering of NTFP's	72.43	53.38	- 19.05

Tab. 2: The percentage of people involved the ‘destructive’ activities - more than one option per person. Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:13 ; 2001:51.

In the result hunting and gathering NTFPs are more important economic activities in the Korup Project area, than in an area without any conservation efforts. On the other hand, it is important to mention, that the actual number of hunters and gatherers has reduced in the conserved area. The informants stated, that the reason for this significant changes is related to the increased enforcement of the forest and wildlife laws in the Korup project area (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:13). Nevertheless, since the involvement in an activity itself does not offer much information about its intensity, the amount of hunting and gathering was assessed in cash-income from sold game and NTFPs.⁶

⁵ Devitt utilised a different methodology (related to cash income) and did not calculate an average for the researched villages, but the results look very similar (Devitt 1988:25).

⁶ The value of the outtake for subsistence is difficult to assess. The only figure existing is related to hunting for subsistence in the Takamanda area. There the ratio between outtake for cash and outtake for subsistence is 56.96 : 43.04. (Schmidt-Soltau unpublished data).

	Inhabitants	Hunting		Gathering NTFP		Hunting & Gathering	
		Total	ØIndividual	Total	ØIndividual	Total	ØIndividual
Korup	28,830	703,402	24.40	1,488,219	51.62	2,191,621	76.02
Takamanda	15,707	380,282	24.21	717,104	45.66	1,097,386	69.87

Tab. 3: Cash Income in Euro from Hunting and NTFP-gathering per year (1999 for Korup, 2000 for Takamanda). Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:14; 2001:51.⁷

The cash-incomes from the different activities are in both areas very similar. Even if one takes into consideration that cash income from hunting and gathering only constitute 37,72 % of the total cash income (Schmidt-Soltau 2001:51), hardly anybody would claim that the villagers with an annual average cash income of Euro 161±53 per person (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:14) are able to give up these activities without facing a significant increase of poverty. From an economic perspective it is not surprising, that villagers are asking for compensation. Interestingly, the cash value of the game and NTFPs sold is much higher than the annual budget of Korup Project – which does not take into account the importance of bush-meat and NTFPs for the subsistence of the inhabitants.

	Euro
Total cash income from hunting and gathering	2,191,621
Total annual budget of Korup Project = Max. amount of possible compensations	1,300,000
Remaining losses in cash income, if hunting and gathering are not carried out and the total annual budget of Korup Project is used as compensation for these losses	891,621
Average cash income per person from hunting and gathering	76
Average loss per person, if hunting and gathering are not carried out and the total annual budget of Korup Project is used as compensation for these losses	31
Average total cash income per person	161
Average loss per person in % of the average total cash income	19

Tab.4: Hypothetic compensation figures for the inhabitants of Korup Project area in Euro and in relation to their cash income

Even if the Project were to use its entire budget to compensate the traditional owners on an annual basis, the villagers – not considering the impact on their subsistence - would be forced to contribute Euro 31.- per person (or 19 % of their annual cash income) to the conservation of rainforests. Everybody knows that no conservation agency would work for free – transfer its entire budget to the population – and that nobody on this planet would be prepared to contribute 19 % of his cash income to conservation. From the setting it is obvious that the project is not able to compensate the traditional owners. Even if all money available for the conservation of Korup National Park and its support zone were distributed to the owners of the land, the costs for the conservation of Korup rainforest would still be unequally shared. The poor pay more - the rich pay less. It can be assumed that this is the reason for the finding that Korup Project never utilises the word ‘compensation’ to justify its development programme, but the vague construction, that the villagers would be prepared to stop hunting and gathering if they would have a “better life”.

⁷ While Devitt only focused on the relation of the different economic activities without offering its value (Devitt 1988:25), Infield only offered average cash income for hunters (Infield 1988:17). If one combines this information (Euro 533.- per average hunter) with the 2000 data, it can be assumed that in 1988 the cash income from hunting in the Korup region was around Euro 688,173.- or nearly the same as today.

From an economic perspective, the justification for an interaction is not as important as the output. Whether compensation or benefit, it remains crucial for the construction of conservation through development, that the rural populace realise an economic “development”. In 2000, only 44.2 % of the respondents could remember that their villages had received any compensation or benefit (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:26). In the discussions the villagers explained that these compensations - some of them useful and important such as roads, bridges, drinking water, seeds and livestock – were in most cases not based on negotiation, but donated without participation. 17.6 % of those respondents who could remember any benefits were of the view, that the donation of an annual calendar was all that Korup Project had offered to them (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:26). Not much, if one remembers, that in exchange, the conservationists are asking them to except a loss of more than a third of their cash income.

Benefits	n	Percentage	Benefits	n	Percentage
School Aid	93	19.96	Abandoned offices	14	3.00
Calendars	82	17.60	Community Hall	13	2.79
Education	40	8.58	Employment	11	2.36
Improved Agricultural Techniques	38	8.15	Promises	4	0.86
Drinking Water	36	7.73	Agric tools at lower rates	3	0.64
Machine	35	7.51	New Village	3	0.64
Seed Donation	26	5.58	Health Care Centre	3	0.64
Animal Donation	25	5.36	Fuel/Firewood	2	0.43
Road Construction	19	4.08	Prizes/Award	1	0.21
Bridge	18	3.86	Total	466	100

Tab. 5: Description of benefits among those, who realised any benefit - more than one option per person.. Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:26.

Nevertheless, the villagers appreciate even these small contributions, especially - as they put it in the discussion - because they are – till date - not forced to do anything in exchange. More than half of the people, who did not want, that Korup Project should be closed, did not want to lose these small benefits (56.7 %, Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:28). That these little benefits are not a free gift, but a form of compensation for a – not yet obvious – loss of income and subsistence from hunting and gathering, will only be clearly understood by the rural population, when Korup Project and the Cameroonian government are enforcing the forest and wildlife laws. They are elements in a policy of small steps to take possession of the rainforests, but since “government” and “conservation agencies” are perceived by the population as “white-man-madness like church and election people, who come and give you food, if you sing with them or make a cross on their paper” (Informant Meka) the villagers are not aware of the costs they are paying for the “small benefits”. While elections are temporary phenomena, which come and go, the government and the conservation agencies are out to ‘secure’ the biodiversity of the rainforests forever.

It needs to be emphasized, that till date only 6.2 % of the villagers realised an increase of conservation activities in their villages or their forest following the creation of Korup Project (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:27). Even more significantly in the discussion, most

villagers did not see any relation between the benefits offered and the designated costs embodied in the accepted increase of conservation activities. One village chief expressed the view that “Korup is very nice to us. They helped us to produce more cocoa. But there are also some thieves among them. They come from time to time and take bush-meat, which we have hunted in our forest and even ask the owner of the meat to give them additional money. We complained to the nice people, but nobody helped us.”

It seems that the “development programme” was not introduced as a form of compensation for the loss of the utilisation of the villagers’ land to conservation, but as a gift from the government and the conservation agencies. The reasons for this are simple from the perspective of the conservationists. They hold the view, that “all land is government land. We do not have to ask anybody for permission or pay anybody any compensation, if we want to protect a part of it. It belongs to the government and the government can do with it whatever it wants to do” (PC. Conservator, Korup National Park). The subjects of this government are neither asked nor involved. They are perceived as something, which does not belong to the setting, while famous conservationists prefer to fly Prince Philip with his entourage to Cameroon to pocket a “gift to the earth”⁸, donated by the president of the republic, than to talk with the inhabitants of “the gift to the earth” about compensation. Why and how this misrepresentation could develop becomes clear if one remembers that the entire budget of one of the richest conservation projects in Africa is not able to compensate the cash income loss of the traditional landowners, but that it is able to ‘compensate’ someone who is only claiming to be the occupier of that land. One can offer something, which does not belong to anyone, very cheaply or even give it away for free. While the African governments pocket money to participate in this charade, the conservationists pocket something which is conceptualised as a sufficient legitimisation for their activities, since the legal process – which hinders the implementation of wilderness in Europe – is also too expensive in Africa. The result is a symbolic conservation discourse, which establishes African governments and international conservationists as brothers in crime. The system is simple and was practiced extensively and with success during the colonial period. As long as nobody questions the hegemony of the concept, that the government is the legal owner of all land, it is only humanistic sentiments, which hinders the conservationist to “exterminate all the brutes” (Conrad 1988:51), who spoil the landscape of the “paradise lost”.

⁸ A „gift to the earth“ is an area of land, handed over to international conservation agencies – in this case WWF. The state is declaring, that he is no longer in possession of this land, but that WWF hold the forest in trust for future generations” (WWF 1999).

Six small steps to conservation = six big steps into impoverishment

1. Step

- International conservation agencies have not the power to increase their conservation initiatives in Europe and North America
- National governments are unable to collect taxes or exploit the forest due to lack of funds and a legal justification
- Rural Population owns the rainforest

2. Step

- International conservation agencies survey remote areas for their biological value and apply to the government to conserve the areas
- National governments utilise the justification offered by the international conservationists to impose laws on the territory handed over to them as state by their colonial masters and claim ownership
- Rural Population utilises the rainforest legally owned by the national state

= **The international conservation agencies and the national state conceptualise each other as legal and competent stakeholders for the management of rainforest**

3. Step

- International conservation agencies introduce the idea of national parks and support zones and support financially and technically the governmental agencies
- The national government demarcates parks and establishes forest laws and instruments to enforce them
- Rural Population utilises the rainforest owned by the government and managed by the conservation projects (run by the international conservation agencies and governmental agencies)

4. Step

- International conservation agencies introduce the idea to “compensate” the rural population for a reduction of hunting and gathering
- The national government uses this money to implement infrastructure
- Rural population utilises the rainforest owned, managed and protected by the conservation project in the knowledge that they are not allowed to do so

= **Paper Parks: The conservation is working on the paper**

5. Step

- International conservation agencies complain to the national government and the rural population that the one are not enforcing laws and the other are breaking laws
- Governments ask the international conservation agencies to finance and accompany increased law enforcement
- Rural population starts to be aware of income losses from conservation and tries to resist

6. Step

- International conservation agencies utilise the rainforest
- National governments own the rainforest
- Rural population is landless, marginalized and impoverished

= **The conservation discourse is hegemonies**

2.2. Participation is just another word for nothing else to do

Earlier, it was argued, that most experts are of the view that meaningful collaboration and participation are essential for successful rainforest conservation. The first condition for such participation is an existing interaction, but the respondents did not see much of Korup Project staff. 8.7 % had never seen any and on average the villagers were visited less than once a month (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:25).

Activities of KP-staff	n	Percentage	Activities of KP-staff	Frequency	Percentage
Hold lectures	205	34.00	Supervise their work	40	6.63
Just Passing	130	21.56	Meet the chief and elders	9	1.49
Encourage Development	117	19.40	Buy things	6	1.00
Work in the Forest	91	15.09	Provide Transport Services	5	0.83

Tab. 6: Realised activities of KP-staff in the villages - more than one option per person. Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:25.

As one can imagine from table 6 it is not only the frequency of visits, but also the activity itself, which influences the perception of Korup Project. Villagers, who hardly ever have the chance to talk to a Korup Project staff (with frequency of visits at less than once a month)⁹ or who remember them only as officials, who pass by or hold lectures¹⁰ have a significantly more negative perception of Korup Project (i.e. are more positive towards KP being closed). Those people who participated in the planning of an activity carried out by Korup Project in their village (57.9 %), were not only significantly more often satisfied with this interaction¹¹, but also more negative towards a closure of Korup Project.¹² It seems so easy – the original consultancy report stated, that “living with them, working with them, talking with them, planning with them and learning with them are necessary commitments of successful conservation” (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:37) but the field staff was not so satisfied with the findings. In the presentation, they focused their critique on the - in quotation marks - statement of a villager, that “the Korup people are only passing in their air conditioned cars.” The critique was interesting. None of the officials in the presentation questioned the statement, that they are “only passing”, but discussed for quite some time, that they do not have air conditioning in their cars. Given such a discourse, one still wonders, why a majority of villages still does not want Korup Project to disappear. On the contrary, such a positive attitude even after negative experiences with conservation projects, is well documented (Curran 1991, Curran & Tshombe 2001) and can be understood as a dedication to conservation among the villagers – a reality discussed in the following section.

2.3. Inhabited wilderness – a good place for conservation

The conservationists conceptualise the rural populace – as outlined above – as the archenemy of the rainforest, because they hunt, gather, fish, log and clear the forest for their farms. Since it is difficult to question the trees, it should be remembered that the rainforests of southwest Cameroon have been inhabited for thousands of years. Recent research claims that “nearly 5,000 years ago hunters and gatherers in the forests then covering part of what are now the Cameroonian grasslands began an experiment which went on for almost a millennium: They became more sedentary, acquired ceramics, and began to supplement their hunting and gathering practices with new ventures in agriculture and trapping” (Vansina 1990:35). The ecological impact of hunter-gatherer societies has been assessed over time, with the result that their way of living is considered as ecologically sustainable, which means that their outtake of renewable

⁹ Pearson Correlation: $r = 0,145$; $p = 0,000$.

¹⁰ Pearson Correlation: $r = 0,252$; $p = 0,000$.

¹¹ Pearson Correlation: $r = 0,302$; $p = 0,000$.

¹² Pearson Correlation: $r = 0,136$; $p = 0,001$.

resources through hunting, gathering of non-timber forest products (NTFP's), fishing, logging for house construction and farming, is lower than the natural rate of regeneration (Darly & Cobb 1989, Gowdy 1994, Hart & Hart 1986, Jacobs 1991). In their classic work "Man the Hunter" Lee and DeVore came to the conclusion, that "to date, the hunting way of life has been the most successful and persistent adaptation man has ever achieved" (Lee & DeVore 1968:3).

Whether this way of life is still an option for the future may be questioned, as even the remotest settlement has to produce cash-income to satisfy the needs and desires of their inhabitants. This combination of hunting, gathering, fishing, farming and logging for cash has definitely increased the human pressure on the natural resources – a fact well known by those who live in and from the forest. A significant majority has a positive perception of the forest. Table 7 documents the relation between perception and its reasons. 81 % of the villagers recognise the forest as a source of livelihood and 97 % of these people have due to that a positive perception of the forest.¹³

	Very positive	Positive	Average	Negative	Very negative	Total
Source of Living	45.93	33.10	1.56	0.35	0.35	81.28
Natural Beauty	3.47	1.21	0.17	0	0	4.85
Conservation Projects	1.91	1.56	0.35	0	0	3.81
Medicine	1.73	0.69	0	0	0	2.43
Collect Forest Products	1.21	0.69	0	0	0	1.91
Logging Timber	0.52	0.52	0.69	0	0	1.73
No Response	0.69	1.56	0.69	0.52	0.52	3.99
Total	55.46	39.34	3.47	0.87	0.87	100.00

Tab. 7: Perception of forest and reason for this perception. Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:14. (n=577, Kedall's correlation: r=0.116, p= 0.002; ANOVA: F=11.6, p=0.000)

Based on the knowledge, that the forest is their source of living, the rural population is quite aware of the various threats to the forest. 26.7 % of the inhabitants of Korup forest recognised a reduction of wildlife, 25.6 % a reduction of NTFPs and 5.3 % were aware of deforestation (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:16). Based on that, a significant majority of the villagers had a positive perception of forest conservation. 28.9 % saw forest conservation as very good, 40.9 % as good and only 18.2 % as bad and 12 % as very bad (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:16). The vast majority of the inhabitants of the Korup Project Area is thus in favour of conservation (69.8 %), because they wish to sustain the forest as a source of livelihood.¹⁴ Elders (56.4 % of the people above 60) have an adequate knowledge of traditional forms of conservation (on average: 33.6 %; Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:14) and hold the view that these methods are more effective than those applied by Korup Project. While 64 % are of the view that Korup Project is contributing in general to conservation, 53.2 % consider the methods applied by the conservation agency as not effective, useless or destructive (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:20/21). Particularly those methods resulting from the European conception of nature protection - outlined earlier in the paper – such as "environmental-education" (39.9 %), "control through rangers" (47,7 %) and "law enforcement" (54.3 %)¹⁵

¹³ Pearson Correlation; r= 0.342 p= 0.000.

¹⁴ Pearson Correlation; r= 0.280 p= 0.000 (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:17).

¹⁵ Pearson Correlation; r= 0.488 p= 0.000.

are perceived as having no impact or a negative impact on the forest. If one remembers that the level of hunting and gathering within the Korup Region is similar or even higher than in an un-conserved forest, this observation makes sense. In contrast, the villagers recommend a more participatory approach to increase the effectiveness of the conservation project (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b:23). One receives the impression, that the local population is dedicated to and interested in conservation of their forests, since this forest is their source of livelihood. Based on this, it seems possible to secure the future of Korup forest. But, a sustainable utilisation of the rainforest is only in the interest of the local population as long as they have the impression that they and their children will be able to enjoy the benefits of their current commitment to conservation. Why should they make sacrifices (not extract as much game and plants as possible) if others enjoy the benefits?

3. The doors of conception

The presentation of the report and the discussion on the recommendations was a fiasco. The conservator of Korup National Park suggested that the consultancy team should not be paid and that a new – “more objective team” – should be invited to repeat the study. The project manager insisted that Korup is a success story and that our analysis was biased and full of errors. The senior-consultant – a retired provincial delegate of the Cameroonian Ministry of Environment and Forestry - was caught between crying and shouting – repeating again and again, that in his whole life nobody has ever criticised him in such a manner and that he will neither work for Korup nor with me again.¹⁶ In the result, my working relation with Korup project came to an abrupt halt. Two projected consultancy contracts were cancelled.

A year later, the criticized report was not available in the Korup library and none of the recommendations were implemented. A new study had documented the success-story of the project and the impact of the impact assessment remained at least on the formal level close to zero, but the problems in the communication between the project and the local populace, which were the reason to commission an impact assessment in the first place, remained unsolved. I was told, that a good number of villages had informed Korup project during that time, that they were not interested in any further cooperation and that Korup staff was not allowed to enter the village or the forest traditionally owned by the village. A friend working for Korup told me, that the increasing conflict between the population and the project culminated on a workshop, where some officials suggested to solve the problems with the argument of force, after the force of argument had failed. The suggestion was simple and a common strategy to break resistance. They wanted to inform the villagers, that if the inhabitants of the project region do not participate actively in all project activities, the project would provide means to enforce the Cameroonian land-law and the forestry and wildlife law. As said before, according to the written laws the government is “free” to burn down the villages and to prevent the inhabitants from earning their living through farming, hunting, gathering, fishing and

¹⁶ His major complain was, that I did not consult the client in advance about the “expected results”. He said, “This is the way to do it. It is better for the project and for the consultants to ask in advance, what should be the outcome of a survey”.

logging. They were quite close to a point of no-return - to “exterminate all the brutes” (Conrad 1988:51) for the sake of the “paradise lost”.

At this extreme end of the people and park paradigm the pendulum swung in the other direction and the reasoning returned to the discussion floor. On request of the major donor (European Union) the development of a new participatory approach was initiated, but – due to resistance of the project staff – this new approach was developed independent from earlier recommendations and reports. Nevertheless, two years after the controversial presentation a senior officer of Korup project expressed his surprise that all activities and methods for a meaningful participation recommended by the original impact assessment team were put in practice. Whether these activities are able to reconcile the different stakeholders is uncertain, but - at least – they are back to the discussion table.

Bennett and Robinson came to the conclusion, that from the biological perspective „paper parks are often worse than no protected area at all” (Bennett & Robinson 2000:513) – an impression, which can be shared from the perspective of social science. The reason could be, that the “undisturbed rainforest”, conceptualised by the conservation agencies as incarnation of harmony and aesthetical regeneration – as “paradise lost” – does not exist. While in the old days, the colonial masters were able to exterminate all the brutes, who spoiled the “discovered reality” of their imaginary landscapes, nowadays conservationists have to face the indigenous reality – the reality of the people living in the area conceptualised as paradise lost. The “paradise lost” is and will always be a chimera. Either the conservationists face these facts or they should start to re-naturalise their own environment.

The important question, whether there is a chance for a win-win situation within the conservation paradigm and due to that an alternative to the above outlined conflicts, remains open. Some conflict resolution trainers hold the view, that each situation of life embodies a chance for a win-win situation. This would be good, because for now the conservation of the central African rainforest remains in a lose-lose stadium. The rural populations are facing a significant loss in cash-income, level of independence and land-ownership. The conservation agencies face a situation where their initiatives do not have much impact on the rainforest, since the level of forest utilisation is similar to non-conserved areas. The state-agencies face a situation, where they are forced to implement laws - promoted by foreigners – against the interest of their own subjects and realise that these laws remain paper tigers.

Conservation is an important aim: important for the survival of mankind and important for the well being of those people, who consider themselves as “children of the forest”. It is neither an option to force the inhabitants to remain noble savages, nor to force them to cut their ties with the land. A first and important step towards a successful joint conservation discourse is the recognition of the fact, that in the modern concept of ownership - where man is entitled to own nature - the rainforest has to be conceptualised as property of the rural populace. This new concept of ownership implies a responsible and sustainable utilisation of forests. Whether this approach is able to satisfy all is uncertain, but without this new approach the forest will always whisper: The horror, the horror.

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