

Section III: Institutions and Approaches to Conservation in the Sangha River Region

Session Overview

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OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

Conservation strategies currently implemented in the Sangha River region include both Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDP) and Conservation Science Projects (CSP).¹ These two approaches, pioneered in the region by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) respectively, deserve deeper evaluation, particularly as they relate to one another. A third framework for conservation and development is exemplified by the organization Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) which operates in the region through highly organized information collection and policy formation or “Project Planning through Objectives” (ZOPP).

This section of the volume contains a series of project summaries by both field-based and home office-based personnel from these three organizations. Such reflections, as case studies, elucidate the strengths and challenges of such conservation approaches as they are applied in field settings. This section’s authors include a representative from each of these international organizations, who provide overviews of their organizations’ approach. Each overview is followed by a responsive text prepared by field directors or project personnel working to apply their organization’s approach within the Sangha region.

In preparing their papers, authors addressed the following questions:

- How do overarching principles espoused by the multiple organizations working in the Sangha region interact with regional realities?
- What have their strengths and weaknesses been in terms of conservation results?
- How do these organizations relate to one another and to the creation and implementation of policy?
- Have field experiences pushed the paradigms of the larger organizations toward change? How?

¹ The acronym “CSP” was created in the proposal for the conference on which this volume is based. We were seeking a concise acronym that would contrast effectively with the more widespread one “ICDP.” It has been adopted and more fully defined by several of the authors (see Vedder, Ruggiero, this volume).

CONSERVATION AND/OR/VERSUS DEVELOPMENT

The papers presented in this section raise a series of contentious questions currently at issue within international conservation and development circles. This overview offers a brief review of some literature on the topics raised by the section's authors, in order to offer readers some background for understanding the terms, concepts and contexts they will encounter in the papers that follow.

The assumption that all stakeholders need to be considered equitably in order for natural resource management systems to be appropriate, accepted and implemented has been widely acknowledged, resulting in efforts to incorporate marginalized rural communities in management decision-making processes (Western and Wright 1994). But such efforts have also given rise to a backlash of opinion concerning development and conservation programs as well as the organizations charged with their implementation (Barrett and Arcese 1995). Many organizations have made attempts to compensate for the lack of voice in these communities by modulating their own voices in debates about advocacy and action, resulting at times in a weakened opportunity for such organizations to affect conservation and development (Barborak 1995).

Certainly, the sustainability of resource exploitation has been identified as a primary goal for numerous conservation and development programs (Barrett and Arcese 1995). Unfortunately, it is difficult to accurately determine the sustainability of many exploitation practices. Sustainability, however it is defined, depends upon knowledge of a natural resource's growth, reproduction, survivorship, density dependence, genetics, and numerous other factors, all of which are affected by stochasticity (Getz and Haight 1989). Nonetheless, in developing any management system it is essential to have an understanding of the range of exploitation levels that will result in populations which may be viable for future generations.

Sustainability must be evaluated within each context. Exploitation levels may be sustainable in one area, but unsustainable in another due to varying environmental conditions. Although models developed elsewhere may be partially applicable in a new region, they will undoubtedly require modification based on empirical understanding of local conditions.

The necessity for comprehensive information concerning the natural systems upon which conservation and development projects are based is complemented in the social science arena. The relationships within and between stakeholder groups drive the decision-making process and indicate how authority is structured (Metcalf 1995). In remote protected areas, such as those in the Sangha region, the effectiveness of a centralized management authority, like

that practiced in the United States, is compromised (Assitou and Sidle 1995). Where centralized authority does not have the capacity to exert control, it is essential to look at the potential for non-authoritarian management and associated incentives (Wargo, personal communication). Resource managers must evaluate human behavior in a systematic way in terms of how it interacts with the biological base. We need to determine how communities arrive at the state in which they currently exist by investigating power, authority, information exchange, control, and property rights (Naughton-Treves and Sanderson 1995). Effective resource management demands an understanding of the characteristics within the societies dependent on the resource concerning specifically who gets access to which resources and how decisions concerning resource management are made. The allocation of rights within a community with respect to the balance of resource use and the capacity to allocate property is an essential component to the management equation.

NGOS IN CONSERVATION

There is a wide literature on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working at both international and local levels (Murphree 1994). These NGOs have supported conservation initiatives in Africa and can play an instrumental role in developing alternative management systems that support increased ecological and economic sustainability by linking communities and national management authorities (Bratton 1989). Their work has supported stakeholder group assessments and decision-making processes as well as identification of key areas where conflict resolution is required (Spiro 1995), which has led to more effective and appropriate wildlife and resource management plans that have an improved chance of being implemented and supported.

The nonprofit sector in Africa has advanced less rapidly than elsewhere (*i.e.* Latin America, Asia, etc.); nevertheless, it is beginning to play an increasingly important role in social development (Garilao 1987; Bratton 1989). Elevated NGO involvement in Africa is partially attributed to environmental degradation resulting from increased natural resource demands by marginalized communities (Salamon 1994). In the developing world, the involvement of NGOs has been, and will continue to be, largely project-based (Charlton and May 1995). Nonprofit activity will have to evolve beyond this project focus before its impact on policy or scholarly research will be realized (Salamon 1994). Alternatively, some scholars and analysts maintain that NGOs are playing an increasingly important role in the international decision-making process (Spiro 1995; Najam 1996).

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NGO effectiveness within the policy-making framework in central Africa is characterized by a number of criteria requiring evaluation. These criteria include: focus on a particular policy issue (primarily supported by local funding); representation of a particular sector of the society; and development of relationships with government officials (Bratton 1990). Identified needs of NGOs in Africa include: coordination and collaboration between NGOs; relationship development with both governments and donor agencies; and the ability to undertake research, develop documentation, and facilitate its dissemination (Namuddu 1992; Ng'ethe 1989). Nonprofit organizations will certainly play an increasingly important role in the development of policy and in affecting institutional changes. Means of collaboration and sharing of knowledge bases is, therefore, essential (Garilao 1987).

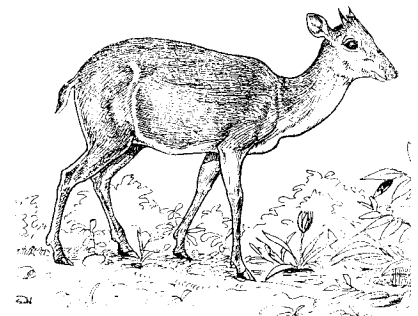
A recent evaluation (Charancle 1996) provides detailed descriptions of indigenous NGO involvement in Congo, CAR, Cameroon, and Gabon. Among the numerous needs and problems to be addressed in this region are: training in project management activities; support for permanent personnel (rather than the current volunteer system); weakness in coordination and collaboration among NGOs; need for information and exchange of ideas; financial support and governmental recognition (linking indigenous organizations with international NGOs). Some NGO groups select such links between local and international organizations as an optimal solution. If a connection between local NGOs and international NGOs active in these countries is to be made, it is important to evaluate the international organizations as well, and to determine their capacity to support these stated needs and criteria.

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

The papers for this section are here summarized according to the questions guiding the authors and the discussions. The final paper in the section (Gartlan) provides a summary of these questions in addition to addressing the overall volume focus concerned with natural, social, and policy sciences and how they interact on the ground with indigenous knowledge forms and practices.

HOW DO OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES INTERACT WITH REGIONAL REALITIES?

In this section, the three major NGOs represented describe their overall goals. Primary goals of WWF include biodiversity and ecological process maintenance; for WCS, wildlife and wild areas conservation; for GTZ, improved human living standards through ecologically sustainable activities. In the papers presented here, each organization representative acknowledges the importance of



Cephalophus sp. (Illustration: Bernardin Nabana)

ecologically sustainable activities, maintenance or improvement of local community conditions, and cooperation with national and international agencies. Although the overall goals of these organizations differ and their projects on the ground are approached differently, their experiences, in terms of challenges to achieving their goals, have been similar. Specifically, WWF lists its main conservation challenges as being institutional blockages, logging activities and trade, poaching, local people's attitudes, mining, and financing (Carroll). Similarly, WCS reports its primary challenges as being highly mobile human populations; natural systems which don't correspond to political divisions; competition for land-use by other interests; political instability; lack of conservation tradition; the cyclical nature of funding; communications and logistics; personnel considerations; and lack of appropriate judicial or legislative support (Ruggiero). GTZ highlights four main goals for its project in Congo but points out that many complex factors hinder their effectiveness, including political instability; difficulties with forestry management administration; inconsistencies between local community needs and conservation agendas; difficulty in developing appropriate consumptive and non-consumptive resource use initiatives; and the need for inventories and management plan development. It would appear, at least given this initial investigation, that, despite different over-arching principles and differing conditions in the three countries comprising the Sangha River Region, many of the realities on the ground are similar.

WHAT HAVE THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES BEEN IN TERMS OF CONSERVATION RESULTS?

Conservation results have been both encouraging and disappointing. Perhaps the greatest strength in the Congo and CAR cases has been the legal establishment of protected areas, which has slowed intensive poaching in the area and has facilitated biological research (Blom, Ruggiero). In addition, conservation programs in both Congo and CAR report relatively positive and supportive relationships with the government, enabling conservation efforts to have an increased chance for success. The reports from Cameroon are limited, so it is difficult to make similar evaluations about conservation success and projections in that country. In the view of some authors, however, the strengths of biological research and conservation programs have been compromised by increased focus on social/development-related issues, which has diverted resources and reduced the focus on ecological considerations (Gartlan, Blom).

Despite the positive relationships developed between NGOs and government officials, high turnover in project and government

personnel and general political instability in the region have compromised the success of these efforts and taken attention of project personnel away from conservation activities (Carroll, Ruggiero, Hoffmann). It should also be noted that two key criteria may not be sufficiently met within many of these projects: accountability and project evaluation. Accountability toward achieving, or at least striving for, stated goals and objectives as outlined in funding proposals is not readily apparent. Although the importance of an adaptive management approach is clearly stated in some cases (Ruggiero) it is necessary to report on the reasons why and how changes in the direction of programs were made. This information could be invaluable to other organizations. Project evaluation should be clearly defined and designed using appropriate methodologies and mechanisms. Without regular evaluations it is impossible to determine in a measurable way whether goals are being achieved.

HOW DO THESE ORGANIZATIONS RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER AND TO THE CREATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY?

It appears, from this volume's authors, that there is a general openness among scientific researchers, NGO practitioners and government officials to discussion and sharing of information. Although goals and opinions differ, these differences create a productive tension among individuals and organizations that, if well managed, could have positive results on the development of relationships among them. How this openness translates into policy appears to be a more difficult issue to address. Despite an interest in informational collaboration, differences in policy goals are evident, for example, between WCS goals (wildlife conservation) and GTZ goals (improvement of human living standards, sustainably). Indeed, there is a potential conflict of interest when both organizations approach policy-making institutions. Thus communication and coordination of these organizations at numerous levels is essential. Relationships to one another, to local communities and to government institutions should be clearly defined, and organizations should account for potential differences in presentations to local, regional, and government communities. Otherwise, these international organizations may run the risk of disempowering themselves and creating conflicts of interest among the varied stakeholder groups.

HAVE FIELD EXPERIENCES PUSHED THE PARADIGMS OF THE LARGER ORGANIZATIONS TOWARD CHANGE?

Based on the papers in this volume and discussions held at the Sangha River conference, it is not easy to find commonalities among

organizations in their formulation of policy. It appears that each organization has experienced similar obstacles on the ground, but it is not readily apparent how these experiences have affected change in the overall paradigms of their parent organizations. Both WWF and WCS appear to have an adaptive management approach, which may be driven by local field situations, while continuing to maintain their overall goals. On the other hand, as outlined by Gartlan, although these organizations maintain overall goals of biodiversity and wildlife conservation, the field experience has driven projects to focus on social and development issues affecting the human communities living in and around the forests, reducing the focus on quantitative biological investigations.

This is not to say that biological research does not occur; it is clear from the record of studies conducted in this region that biological surveys do take place. The point of discussion, however, is whether or not these donor-driven organizations can respond to the realities and needs of the field while maintaining the mandate upon which their financial support depends.

In conclusion, questions of the interrelationships between organizational field experiences and policy formulation are extremely complex and require detailed evaluation and collective participation if they are to be properly addressed. The papers that follow provide detail and insight from individuals who have worked as both researchers and practitioners in international organizations conducting conservation and development activities in the Sangha River region.

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