

Orientating wildlife diversity towards the needs of people in rural areas: case studies of old Oyo National Park and Asejire area, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study of orientating wildlife diversity towards the needs of people living closer to the protected and free zone areas was carried out in Old Oyo National Park (OONP) and Asejire areas respectively. Three hundred copies of questionnaire were administered at villages closer to the OONP (Tede, Aha, Ago Amodu, Sepeteri) and Asejire area (a free zone area). Fifty respondents were randomly sampled in each area. Essential features considered are: sustainable utilization of wild animals as source of protein, integrated range farming, possible domestication of some wild species, and lastly participatory approach of local residents as well as profit beneficiaries from the resources. Results showed that animals mostly hunted by the inhabitants in OONP and Asejire areas are rodents (45%, 51%), birds (25%, 30%) and reptiles (20%, 8%). Moreover, from the study, domestic stock (Cattle: 4,719; sheep/goat: 2,608) reared at the surrounding villages of the OONP and Asejire areas respectively indicated significant level ($p < 0.05$). It was suggested that possible domestication, and potential approach of integrating local leaders in the centralized wildlife resource management would yield positive benefits. And concluded that legislations developed in the country to regulate and encourage rational use of wildlife resources are ill fated, because these have forced the resources on repressive law enforcement agents rather than sustained rural development and care for immediate needs of the people.

Key words: Sustainability, wildlife, natural resources, conservation, and domestication.

Introduction

Man has been user of wildlife and its diversity for several decades. Rural dwellers harvested a great variety of wild animals as food, trophies and for medicinal purposes, as evidenced by many species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrates which are still being collected today by the people living closer to the natural resources. Rural development programmes in all their forms share a multiplicity of objectives geared towards improving the living standard of the rural population. Their operation invariably involves not only the tapping of renewable and non-renewable resources but also the transformation of natural environment. Virtually all species of wildlife, mammals: birds, reptiles and invertebrates, serve as source of wild meat in West Africa (Ajayi, 1979).

The most popular are the rodents and certain wild ungulates. In some parts of Ghana, as much as 73% of locally produced meat comes from wild animals, particularly from some of the smaller types, such as: grass cutter: *Thryonomys swinderianus*; hares: *Lepus* sp. and giant rats: *Cricetomys gambianus* (Asibey, 1990). Many cultural and religious factors exist in various parts of the rural areas, which prevent or inhibit

people from using certain species of wildlife, however, starving desperate people often put these aside. Several societies forbid their members to eat particular animals which according to their legends; aided the group's original founders in one way or another and are, therefore, honoured. Squirrel, for example, considered sacred to the Afana (Ibibious tribe in Nigeria), may not be killed and consumed by them (Messenger, 1981). Several animals, including the cow and the monkey, are considered sacred by the Hindu religion and way, therefore are not eaten.

However, Game ranching and domestication are methods of wildlife production that may provide immediate and tangible benefits that are required by the rural populace. In addition to better alternative use of land, it also provides protein for people. Game meat is nutritionally superior to domestic meat because of its higher protein to fat ratio (Ledger, 1963; Tewe and Ajayi, 1979). Game ranching is a form of land use that can be woven into the cultural fabric of many societies and the practice is closely similar to the ranching of domestic animals. Both biotic and human factors are involved in deciding which animal species

Table 3: List of compatible wild species with domestic stock in the tropical region (protected areas)

| | Species | Condition |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Kob- <i>Kobus Kob</i> | Semi-arid |
| 2. | Giant rat - <i>Cricetomys gambian us</i> Bush bucks- <i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i> | Coarse-grass area; infested with tsetse fly. |
| 3. | Guinea fowl- <i>Numedia meliagris</i> Roan antelope- <i>Hippotragus equineus</i> | Tropic area, lesser water demand |
| 4. | Western hartebeest- <i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i> | Marginal area, less productive |
| 5. | Buffalo - <i>Syncerus caffer</i> Duiker - <i>Cephalophus sylvicultor</i> | Resistant to trypanosomiasis, economic use of water |
| 6. | Water buck - <i>Kobus deffasa</i> | Marginal area. |
| 7. | Dorcas Gazella - <i>Gazella dorcas</i> | Resistant to trypanosomiasis in tsetse - infested area. |

Source: Dasmann and Mossman (1961)

Table 2 and 3 indicate estimated numbers of domestic stock, with list of compatible wild species in the surrounding villages of Asejire and Old Oyo National Park. Limited knowledge and a fear of reduction in productivity resulting from competitions between wild and domestic animals, as well as the presumed transfer of diseases were among the reasons that could hinder integrated game ranching. However, this integrated practice would be complementary to, but not competitive with domestic live stock production. Chi square test indicated significance ($p < 0.5$) in domestic stock rearing at the surrounding towns and villages of Old Oyo National Park, as in Table 2.

The need to meet the multiple demands of people living around the conservation areas and at the same time to protect its interest has always resulted into conflicts. The people living around these conservation areas (National Parks, Game Reserves and Forest Reserves) tend to modify and transform them by encroaching on the resources, in search for food and other necessities. It is inevitable that people will modify most of the ecosystem they are living closer. This will be to achieve the social and economic results they are intended to bring; thus the challenge to humanity, is to ensure that their modification of such ecosystem secures the

survival and well-being of the future generation and of the resources in use (Asibey, 1990).

From conservation point of view, this is an ethical dimension, which tries to look ahead and to ensure that in meeting immediate human needs, those of the future are not jeopardized. Through out the world, especially in developing countries like: Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Tanzania; natural resources are being destroyed not through bad planning, greed, or even ignorance, but because the people involved mostly have no choice. They are compelled by abject poverty, population growth and inequitable land and profit distribution. They find themselves undermining their means of survival still further by over cultivating, over grazing, over hunting, and over cutting of fuel wood (Mwenya, *et al* 1988).

Both biotic and human factors are involved in deciding whether one or more species should be used in game ranching. Wild and domestic animals convert vegetable matter into valuable meat, however meat-producing potential of wild animals often compares favourably with livestock. Limited knowledge and a fear of reduction in productivity resulting from competition between wild and domestic animals, as well as the presumed transfer of disease could be the root causes of set back for this approach.

Conclusion and recommendations

Much negative variables influencing wildlife diversity in the nation are identifiable and modifiable, if guided by the native people's needs and tradition, and in co-operation of the natural resources managers. An example is ADMADE (Administrative Management by Design) in Zambia (Ajayi, 1995). Lewis (1989) asserted that this design offered a set of guiding principles in management of the natural resources and the manifestation of the approach helped to reduce poaching and other illegal activities in Zambia. Another suggested programme of such was launched in Zimbabwe 1978, called WIND FALL: (Wildlife Industries New Development for All). The objective was achieved by reducing conflict between human population and wildlife users in the protected rural areas. The key factor for success in the management of Old Oyo National Park and other related sanctuaries within this country is the support of rural people for legal use, of wildlife with their corresponding commercial purposed as opposed to illegal uses.

Given the potential for bush meat production along side livestock, it is important to focus on development systems and improve domestication technologies to improve integration and increase meat production from rural areas. However, sustainable management is particularly important in view of the role of

wildlife resources as a source of food and income for the rural people.

The following are some recommendations projected towards orientation of the wildlife diversities to the development of the rural areas within localities:

1. Create more awareness through effective communication and publication in radio, television, and newspapers, of the National Park's existence, objectives, and goals.
2. Provide the rural people in these areas with easily sampled wild species that can be domesticated or ranched and support them with simple modified technologies and materials.
3. The need of the rural people living closer to the Park should be identified and such is met with simple and acceptable design to their standards of living.
4. The kings, chief, headmen and others around the protected areas should be more involved in the management and decision making of the National Park.
5. There is need to establish a vast area to serve as game ranching within the local communities closer to the National Parks. This will reduce the encroaching habit of herders as well as improving integrated game ranching.

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