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Learning from local hostility to protected areas in Togo

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The deliberate destruction by local people of natural resources in protected areas in Togo is evidence of conflict between government programmes and people's needs. A new policy to safeguard protected areas and manage their natural resources must reconcile government interests with those of the local populations.

The legal concept of protected areas was introduced in French West Africa in 1925 and, one year later, the governor general issued an ordinance establishing 15 such areas. In Togo, a governor general's circular of 1 February 1933 stipulated: "As an effective means of preventing excessive deforestation in the country, I have envisaged the establishment of a vast forest reserve from the disorderly expanse of unoccupied and unowned forest land. The reserve is to be given adequate legal status, clear boundaries and special protection" (Aubreville, 1937). These protected areas were to be kept free of human contact as far as possible, and entry and hunting were forbidden (Foury, 1948). Although the governor general's circular did envisage allowing the indigenous population to exercise user rights in non-reserve areas, by considering the forest area as "unoccupied and prices unowned", it evidenced a basic lack of understanding on the part of the colonial authorities of traditional land-use practices.

A roadside market at the entrance to the town of Mango, near the Naboulgou Reserve; so much wildlife has been killed that the meat is sold at bargain



Customary land tenure in Togo is based on the clan, with land placed under the collective ownership of descendants of the same ancestor. There are no individual owners, as all the land within a clan's territorial boundaries is considered a single entity to be at the disposal of all its members. The establishment of reserved areas was therefore opposed by the population, since the withdrawal of usufructuary rights, particularly the right of clearance, was tantamount to dispossession of something they considered to be their own.

In 1955, a new statute was adopted which transferred all powers except defence, foreign affairs and currency to local government. The statute also contained a clause that rejected the principle of unoccupied, unowned land and stipulated that the creation of forest reserves should involve the local populations and take their aspirations and needs into account. The legal texts recognized customary user rights, including the right to collect fuelwood and to gather fruit, food and medicinal plants. Before forest classification, an inquiry was to be conducted with the local population to determine prevailing user rights. If the enquiry concluded that the general interest outweighed user rights, the forest was to be classified but the expropriated owners were to be indemnified. Unfortunately, this revision of usufruct rights came too late to be put into practice.

In 1958, during the election campaign for a new legislative assembly, held under the auspices of the United Nations as a prelude to independence, some political leaders made an issue of the reserved forests, denouncing them as a form of land expropriation, while local people attacked the forest wardens and deliberately destroyed the flora and the fauna in the reserve areas.

Soon after assuming control in 1967, President Eyadema convened a meeting of all the foresters to examine the state of the environment and suggest ways to redress the situation. From 1968, a highly centralized policy of protected area management and natural resource conservation was introduced; the hunting of all but small animals was banned throughout national territory, except with special authorization, and the possession of firearms was again forbidden as it was during the colonial

period.

Elephants in Kéran National Park before 1990

From 1971, the government expanded some of the country's protected areas and reclassified three as national parks as part of its environmental protection policy:

- The Fazao-Malfakassa National Park was established in 1975 by combining two reserved forests introduced in 1951 (Fazao of 162000 ha and Malfakassa of 30000 ha). This park, located in the Central Region's Atakora mountains, has a typical semi-mountainous tropical forest ecosystem.
- The Kéran National Park, established in 1971 from a reserved forest introduced in 1950 (6700 ha), was enlarged to 163600 ha in 1975-76, then to a total of 179550 ha in 1981-82, including a 50470 ha hunting reserve. Located in northern Togo, this park has a typical sub-Saharan savannah environment.
- The Fosse aux Lions National Park, established as a reserved forest in 1954, covers an area of 1650 ha. It was decided in 1981 to protect the whole of the Oti Valley (which extends from the northern and northeastern boundaries of the Kéran National Park to the northeastern frontier of the country), thereby establishing the Oti-Mandouri Wildlife Reserve whose boundaries have been extended on several occasions and which now covers 148000 ha.

Togo's total land area covered by national parks (357390 ha), wildlife reserves (290401 ha) and reserved forest areas (159719 ha) now amounts to approximately 807410 ha, or about 12 percent of its territory. The Savannah Region in the far north of Togo is the most important in terms of plant and wildlife protection (Dapaong Regional Directorate of Planning and Development, 1985). The protected area in this region (national parks, wildlife reserves and forest reserves) mushroomed from 164 km² in 1960 to 2632 km² in 1990, which is approximately one-third (31 percent) of the region and almost 40 percent of all protected areas.

Unfortunately, the enlargement of protected areas and the creation of new ones failed to make a rational distinction between land to be protected and land needed for food cultivation by a growing population. The conservation policy is meant to use the physical protection of land to enhance the natural environment for the benefit of local populations. But there have been no complementary actions (enhancement of arable land, assessment of people's needs, etc.) to help the protected areas play their full intended ecological and economic role. In actual fact, forest classification orders have focused on land protection *per se* and land-use planning has followed this fixed objective.

Unfortunately, the political objectives of environmental protection have completely masked the basic rationale for establishing protected areas. Instead of triggering the economic development of regions that are more than 90 percent rural, the protected areas have become "food larders surrounded by hunger" (Sournia, 1990).

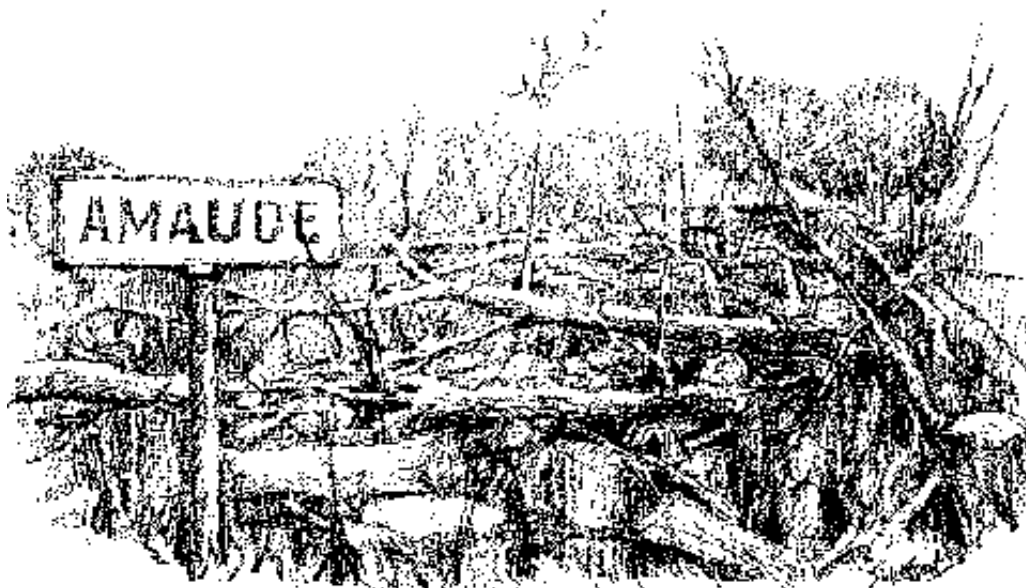
The report of a workshop on national parks and the protection of the flora and fauna, held in Kara in mid-1982, stated: "... with its socio-cultural objective of giving each Togolese citizen his place within his natural habitat, helping him to gain his lost

identity and to recognize and value his cultural heritage, the Government has resolutely pursued a process of ecological development and conservation whose fundamental objectives are to plan the management of national parks and reserves so as to protect and enhance our natural resources for the social and economic well-being of the Togolese population as a whole and the rural population in particular". On the economic level, the report clearly stipulates that the national parks should support regional and national economic development, mainly through the rational exploitation of wildlife. The economic utilization of wildlife is one component of the government's programme for the development of renewable natural resources which aims to meet food needs and, above all, to reduce the animal protein deficit as well as, in the short or long term, producing a large volume of quality game products and by-products for the market through planned and regulated hunting. The report then goes on to state that national parks and protected areas will help local populations to: find gainful employment; earn income from tourist services; sell handicrafts and souvenirs; and meet their food requirements by consuming the game hunted by tourists.

However, in reality, none of this has come about. On the contrary, the protected areas have been immensely harmful for the local populations. The Dapaong Regional Directorate of Planning and Development stressed in 1985 that "the negative impact of the reserve is manifestly clear: loss of hunting land and therefore loss of protein for the rural populations; ban on fishing which was a traditional activity along the Oti River; livestock cut off from lowland pastures and watering points, particularly important during the dry season; abandonment of numerous agricultural development projects [originally planned on land now classified as protected areas] in the most productive parts of the Region" (Dapaong Regional Directorate of Planning and Development, 1985).

Surveys conducted in villages bordering the National Park of Fosse aux Lions (Panabago, Tambago), the Kéran National Park (Sagbiébou, Mango, Péssidé), the Galangashie Wildlife Reserve (Galangashie) and the Abdoulaye Wildlife Reserve (Tchamba) give some indication of how disillusioned, bitter and hostile the populations feel about the protected areas. The populations living near the protected areas consider them to be totally alien to their needs and see them as symbols of expropriation, of interest only to foreign tourists and to a portion of the political elite. The benefit, if any, is only to the state. The words of one inhabitant of Péssidé (a village situated to the south of Kéran National Park) are: "We have suffered from hunger since 1976, when our village was moved to make room for the park. [*Ed. note:* Adopting the principle that the reserved forest area should be as isolated as possible from human contact, the government evicted populations in the 1970s, often forcibly. The displaced populations were generally not familiar with the new territory and, even when they were, did not receive compensation or socio-economic infrastructure such as roads, schools, wells and dispensaries.] Our new village is located on very poor soil and water is extremely scarce. Our harvests are bad and though we are farmers we have to buy our cereals elsewhere.... We are not against environmental protection as such but deplore the fact that the political and administrative authorities do nothing to help us."

Deliberate destruction of a teak (*Tectona grandis*) plantation in the village of Amaudè in central Togo



Villagers living near the Fosse aux Lions National Park believe that all their problems stem from the parks and wildlife reserves, not only because they have no land on which to grow their cereals but also because their scarce crops and meagre harvests are destroyed each year by the elephants, warthogs and monkeys that they are not even allowed to hunt. "We have suffered too much from the elephants and we want to see the last of them", said one villager. "All our crops and harvests have gone. We haven't grown sorghum, beans, groundnut or maize for years - only six-month millet. The elephants are the cause of hunger in the region and we're fed up hearing people from the outside talking about them. If they want to protect the elephants on our land they'll have to fence the park to prevent the elephants from getting out. Otherwise we will categorically oppose any efforts to protect elephants on our land."

Manifestations of hostility

The deep-running latent hostility of those who had been expropriated, displaced and then ignored erupted in 1990. Numerous attacks were made on forest land uncontrolled felling, illicit land clearing, illegal returns to vacated villages and massive destruction of wildlife. Before 1990, the national parks and reserves were particularly rich in wildlife. With the social upheavals of 1990, the local populations systematically slaughtered the wildlife as an act of vengeance, not to assuage their need for game. On the northern boundary of Kéran National Park, the wildlife monitoring station of Mango has become a market for fresh and dried bushmeat, with supply exceeding demand.

It is very difficult to assess the damage that has been done to the wildlife, but anyone familiar with Kéran National Park before and after 1990 cannot fail to notice the harm done to this park. There is also evidence that local populations have encouraged and protected illegal hunters from neighbouring countries, including Ghana and Benin (Chief of Bombouaka, personal communication, 1992).

Destruction has also taken place outside the protected areas to include teak and eucalyptus reforestation stands. In the Central Region, for example, around villages bordering Highway No. 1 such as Yalimbè, Ayengré, Nima, Aouda, Amaidè and Amaudè, the state teak plantations have been systematically cut down by the local population as an act of vengeance.

Another way hostility to national parks and protected areas has been manifested is

through demands for reduction or even the elimination of protected areas in order to liberate land for use by local populations. These demands have followed two main orientations: a focus on the complete removal of "protected area" status, indicating a categorical rejection of reserved land; and a more moderate position based on the acceptance of protected areas but with boundaries put back to those established during the colonial period. The demands have been most virulent in the central and northern parts of the country where the designation of reserved forest land has caused considerable problems for the local population.

An example of the more extreme position is that of the populations affected by Kéran National Park which straddles the Oti prefecture in the north and the Kéran prefecture in the south. Land was declassified in Oti prefecture in 1991 but the local populations still claim all the area south of the Sadori-Takpaniéni highway down to the Koumongou River, which is the natural boundary between the two prefectures. This position clearly indicates the local population's refusal to accept protected areas in their region.

A more moderate tack has been taken in Kéran prefecture, where the local population claim more land and want the boundaries of the protected land to be those of the village of Atchenrité (Ayendete), as they were in 1973.

The challenge is to reach a compromise

Togo has experienced two decades of ecological disequilibrium (persistent drought, particularly in the northern part of the country, deforestation and the disappearance of woody vegetation, particularly in the Savannah, Kara and Maritime Regions, with a consequent lack of fuelwood and increasingly irrational land use) causing enormous damage to the country's flora and fauna. More or less long-term ecological imbalance can be expected unless action is taken, and the remedy must prioritize the sociological and psychological dimension over technical and financial aspects. The proper solution is undoubtedly to involve the local populations in the management and exploitation of their natural resources and to increase their sense of responsibility. The ultimate objective can no longer be to isolate the protected areas from the local communities. Surveys conducted around 20 protected areas distributed throughout the country reveal that the local populations recognize the ecological role of forests for rainfall, soil fertility and their own survival and consider environmental protection to be necessary. However, they want the uses of protected areas to be redefined and their size reduced, as they consider these excessive given the amount of arable land needed to cope with population growth. Their proposal is to realign the boundaries of the protected areas to those of the colonial period. This new demarcation should be done together with representatives of the landowners and accompanied by compensation, as local populations consider that, in the past, their land has been confiscated rather than purchased.

With regard to hunting, the local populations want to be allowed to hunt outside the protected areas, particularly the animals that cause damage to their crops. A basic socio-economic infrastructure should be established in the villages near protected areas (old and new) to improve the quality of life. Assistance should be provided so that the land bordering the protected areas can be rationally and methodically utilized and so that the local population can be integrated in the protection process. Serious thought should be given to the participatory management of protected areas - an innovative perception of environmental protection.

People's ways of thinking (which implies sensitization) as well as forest wardens'

attitudes (which implies training) will have to change with regard to natural resource management and exploitation. Togolese forest law will also have to be duly adjusted. Finally, an effort must be made to match words with deeds so that misunderstandings do not arise between the authorities and the local populations.

Conclusion

The protection of nature is important, for its destruction seriously undermines the quality of life of human beings who are an integral part of nature and dependent on it for their well-being. The recent examples of wilful destruction of natural resources are a manifestation of the latent hostility that has existed in Togo for the past 20 years and which came to a head in 1990. The reasons for establishing protected areas need to be redefined to make the local populations want to contribute towards the protection, management and rational exploitation of natural resources. The government authorities will also be called on to sensitize the population to the importance of protecting the country's forest resources.

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