

Conflict between
mole national park
and larabanga
community politics
essay



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Historically, conservation strategies have been dominated by exclusive management approaches, reserving places for nature, and to separate humans and other species. According to Adams and McShane (1996) the method for establishing parks has always involved the expensive operation of removing those people living on the newly protected land. In almost all cases, the result is a park surrounded by people who were excluded from the planning of the area, do not understand its purpose, receive little or no benefit sharing and hence do not support its existence. As a result, local communities develop a lasting distrust of park authorities, in part because of the glaring lack of attention those authorities, supported by conservationists, have traditionally paid to the link between park ecology, the survival of wildlife and the livelihood of the displaced people. In the longer term the effect of the de-linkage of park wildlife from village livelihoods, encouraged by the preservationist views of nature on which the national park as an institution is founded, is to make local people hostile to wildlife conservation (Knight, 2000).

In Ghana, the Mole National Park and one of its surrounding communities, Larabanga, have for a long time being involved in a series of conflicts that have negatively affected the peaceful co-existence of man and nature. This paper explores the causes of the conflict and the values, interests and positions of the key stakeholders involved in the conflict. An analysis of the conflict using the social conflict theory and various techniques in conflict management is also employed. The authors also present a new view of the conflict and present alternative dispute resolution methods that are

applicable in resolving the conflict. Inclusive governance as a key participatory process is also discussed in the paper.

Key words: Environmental Conflict, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Inclusive Governance, Protected Area, Stakeholders

Introduction

National parks and other wildlife reserves are a major source wildlife conservation conflicts in most parts of the world. In Ghana, wildlife conservation conflicts are prevailing in the north of the country between the park authorities of the Mole National Park (NP) and the park-adjacent communities especially Larabanga (Marseille, 2004). Mole NP is a typical example of coercive conservation or exclusive management, during its creation a policy of externally enforced exclusion was pursued and no serious attempts were made to involve the local communities in the management of the park (Marseille, 2004). The control of Mole NP is vested in central government by means of the Ghanaian Wildlife Division [WD]. Throughout the years the WD and the communities have been engaging in a poor relationship which created a breeding chamber for different conflict situations (Marfo, 2003). Marfo (2003) however states that recently there has been a shift from the traditional preservation approach in protected area management to the more flexible concept of conservation through sustainable use. Despite a range of protected area [PA] outreach strategies targeted at improving the relationship with the local communities and reducing the conflicts tension still exists. The lack of communication and the

tension between local people and park staff is a common theme from different parks (Newmark et al 1993 in Bergin 2001).

The WD holds the view that local communities have done little to change their negative perceptions about the activities of the Park. Particularly the communities surrounding the Mole NP are notorious in violating park boundaries and regulations. Among the local communities both suspicion and mistrust for wildlife staff and bitterness over the process by which the Park was created is prevailing. Hulme and Infield (2001) found that the community attitudes towards protected areas is influenced by the nature of community use of park resources, the physical proximity to the park, influencing both problems caused by wild animals and negative interactions with game officials, and the history of both positive and negative interactions with park staff.

Problem statement

Though the Mole NP authorities have made efforts to reduce local conflicts there appears to have been little concerted effort to apply the principles of conflict management to protected area-people relationships (Hough, 1988). It is almost universally evident that the question of power and how it plays itself in specific conflict setting is an important dimension to the conflict management problem. The crucial role of power in natural resource conflict management has driven the debate in search for its dynamics and how to deal with it in policy and practice.

Conflict is a complex phenomenon, with the possibility of involving several actors. However, at a superficial level there are only two actors involved in

wildlife conservation conflict, namely the local national park administration and the local communities (Hough, 1988).

Within natural resource management one major reoccurring issue relates to the question of how to control and manage natural resources on an official level while simultaneously taking into account the needs of the local population (Caspary, 1999).

The emerging challenge is to encourage a scientific and policy rethinking of wildlife conservation conflict management intervention processes, guiding wildlife conservation conflict towards constructive rather than destructive results favors both the communities living on the fringes of the Mole NP as well as the park management.

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is formulated as follows:

“ To explore conflict management strategies in wildlife conservation conflict using Mole National Park and the Larabanga Community in Ghana as a case with a view to making appropriate recommendations for wildlife conservation conflict management”

Objectives

In order to achieve this aim, the following specific objectives are formulated:

To identify the background and basics of the conflict

To explore the positions, interests and values of the key actors and the strategic action exercised during the conflict

To examine the linkages of the conflict to the foundations and theories of conflict and conflict management

By identify conflict management approaches that are currently being used to address the conflict

To propose alternative conflict management and participatory approaches that could be used

Research questions

What is the basis of the conflict? Why?

Which actors are involved in the conflict? Why?

What conflict management approaches are being used or could be used

Which concept(s) of inclusive governance, which theories of democracy, is

Is the governance process participatory and which theory of democracy is it built on?

The analysis of this case study will focus clearly on conflict management techniques and interventionist strategies. A third party intervention strategy will focus on understanding the strategies different actors use to “empower” themselves during conflict and providing alternative ways of resolving the conflict towards a constructive end.

Mole National Park

The Ghanaian Wildlife Division is responsible for 15 integrated protected areas covering a total area of 13, 489 sq. km under which Mole National

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Park, see map of Mole NP in figure 1. Mole NP is one of the six national parks in Ghana and one of the three established in the interior savannah.

Fig. 1: Map of Ghana showing Mole NP and LarabangaThe IUCN defines a National Park as a protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation. Mole NP is a category II park by IUCN classification of protected areas (IUCN, 2010). A National Park is a national asset and as such remains under the jurisdiction of a central authority personified by the WD (Symonds and Hurst, 1998).

The Mole NP Protected Area in Ghana and it is considered to be the most prestigious in terms of its attraction to visitors' facilities for visitors (IUCN, 2010). The protected areas system in Ghana is designed to conserve key representative areas of Ghana's varied wildlife habitat (Symonds and Hurst, 1998).

ontextMole National Park (4840 km²) is found in the western half of the Northern Region in the Guinea grassland zone (see figure 1). Mole is named after the river Mole which runs through the conserved area. In the 1930s about 2330 km of Mole was initially designated a Game clearance area for purposes of tsetse control. The policy of game clearance was abandoned and in 1958 an area of 1, 916 sq. km. was officially constituted as the Mole Game Reserve and placed under the Forestry Department (FC, 2010)

In 1971, the reserve was almost doubled in size (4912 km) and gazetted a National park under legislative instrument 710 of the wildlife reserves regulations. In 1992, with the removal of another village in the North west

the park (Gbantariga), Mole NP was subsequently extended to the present 4840 km (Marseille, 2004).

The park is very popular with tourists visiting northern Ghana, 93 mammals, 33 reptiles, 9 amphibians and 304 bird species have been recorded at Mole. The dominant faunal species are elephant (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*), buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), waterbuck (*Kobus defassa*), roan antelope (*Hippotragus equinus*), kob antelope (*Kobus kob*), bushbuck (*Tragelaphus scriptus*), warthog (*Phacochoerus aethiopicus*), green monkey (*Cercopithecus aethiops*), patas monkey (*Erythrocebus patas*) and olive baboon (*Papio anubis*) (FC, 2010).

Larabanga community

Approximately 4 kilometres from the entrance gate of Mole NP lies the village of Larabanga, or “ Home of the Arabs” as its name signifies. The Larabanga community is a 100% Muslim which has being in existence since the 15th century and originally a hunting tribe (Marseille, 2004). Larabanga is poor rural community whose main source of livelihood is farming closely followed in importance by hunting and fishing. Basic social amenities and infrastructure are critically lacking in the community (UNDP, 2007).

Larabanga has a population size of about 3800 people, most community members are engaged in farming subsistence crops such as yam, maize, guinea corn and cassava (UNDP, 2007). The farm lands surround the village in all directions and are communally owned with most farmers practicing shifting cultivation.

The ancient mosque of Larabanga is of Sudanese architectural style and is recognized officially as a World Heritage Site. A few retailers in the village also generate some profit by selling provisions to visiting tourists. In Larabanga 99% of the community is illiterate, the same situation counts for all other fringed communities (Marseille, 2004).

Causes of the Conflict

Knight (2002) describes human-wildlife conflict as relations of rivalry or antagonism between human beings and wild animals which typically arise from territorial proximity and involve reliance on the same resources or a threat to human well-being or safety. It is proposed there are two dimensions of human-wildlife conflicts: political and social.

Political

An increasingly important factor in the political determination of wildlife conservation conflict is the role of the established political actor, the state. Many wildlife conservation conflicts are informed by people-state conflict. When wild animals become the object of official protection measures whether in the name of game management or wildlife conservation, local victims of wildlife damage may well attribute blame to and seek political redress from, state authorities (Knight, 2000). In this case study wildlife conservation conflict is defined as follows:

“ a situation where an actor experiences the action of other actors in the use and management of wildlife resources as an impairment to their interest in those wildlife resources”

The state through the Wildlife Department (WD) has adopted a preservationist approach in managing the Mole NP (Jachmann, 2008). This has resulted in the alienation of local communities and has excluded opportunities for participatory rural development activities and the sustainable use of the reserves' resources, thus generating antagonism resulting in conflicts between local communities and wildlife/forestry officers (Marseille, 2008).

One of the key obstacles to establishing key processes for the effective management of national park-people conflict identified by Hough (1988) is the large difference in power between government-backed parks and local people in rural areas. Central government has the weight of the legal and enforcement mechanisms of the nation state. The key infraction during the creation of the park was the compulsory acquisition of land without due compensation being paid to the evicted communities. The state has also being accused of using its power to expand the park several times without the consent of the local communities (Bosu, 2010).

The local communities however are relatively powerless, the villagers try to get something back - by “ poaching” park animals or by collecting inside the park - and thereby restore some degree of balance in the village-park relationship. According to Hough (1988) this difference in power is the root cause of the conflict in that the desires of central government were initially forced on the relatively powerless resident populations.

Social

The conflict is manifested through three major social conflict bases; issues of illegal hunting, crop damage and land access into Mole NP (Marseille, 2004).

Source: Marseille, 2004

Illegal hunting

Illegal hunting can be defined as the unauthorised harvesting of any wildlife species for either subsistence or commercial purposes (FC, 1994).

Regulation 2 of the wildlife reserves regulations of 1971 (L. I. 710) prohibit any person at any time to hunt, capture or destroy any animal or collect or destroy any plant within the reserve (FC, 2010). Group hunting, a group of two or more individuals hunting together, is with or without a license prohibited. Nearly all hunters surrounding the park however do not carry valid licenses and hunt mainly inside the park (Marseille, 2010). Once hunters and patrolling scouts clash with each other conflict is initiated, this practically means that causing arrest is similar to causing conflict

Crop damage

Crop damage occurs when animals cross the boundaries and move into the farm fields to feed on the cultivated crops like maize, millet, cassava, yam, guinea corn and ground nuts. The most troublesome animals are elephants, baboons, green monkeys and red monkeys. The WD is seriously concerned about crop damage and problem animals but does not have financial resources available to grant compensation for lost crops (Wildlife Division, 2001).

The current legislation does not provide sufficient incentive for farmers to care and protect wildlife on their properties. The result is that wildlife for most farmers is considered a pest that in many cases is directly competing with their agricultural activities (Wildlife Division, 2001). The farmers feel the WD should take responsibility of “ their” animals to reduce the amount of damage. The WD has the opinion that the farmers are exaggerating the actual amount and frequency of damage, farmers are using crop damage only to create resentment (Wildlife Division, 2001).

Resource access

The wildlife reserves regulations of 1971 (L. I. 710) states that no person at any time can enter a reserve except with the consent of the Senior Wildlife Officer. It is thus illegal to enter Mole NP without official permission. The denial of land access is the third identified social conflict base, meaning that the villagers are not allowed to enter the reserves, also for purposes other than hunting such as fetching water, collecting fire wood and NTFP's as well as visiting sacred groves (Marseille, 2004).

The sacred stream case for example is a conflict relating to the issue of land access. Villagers are not permitted access to the stream creating disagreement which is primarily values and interest-based. The villagers value the stream based on its traditional and spiritual importance whereas the WD values the stream for its biological and ecological features. The villagers also have a different interest in the stream, they would like to use the stream for both swimming and fishing purposes as well as the fetching of water. The interest of the WD in the stream is linked to conservation

purposes (Marseille, 2004). Also, more indirectly the conflict is history-based, <https://assignbuster.com/conflict-between-mole-national-park-and-larabanga-community-politics-essay/>

culture-based due to the way the park was created and the influence of government institutions.

The situational circumstances that surround the initial conflict setting determine the actual conflict base. The identified conflict bases are the surfacing fundamentals of the wildlife conservation conflict in general, however, these conflict bases have by no means static characteristics. As the conflict evolves the initial conflict base might develop into another conflict base. Conflict bases are also interrelated with each other.

Ghana's Wildlife laws

Ghana's wildlife policy states that although the Government cannot be liable for damage caused by wildlife, it will take reasonable measures to protect people, crops and property against wild animal damage. The 11th and 12th item of the Policy states that the conservation of wildlife within Parks and Reserves will over-ride all other interests in them (FC, 2010). No use of Parks and Reserves that will conflict materially with wildlife conservation will be allowed. It presents specific principles on rights of local access to basic natural resources, local democracy, participatory management and protection of forest and wildlife resources (Kotey et al, 1999). The policy entrenches a biocentric approach to wildlife conservation which is reflected in exclusive management and thus denies human access to resources because degradation of biodiversity has been verified (Caspary, 1999)

Stakeholder analysis

The stakeholders, generally referring to all the people who affect and/or are affected in the conflict situation, are hereby classified into these three broad

groups namely; government, local community and third party. By analyzing using the conflict onion, the positions, interests, needs and fears/hopes of these stakeholder groups were identified and presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Stakeholder classification using the conflict onion

Elements of conflict

Stakeholder

Government

Local Community

Third party

Position

In favour of the national park

Against the national park

In favour of the national park

Interest

Biodiversity conservation

Exertion of authority

Access to resource

Protection of heritage

Resource conservation

Social justice

need

Income (tourism)

International convention

Subsistence

Employment

Cultural values

Sustainable resource management

Political success

Fear/hope

Biodiversity loss

Loss of land and cultural heritage

funding

The government being in favour of the creation and maintenance of the national park could be considered as the proponent in contrast with the local community as opponents in this conflict situation. The third party could be regarded as social based group which is also in favour of the national park in

terms of position in the conflict. There are varying interests from the stakeholder groups with only resource conservation overlapping between the government and the third party as opposed to resource access by community. However, while the government's interest is to show that it holds the final authority over all forest and natural resources, the local community is also interested in preserving the heritage their ancestors had handed over to them from generation to generation and the third party is also interested in social justice for the local community.

Power structure of stakeholders

The government represents all agencies in favour of the national park comprising the Ministry of Land and Natural Resources (MLNR), Forestry Commission (FC), Wildlife Division (WD). These are state agencies are mandated by law to manage the forest and wildlife resources for the common good of all Ghanaians. With the decentralized system of governance, the Ministry of Local Government (MLG) and the District Assembly (DA) form an allied group that supports the government in its decision. Though the MLG and the DA have the mandate to see to the sustainable development of the district, with respect to forest and wildlife resources the MLNR and the FC wield more power in this conflict situation. Hence, the DA is seen to be indifferent in this situation.

The local community comprises farmers, hunters, youth group, women group and community-based organizations. These are mostly individuals and informal community associations which are easily alienated from any formal decision making processes. The third party in this conflict case is the

Netherlands Development Cooperation (SNV) and other local and
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international non-governmental organizations such as Plan Ghana. These are considered to be social based group which operate as watch dog to ensure social justice. They serve as intermediary between the government and the local community. The power relation is depicted in the figure 1 below.

Figure 3: Relationship between key stakeholders in the conflict

Conflict Theory

The power relation between the stakeholders is asymmetrical and could be analysed with the social conflict theory. This theory argues that in any conflict situation where power is unevenly distributed, the stakeholder group with more power exploits those with less power (Bartos and Wehr, 2002). This is the case where the government by executive instrument forcefully evicted the inhabitants during the creation of the national park without adequate compensation and resettlement plan.

Type of conflict

The conflict is basically over the forest and wildlife resource. The land and the wildlife resources served as the source of livelihood to the local community. The denial of access and use right to the park signifies the removal of the local community's source of livelihood and threat to their lives. The use of arms to guard the borders of the park and ward off entry by local community members has resulted in the conflict taking on a relational dimension. Hatred and unfriendly relation between local community and staff of the park is a key factor in the conflict.

Moreover, the conflict encompasses different form and nature of incompatibility. These interconnected elements culminate in the complexity of the conflict. The different bases of incompatibility (Wehr, 1979 in Walker and Daniels, 1997)), see table 2, are all to a varying degree included within the different conflict bases.

Table 2: examples of incompatibility in the conflict

Nature of incompatibility:

Example:

Fact-based

The actual amount of crop damage reported by farmers

Value-based

The elephant : a farm pest or a valuable species

Interest-based

The presence of fertile arable land within the park

Person-based

Suspicion and mistrust among villagers about the wildlife staff

History-based

The way the park was created; exclusive management

Culture-based

Traditional linkages with sacred places within the park

It could be seen that this case of a resource conflict is multifaceted and all these elements presented in table 2 above must be addressed and an acceptable agreement achieved through a participatory decision making process.

The conflict phases

Using the conflict escalation model, the conflict has been a long standing one with multiple phases. The resource area was first created as a wildlife reserve in 1958 and later re-designated as a national park in 1971 (FC, 2010). The period between 1958 and 1971 could be considered as the pre-conflict phase because during this period the local community started to sense the threats to its very existence. Though during this period the local community members could have access into the reserve and some communities were actually sited in the reserve, they were not allowed to engage in any commercial activity from the resources they have customary rights over (Marseille, 2010).

However in 1971 when the reserve was re-designated as a national park, all the local communities within the area were forcefully evicted by the use of state security apparatus and that led to the first eruption of conflict (Marseille, 2004). Prior notices had been given to the local communities to evacuate from the area where they lived to outside the borders of the national park without any resettlement plan by the government for the local communities. Hence, the community readied itself to engage in open confrontation and the government knowing this also deployed the military to

maintain order. The violence continued because the local communities were not ready to give up the historical heritage but with the heavy presence of military forces the violence finally calmed down (Marseille, 2004).

After the eruption of the first conflict, no efforts were made to address the concerns of the local communities but between 1971 and 1992 the conflict became latent largely due to the military political regime. However, from 1992 when Ghana became a multi-party democratic state the local communities started to mobilize themselves for an action to attract attention to their plight. In 2004, an invasion of local community farmlands by wild animals, particularly elephants, triggered a massive community protest with attack on the national park through killing of animals and bushfires (Marseille, 2004). This represents the second eruption of conflict and being a democratic society, a peaceful solution was sought to resolve the conflict this time. This brought in the third party group in 2005 to address the conflict situation. Hence, the conflict is in its second post-conflict phase till date. The figure 2 below gives a representation of the stages of the conflict.

Fig. 4: Phases of the conflict between Larabanga and Mole NP

Previous conflict resolution approaches

The first formal process of conflict resolution started in 2005 with the coming in of the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) as a third party to bring the opposing sides together to find a peaceful agreement between them. Two alternative dispute resolution (ADR) approaches were employed; namely facilitation and mediation. The facilitation process sought to deal with the strong emotions and to prepare the two sides to engage in a formal

process of dialogue towards finding a common solution to the conflict. This was followed by a mediation process where the opposing sides presented their cases to the neutral mediator. In the end, the mediation process saw to the shifting of the position of the local community from opposing the existence of the national park to a new position of acceptance for the common good of the whole country (Marseille, 2004). Consequently, an agreement was successfully negotiated with the local community demanding adequate compensation, proper resettlement plan and participation in the management of the national park. (Mason and Danso, 1995)

Challenges of the conflict resolution process

It is indisputable that the facilitation and mediation processes employed by SNV were successful in dealing with the strong emotions and bringing these opposing sides to sit down to dialogue. Also, a peaceful agreement was reached with some level of satisfaction by both sides at the end of the negotiation (Marseille, 2004). However, the implementation of the outcomes and the action plan of the mediation process were faced with some challenges that were overlooked during the negotiation process.

Stakeholder representation: from the stakeholder analysis above it could be realized that not all stakeholders were represented at the negotiation process. Typically, only the leaders of the community and the park managers were brought at the table. Hence the issue of legitimization became a limiting factor to the implementation of the outcome of the process. The park managers do not have the constitutional mandate to pay compensation and to meet the other demands of the local community. It is not clear the

strategic behaviour of the MLNR, which have the ultimate authority to
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implement the outcomes, to stay out of the negotiation process. The legitimacy of the outcome was questioned since the creation of the national park was by executive instrument and the conflict transcends the domain of the local community and the park management team to the bigger domain of national politics.

Non-binding agreement: the non-binding agreement was not appropriate for the conflict resolution process since the outcome required more of a legislative or executive instrument to implement. Again, because the agreement is non-binding, with every change of government the new administration tends not to continue with any programme of the previous government if it is not legally binding. It must be emphasized that when a new government comes to power, certain positions in the state organizations, mostly the Ministers, Chief Executives and directors, are replaced by new ones for political reasons.

A new view of the problem

A theoretical approach to the conflict

Conflict may involve various kinds of issues: substantive, procedural and relationship. Substantive issues refers to interests that relate to tangible (observable, definable, measurable) products such as availability of firewood, protection of crop-raiding animals or stopping illegal hunting activities (Walker and Daniels, 1997). Procedural issues include a group's need to be included in decision-making, to have their opinions heard and to be respected as a social entity (Borrini-Feyerabend et al, 2000). Conflict management involves making progress on these three fundamental

dimensions of a conflict situation. Any conflict situation includes substantive, procedural and relationship dimensions (the type of conflict) and a conflict situation is initially addressed through any of the three dimensions.

Natural resource policy conflicts are complex; they arise within some context which typically is defined by a complex array of factors, such as numerous parties, multiple issues, deeply held values, cultural differences, scientific and technical uncertainty and legal and jurisdictional constraints (Walker and Daniels, 1997).

It has been contended that natural resource conflicts are inevitable and unavoidable but also desirable to the extent that it can lead to negotiated, innovative agreements among stakeholders (Daniels and Walker, 1997).

While conflicts over resource use are never favourable, when they do occur they can be used to demonstrate the need for a conflict management approach. According to Walker and Daniels (1997) well-managed natural resource conflicts can lead to better decisions, improve social cohesion, stimulate innovation and increase morale. Complex conflict situations may never be “resolved”, so that an agreement is reached that puts an end to those incompatibilities that caused the conflict. Whatever the conflict situation and how it is characterized, co