

Human activities and conservation efforts in and around Korup National Park (Cameroon)

- The impacts of an impact assessment -

“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 goal: 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 1,3 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. In the result some general thesis on community based conservation projects in the Central African rainforest were elaborated, which did not find much sympathy among project staff. Nevertheless, two years later nearly all the recommendations have been implemented. The reasons for

the delay and for the restrained reception are outlined in an impact assessment of an impact assessment.

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, Stephen Gartlan and Phil Agland, 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. So in the case of Korup National Park: the ‘no man’s lands’ is home to 1400 individuals from the species homo sapiens assembled in 7 settlements (Schmidt-Soltau 2000a). Nearly 30000 individuals from 187 villages are utilising the park and its surrounding area for their livelihood as hunters, gatherers, fisher-folk and farmers (Butcher 1997). While the consequence – that any biodiversity conservation project aimed at preservation of ‘nature for its own sake’ in an African wilderness is untenable and bound to fail - has been known for a long time, no solution has yet been found.

Research holds that the creation of national parks do not automatically convey full protection, especially in a country like Cameroon where the responsible national authorities are not capable of managing the area because of inadequate training, staff, motivation, equipment or financial means 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 affected communities an 'indirect compensation' (Kiss 1990; McNeely & Miller 1984). In fact, to offer compensation is seen as essential to increase the effectiveness of conservation projects. Nevertheless, 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 benefits should 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 - in theory - a political empowerment through institutional development and legal strengthening of local land tenure (Ghai 1992, Gibson & Marks 1995). In the case of Korup National Park, however, it seems as if all things, which could go wrong, did go wrong.

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. A local leader, whom I interviewed eleven years later, claimed that the populace experienced "the Masterplan as the plan of their masters". Nevertheless, agreements were drawn up, in which the communities 'declared their will' to follow all rules and regulations related to the new status of the land traditionally used and owned by them. The way in which these agreements were 'negotiated', suggests that the European promoters of Korup National Park were either naïve or did not care about participation. The heads of the six villages situated inside the forest reserve were informed that "it is envisaged that you be moved for resettlement elsewhere so that you can enjoy better facilities in future" (in: Devitt 1988: 40). They were told that the establishment of the National Park would attract development to the area and that many jobs would be created (Devitt 1988: 40). The villagers were "informed" that if they followed instruction "voluntarily", they would receive compensation, but if they "caused trouble, the armed forces would drive them out" (Gartlan 1982, Report 1982). The chiefs "agreed", and followed instructions "voluntarily".

Such an approach is contrary to any form of participation 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 participation focuses on the premise that local populations must realise direct economic benefits that adequately offset the costs incurred from lost access to resources (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 participation of the inhabitants concerned. The problem is that participation is one of the few things in this world, which cannot be bought with money.

But before focusing on the impacts of the conflict resolution pattern chosen by Korup National Park, 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 National Parks in Africa and Korup National Park 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 humanity¹ – 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 consumption 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 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

¹ 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)

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 National Park, 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 and 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 Ndian Division, which covers most of the Korup National Park 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), 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 that “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 National Park is perceived as ‘government’: an alien institution, which tries to steal their land 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.

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 misunderstanding 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).

"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).² While the management of the national park, including the controversial resettlement (Schmidt-Soltau 2000a), 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,

² Based on a very critical mid-term review the overall aim was changed in December 1997. According to the logical framework currently in force 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).

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 on the basis of available census data for the 187 villages of the Korup Project area (Butcher 1997, Bijnsdorp 2000). The strata occupied were geographical position (10 village cluster), sex and age. 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. The paper will first focus on the impacts on the livelihood of the local population, before the impacts on the social system are assessed.

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 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 number of households was selected in each village for further interviews, utilising the simple random selection method, since only census data was collected during this research (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, the economic activities related to forest use

carried out by Korup project villagers were assessed and compared to those of inhabitants of un-conserved forest areas.

Activity	No Conservation	Korup Project	Change No CP = 100 %	No Conservation	Korup Project
	%	%		n	n
Hunting	8,92	8,94	+ 0,02	496	94
Gathering of NTFP's	27,21	29,28	+ 2,07	1513	308
Farming	30,41	46,58	+ 16,16	1691	490
Fishing	14,32	7,22	- 7,09	796	76
Trading	12,72	2,47	- 10,24	707	26
Gathering of Medical Plants	6,42	5,51	- 0,91	357	58
	100	100		5560	1052

Tab. 1: The relation of the different economic sectors in number of economic actors - more than one option per person (IQ, $n = 1874$). Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b: 13 ; 2001: 51.³

In the result more people are hunting (+0,02 %) and more people are gathering NTFPs (+2,07 %) in the Korup Project area, than in an area without any conservation efforts. 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.

	Inhabitants	Hunting		Gathering NTFP		Total	
		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. 2: Cash Income in Euro from Hunting and NTFP-gathering per year (1999 for Korup, 2000 for Takamanda). Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b: 14 ; 2001: 51.⁴

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 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. 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

³ 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).

⁴ 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.

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 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”.

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 the economic benefits. 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. 3: Description of benefits among those, who realised any benefit. Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b: 26.

Nevertheless, the villagers appreciate even these small contributions, especially - as they put it in the discussion - because they are 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).

It needs to be emphasized, that only 6,2 % realised an increase of conservation activities in their villages or their forest following the creation of Korup Project (Schmidt-Soltau

2000: 27). Even more significantly in the discussion, most villagers did not see any relation between the benefits offered and the 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”, 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”.

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

Earlier, it was argued, that most experts are of the view that participation is 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. 4: Realised activities of KP-staff in the villages (n=603) Source: Schmidt-Soltau 2000b: 25

As one can imagine from table 4 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)⁵ or who remember them only as officials, who pass by or hold lectures⁶ 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 interaction⁷, but also more negative towards a closure of Korup Project.⁸ 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

⁵ Pearson Correlation: $r = 0,145$; $p = 0,000$.

⁶ Pearson Correlation: $r = 0,252$; $p = 0,000$.

⁷ Pearson Correlation: $r = 0,302$; $p = 0,000$.

⁸ Pearson Correlation: $r = 0,136$; $p = 0,001$.

societies has been assessed over time, with the result that their way of living is considered as ecologically sustainable, which means that their oftake of renewable 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. 26,7 % of the inhabitants of Korup forest recognised a reduction of wildlife, 25,6 % a reduction of NTFPs and 5,3 % of the respondents 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). Even more important is the general perception of the forest documented in Tab. 5. 81 % of the villagers recognise the forest as a source of livelihood and 97 % of them have due to that reason a positive perception of this forest.⁹

	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	0,00	0,00	4,85
Conservation Projects	1,91	1,56	0,35	0,00	0,00	3,81
Medicine	1,73	0,69	0,00	0,00	0,00	2,43
Collect Forest Products	1,21	0,69	0,00	0,00	0,00	1,91
Logging Timber	0,52	0,52	0,69	0,00	0,00	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. 5: Perception of forest and reason for this perception (n=577). (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b: 14)

The vast majority of the inhabitants of the Korup Project Area is thus in favour of conservation, because they wish to sustain the forest as a source of livelihood. Elders (> 60 = 56,4 % of the sample) and people from the northern part of the research region (53,6 %) have an adequate knowledge of traditional forms of conservation (on average: 33,6 %; Schmidt-Soltau 2000: 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 the joint conservation goal, 53,2 % consider the methods applied by the conservation agency as not effective, useless or destructive (Schmidt-Soltau 2000: 20/21). Particularly those methods resulting from the European conception of nature protection - outlined earlier in the paper – such as “environmental-

⁹ Pearson Correlation; r= 0,342 p= 0,000.

education” (39,9 %), “control through rangers” (47,7 %) and “law enforcement” (54,3 %) ¹⁰ 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. A good number of villagers were appealing to Korup project to apply community based conservation methods, such as forest management committees (5 %), hunting regulations (1,6 %), promotion of agriculture (6,6 %) etc. and change its attitude from “superiority” to “participation”. 3,3 % were of the view that Korup Project should keep to its promises. 2,1 % recommended regular working visits and 15 % were of the view that the villagers should be involved in all activities of Korup 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 2000 report concluded with some major recommendations:

- “The frequency and quality of interaction with the villages has to be increased. One step could be to include in the terms of reference of field staff that they have to live for 20 days a month in the villages they work with. While the administration should supervise the relevance of the activities for the overall project aim, the villagers could assess through the suggested participatory impact monitoring, the impact of activities and methods in the field.
- Special emphasis should be laid on sustainable and participatory management of the natural resources. Quite a number of villagers are prepared to jointly manage the forest resources with Korup Project, but it has to be made clear that it is still their environment. Korup Project should put more emphasis on the idea of joint management options for hunting, fishing and NTFP's collection. They should offer "in-service" training for the marketing of all these forest products. The facilitation of participatory management of natural resources requires both the sincere commitment of project field staff and a sense of ownership by the villages concerned.” (Schmidt-Soltau 2000b: IV)

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.

¹⁰ Pearson Correlation; $r = 0,488$ $p = 0,000$.

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. 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 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 and 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. Impact assessment can assist them to realise, that activities based on myth are not able to suite the complex environment of the African rainforest. The “paradise lost” is and will always be a chimera. Either the conservationists face these facts or they should start to re-naturalise New York City before travelling to Africa.

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