

Is the Displacement of People from Parks only 'Purported', or is it Real?

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This article responds to the critique of data on population displacements voiced in the article 'Are Central Africa's Protected Areas Displacing Hundreds of Thousands of Rural Poor?' (hereinafter Curran *et al.* 2009) and an earlier version of the same paper with the title 'Central Africa's Protected Areas and the Purported Displacement of People' (hereinafter Maisels *et al.* 2007). Both articles cast doubt upon the data collected in the field by me and my research assistants. While we have shown that large numbers of people have been physically and economically displaced from 12 protected areas in Central Africa (for example, Schmidt-Soltau 2003, 2005; Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau 2006), my critics claim that not a single person was displaced from at least 10 of the 12 protected areas covered in our 1996–2007 research. [While the critics claimed earlier that they 'can find no unequivocal evidence of people having been forcibly or involuntarily displaced from the (12) protected areas cited by the authors' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 75), they have slightly modified their view and claim in this volume that 10 of the 12 'protected areas do not have such a (resettlement) policy for one obvious reason: despite the assertions to the contrary, resettlement has not happened, nor is it planned, in any of these sites' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 4).] Throughout their articles, the critics attempt to dispute the data and through this process try to discredit the inevitable conclusions that result from these data and the convergent empirical findings of many other researchers. Ultimately, the critics suggest that calling for a conservation that 'strive to contribute to poverty reduction at the local level and at the very minimum must not contribute to or exacerbate poverty' (WPC 2003 Recommendation 29) is meaningless as according to them we challenge a practice which is not real but only 'purported'. ['These papers challenge the purported practice of sovereign states, often supported by conservation NGOs, to designate protected areas without discussion with or providing compensation to people living nearby' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 1).] This is in fact the same old position that ignores and denies the impoverishment caused by protected areas instead of

acknowledging and addressing this unpleasant reality in order to find mutual acceptable solutions. While we thought that this position has been repeatedly and convincingly refuted and that conservation Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) would focus after the World Park Congress in Durban (WPC 2003) on corrective actions and pro-poor conservation, the denials are repeated time and again in complete ignorance of what had been discussed and agreed upon. This is unfortunate from a societal perspective as it slows down the shift towards pro-poor conservation and from a personal perspective as I have worked with most of the critics over the last decade and considered some of them to be friends.

Before documenting in detail that the critique is unsubstantiated, it seems useful to provide the reader with some background to this debate as there is a long history—reconstructed in many books and articles—devoted to the analysis of the 'peoples and parks' issue. In this literature many researchers from different countries have reported brutal displacements, the lack of fair compensation and the absence of elementary human compassion for those affected. Yet in disregard of this long stream of published literature, my critics claim that they 'can find no unequivocal evidence of people having been forcibly or involuntarily displaced from the protected areas' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 75). Not only is this assertion fully contradicted by my data itself (which have been confirmed in the meantime by other researchers), by other independent studies, but also by data reported by some of my critics themselves.

This stark discrepancy suggests that the critique was not produced in scientific recognition and respect of facts by truth-seeking researchers and scientists. Rather, it appears to be a belated echo of the old strategy of camouflaging human rights violations under the guise of the good and necessary cause of biodiversity conservation. While the critics acknowledge, at least in their revised article, that 'the creation of protected areas will inevitably have some negative impacts on some individuals living nearby' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 1), they refuse

to acknowledge the resulting impoverishment and that such unmitigated interventions are violations of fundamental human rights irrespective of the number of affected people. They try to justify their own involvement in the establishment and management of protected areas and the resulting impoverishment of hundreds of thousands of poor local people, as 'inherent trade-offs' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 1). Conservation is essential and indispensable and the goals of conservation are indeed noble, but in conservation work, like in many other human endeavors, the good goals do not justify the means and must not be achieved at the cost of inflicting destitution and misery on powerless, indigenous, forest-inhabiting peoples. What is even worse is that unlike hydropower and infrastructure development, biodiversity conservation does not need to resort to displacements as conservation goals can be achieved through 'legislative and market solutions that [use the monetarized] true value of carbon and eco-system services provided by the world's remaining rainforests [in order ...] to provide credible incentives to rainforest nations, down to the farmers on the ground, and "out-compete" the drivers of rainforest destruction' (HRH The Prince of Wales 2007: 3).

This is one of the reasons, why I find it necessary to respond in public to this group who appears not to acknowledge that their practice has long been out-ruled and stands in stark contrast to established international standards (WPC 2003; CBD 2004). It is further necessary to do so, as they still receive significant funds from well intended governments and individuals, who unfortunately have little if any idea of what happens with their money on the ground. Conservation NGOs in Central Africa receive every year public and private support with a value of more than USD 35 million (Scholfield & Brockington 2009) and have recently launched a campaign to obtain significant additional funds. The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), which employs directly or indirectly most of my critics, has an annual budget of USD 20 million for Africa and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which employs some more of my critics, has an annual Africa-budget of 40 million USD (Scholfield & Brockington 2009). It is important to highlight that these funds exceed by far the funds available to national authorities in charge of protected area management, and consequently conservation NGOs are in most Central African countries the key decision makers on how protected areas are established and managed. Therefore, their claim, that we challenge the 'purported practice of sovereign states, often supported by conservation NGOs' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 1), is misleading. While most governments have acknowledged the adverse impacts of protected areas (see the discussion later in the article) those driving these developments hide behind governments, which hardly know what the NGOs are doing in the protected areas.

Given that my critics no doubt wish to defend their current yet outdated and unethical practices, it is not surprising that they attempted to find grounds to invalidate my expository data. They claim, 'that the majority of the case studies are based on incorrect or inappropriate data, or at least, data which have been interpreted incorrectly' (Maisels *et al.*

2007: 75). The critique goes on to complain that my repeated field visits were inadequate for data collection. However, if anything, these critics should call into question their own data-gathering methods. In order to deny the effectiveness of my fieldwork data, they state that their data is based on 'published documentation, (their) own experience, and data gleaned from years of working in and around most of these protected areas' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 77), however, *not* upon any sound scientific data or research. Furthermore, as evidenced by the use of personal anecdotes as data sources, the authors demonstrate that they are not social scientists and thus not well equipped to work on the complex social dynamics of the people and park paradigm or fit to pass judgment on published accounts by qualified and experienced social scientists. The use of anecdotes to critique scholarly writings is not the accepted norm of any scientific community.

As my critics are natural scientists, it is no big surprise that they consider natural science methodologies to be the one and only approach to obtain 'scientific' data: 'What is essentially required is a published comparison on the welfare of households that traditionally have claims on park resources with "control" households that do not' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 17/18). Consequently, my critics introduce their own ongoing research in Gabon, which is based on this methodology and undertaken by them themselves, as the only scientific survey on the societal impacts of biodiversity conservation (Curran *et al.* 2009: 2; Maisels *et al.* 2007: 76, 86). It needs to be highlighted that such a setting, which exposes people to unmitigated harm just to see how they cope with it and which is undertaken without their free, prior and informed consent, is considered by social sciences an unacceptable methodology and stands in stark contrast to establish research ethics (for example, ESRC 2005: 25). This further underlines that the critics are ill equipped to judge on the complex peoples and park issue.

In the version published in this journal, the critics have slightly moderated their tone and suggest now that my data 'are based on very cursory survey methods and are, as such, unreliable. In addition, certain "factual" statements made in many of the site level observations are also questionable' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 4). They suggest that 'the evidence necessary to answer the question as to how many people have been displaced or negatively affected by conservation is simply not there; it has not been collected either by those criticizing conservation, or by conservationists themselves' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 24). While I agree and have constantly indicated that my data include rough estimates and extrapolations (see for example, Schmidt-Soltau 2005: 285), thus could be enhanced through additional research by social scientists, I have difficulties, however, following their logic. If they do not have data, how can they claim that in 10 of 12 cases 'resettlement has not happened' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 4)?

Their argument becomes even more problematic: They acknowledge 'that the creation of protected areas will inevitably have some negative impacts on some individuals nearby' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 1) and 'advocate that there are indeed instances where fully protected National Parks may be

necessary to ensure biodiversity conservation and the provision of ecosystem services for the good of the local people and the global community at large' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 24). In sum, they seem to suggest that to inflict negative impacts on some individuals is in the interest of these individuals themselves. This seems to indicate that my critics presume to know better than those affected what is best for those living around protected areas. This is the old sad story of some individuals who assume to have the right and the knowledge to sacrifice other people and/or their livelihood for some greater good. To call this a 'trade-off' is not only cynical but totally out of step with modern development thinking.

The former public relation director of Conservation International describes the jet-set lifestyle of conservationists in detail and documents that, for example, the WCS President Steven Sanderson has an annual salary of USD 825,170 (MacDonald 2008: 21). Not that he should work for free, but his salary alone would be sufficient to offset the income losses of the 5,800 people economically and physically displaced from the Loango and the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Parks, both managed by WCS (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau 2006: 1820). Further, if one analyses these 'trade-offs' in the framework of the Carbon Offset Trading Schemes recently established with active support from conservation NGOs, the underlining imbalance becomes even more visible: An increasing number of developed countries and industries that exceed their allocated CO₂ emissions under the Kyoto Protocol balance their emissions by providing funds to conservation NGOs to create more protected areas as this is said to reduce emissions from deforestation. Offsetting additional emissions through the creation of protected areas without providing for socio-economic mitigation measures enables those living in developed countries to maintain their lifestyle at very low costs, while those living around the protected areas lose their access to the one and only source of their livelihood and are consequently forced into poverty. These 'trade-offs' are unacceptable.

The dilemma of my critics is that they are fully aware that their conservation efforts have adverse impacts on the local population, but as they are unable or unwilling to compensate for them, they need to justify them as 'inevitable trade-offs'. While a similar minded conservationist justified some years back the brutal eviction of several thousand people from the Kibale Wildlife Corridor as 'successful operation... which has opened up the possibility for the frustrated elephant population of Kibale to migrate between the Queen Elizabeth National Park and the forest' (Feeney 1993: 4), my critics try to get away with similar actions by attacking my field work data.

Their strategy to isolate and attempt to oppose the findings of a single researcher calling for 'do-no-harm' and 'pro-poor' conservation, is in the 21st century context both ignorant and disingenuous. All projects funded by multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Finance Corporation (IFC), African Development Bank (AfDB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Inter-American

Development Bank (IDB), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and others are scrutinized to determine whether they cause 'involuntary restriction of access to legally designated parks and protected areas resulting in adverse impacts on livelihoods' (World Bank, OP 4.12). If it is found that a project risks impacting negatively on local livelihoods, it must then be documented that the project ensures through mitigation measures that the livelihoods of all affected people are enhanced, or, at the very least, restored and that the standard of living for the poor and other vulnerable groups are improved. Projects which are unable to document that they restore and enhance rural livelihoods are not eligible for multilateral funding. This practice has now been endorsed by many bilateral organizations and private investment banks. The U.S.-funded Millennium Challenge Cooperation and the Agence Française de Développement recently adopted all 10 World Bank safeguard policies and it is very likely that the new U.S. government will also desist in funding organizations unwilling to distance themselves from forced evictions in the name of biodiversity conservation. The World Bank, ADB, IFC, EBRD, IDB, AfDB, OECD, 60 private sector banks, etc., have all enhanced over the last five years their resettlement policies to cover the involuntary restriction of access to legally designated parks and protected areas even if the affected people do not need to relocate physically (World Bank OP 4.12, Para 3b; see also Cernea 2006). Further, this policy change goes along with a fast growing number of case studies on displacement from protected areas (see Brockington & Igoe 2006) and is based on independent and rigorous research, extensive consultations with all stakeholders and endorsement by all shareholders of the multilateral banks, which comprise the governments of nearly all countries on this planet.

It seems almost inevitable to draw the conclusion that WWF and WCS had to be operating with alternative motives when the critique was authored: If WWF and WCS took issue with my data, there was plenty of time for these concerns to be voiced prior to publication. My critics stress the importance of sound fieldwork and subscribe that 'the presentation of detailed and accurate data is essential when constructing and testing hypotheses' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 76). Yet none of them seemed to care enough about accurate data to notify or question me personally. Among those exposed to the data prior to publication were Karin von Loebenstein, who assisted me to present a first draft at the World Congress of Rural Sociology (Rio 2000) as well as Fiona Maisels (WCS Gabon), Terry Sunderland (WCS Cameroon), and others, who were present when earlier drafts of the research were presented at a CIFOR Conference (Bonn 2003), the World Park Congress (Durban 2003), and the World Conservation Congress (Bangkok 2004). My critics had ample time prior to the data's publication to contest it privately with me, but instead, they chose to wait until the study came out to air their criticisms.

Further despite the fact that my critics place 'sound science' upon a pedestal (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 76), the critique of my articles in leading peer-reviewed journals (*World Development*, *Development and Change*) was published first in a WCS

circular. 'Sound science' means that comments or critiques are published in the same journal in which the original article was published in order to provide the original author a forum in which to reply. As a result of their choice to publish this critique in an exclusive, separate journal, financed and managed by WCS, it made it impossible for me to respond. Furthermore, informal attempts to respond to the WCS article have remained unacknowledged and unanswered. This is indeed bad science.

The bias of the authors comes through in their palpable concern about the influence of my study. In their critique, the authors suggested that 'publications like those produced by Schmidt-Soltau influence decision-makers at the larger donor agencies and within national governments. When the information on which it is based is poorly gathered and makes false assumptions, it can misinform policies, which can be detrimental for conservation' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 89). Is it really the *quality* of the information that presents risks for conservation? If a body of poorly gathered information was in support of conservation, WWF and WCS would be unlikely to voice any criticism. The cause of alarm is not the quality of the data or the fact that my publications are influential, but the content which happens to expose unacceptable practices on the part of the conservationists. It is indeed quite ironic that their recent critique uses a question as title ('Are Central Africa's protected areas displacing hundreds of thousands of rural poor?'), when a discussion of the pros and cons of the data is omitted in favor of a calculated disassembly of the argument. The title of the article is rather misleading as it implies objectivity, when in fact it is an attempt by those who are involved in what are in fact human rights violations attempt to defend their positions. In sum, it seems clear that the critique was written to debunk my argument and gloss over the case studies I examined.

Let me go through their list of allegations and show that all these allegations are unsubstantiated:

I documented that the Korup National Park (Cameroon) resulted in the involuntary resettlement of 1,465 people. The critique generally confirms my detailed case study data regarding this park and highlights that 'the remaining funds were insufficient for the resettlement of the remaining five villages, and from 2001 all further resettlement was suspended' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 6). Everyone can agree on this. The point of conflict is their conclusion that 'therefore the claim of Schmidt-Soltau that 1,465 people were resettled is incorrect and that the resettlement was involuntary is also incorrect' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 80). I have earlier responded in detail to the claim that this was a voluntary resettlement (Schmidt-Soltau & Brockington 2007) and will not repeat this here. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that even after the publication of our 2007 study on the differences between voluntary and involuntary resettlement in conservation my critics try to redefine established social science definition by quoting from the 1989 Korup management plan, which states that 'all resettlement should be voluntary, meaning that people move to a site of their own choice at their own time' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 6). If anything, this documents that my critics are ignorant of the global discourse on involuntary resettlement that

has been ongoing for the last three decades, notwithstanding, a limited understanding of social patterns and social science. 'Voluntary' would such movement only be, if the affected people would have had the option to stay. To call the participation in the implementation of the involuntary resettlement scheme voluntary indicates ignorance of globally accepted norms. In view of the suspension of further resettlements itself, my critics forgot to mention that this suspension was a direct outcome of my fieldwork and only affected the financial support from the European Union (EU), *not* the resettlement program itself. Due to the lack of funding (not to a deliberate antidisplacement strategy), five villages are not yet displaced and still present in the national park. Neither the park-management plan nor any other document legalizes and regulates their existence in a manner that will both protect the park's biodiversity and offer them 'legal' sustainable livelihoods. In practice, their existence within the park's boundaries is only temporarily accepted and economically restricted by various interdictions and without regulated facilitation for alternative subsistence. This absence of legal livelihoods fits the World Bank's definition of '*restriction of access without physical displacement*' and—*economically*—represents a displacement of the people from their sources of livelihood without giving them a commensurate alternative. The World Bank—and not me—defines in its most recent policy on involuntary resettlement that such situation of project-introduced and imposed restriction of the access of residents to their previously used natural resources is a form of displacement. This is why the World Bank decided in 2001 that its resettlement policy must '*cover restriction on the use of resources imposed on people living outside a park or protected area, or on those who continue living inside the park, or protected area, during and after (project) implementation*' (OP 4.12. n. 9). My critics are not prepared to recognize, fairly and publicly, that my analysis and interpretation are along the institutional analysis and policy conclusion adopted and enacted as minimum standards by the largest and most influential development organization. They simply hide this fact from their readers although it is germane to the very heart of our controversy. One could not call this type of selective quotation of existing evidence an acceptable discussion practice, while indulging in lecturing about 'facts'. In sum, my critics' interpretation that the temporary suspension of the physical relocation program means that there was or is no displacement, simply skirts around the facts and documents a significant amount of ignorance of the basic international standards, definitions, and practice.

I could go on and question, for example, how observations made during a 2003 field trip prove that in 2004 the resettled people did not move back to their old location in the park (Curran *et al.* 2009: 6), what relevance overall annual rainfall volumes have on the availability of drinking water in an area with a distinct dry season (Curran *et al.* 2009: 7) and why a statement of a park advisor proves that resettling people to an area without access to drinking water during the dry season has no health implications (Curran *et al.* 2009: 7), but let me, in view of the limited space available for this article, focus on the main issues.

My critics refute my conclusions in the case of the Cross River National Park (Nigeria). We noted that the physical displacement of 2,876 people is planned, but ‘has not started’ (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau 2006: 1814), while my critics stress that ‘the Federal Government (Ministry of the Environment) is currently investigating options for the resettlement of the three enclaves’ (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 85). The critics’ argument is that the boundaries of the park are ‘proposed rather than actual’ (Curran *et al.* 2009: 8). ‘The proposed area included the three enclaved communities of Okwangwo, Okwa and Balegete, which were never, in the end, gazetted. ... Therefore the human population in the Park when it was decreed was zero. There was never any suggestion that the people of Okwa and Okwangwo would be resettled “involuntarily”’ (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 84). Unfortunately, this is not true. John Oates, one of my critics, describes in his book ‘Myth and Reality in the Rainforest’ that ‘these enclaves supported more than 2,500 people’, that ‘it was obvious that if these villages remained where they were and continued to grow, they would ... progressively deplete its wildlife’, and concludes that ‘based on these observations, one of the main recommendation ... was that ... the villages of Okwa and Okwangwo would have to be relocated outside the forest’ and that ‘the recommendations ... formed appendices to the master plan’ (Oates 1999: 157–158). Oates further mentions that the 1990 master plan, endorsed by the Federal Government and the EU, allocated ‘1.44 million ECU to be spent on the resettlement of Okwa and Okwangwo villages’ (Oates 1999: 159). The fact that the resettlement had not occurred yet, as my critics correctly points out, is a result of the sanctions after the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight comrades in 1995. Financial support from the EU was reduced, but the plan to resettle the villages was and is still high on the agenda of the park management and, like in the case of Korup, only temporarily suspended. As Oates’ book confirms my data and interpretation, the dismissive claim of his and his colleagues that I used ‘incorrect or inappropriate data or at least data, which have been interpreted incorrectly’ (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 75) is not robust.

My critics rightly mention that the Takamanda National Park (Cameroon) was officially created in 2008. It has not been presented by me as a case study of economic displacement. Therefore, I do not see the relevance of their information that ‘the management framework of the Takamanda National Park, drafted in 2006, includes rights of access, nondestructive harvesting of nontimber forest products and the continued presence of legally enclaved communities so the livelihoods of those reliant of high value forest products will not be deleteriously affected’ (Curran 2009: 9) as critique of my data. Anyway, a forthcoming publication in *Small Scale Forestry*, published by the International Union for Forest Research Organizations, which is not known for an anticonservation agenda, highlights that the ‘restrictions include a total ban on hunting and agricultural practices within the park, abandonment of current farms, removal of permanent camps, potential for relocation of the enclave communities and progressive ban on NTFP collection’ (SSF in print: 5). Further, this paper suggests

that the claim of my critics that ‘there was extensive consultation with local communities during the NP creation and formulation of a legislative framework’ (Curran *et al.* 2009: 9) might be wrong. The *Small Scale Forestry* paper suggests that ‘the recent creation of the Takamanda National Park in south-west Cameroon does not integrate local concerns about the potential restrictions in user rights’ (SSF in print: 8). These findings have been further confirmed by the research conducted by Nathalie van Vliet from CIFOR (pers. communication 2009) and the Master thesis of Emmanuel Freudenthal (2009) from Oxford University.

Further, while the critics confirm that the detailed household data gathered by my research assistants and me in and around the today’s Takamanda National Park between 2000 and 2003 are correct (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 88) and have consequently been used in many of their publications (see Comiskey *et al.* 2003: 5, 34, 118, 130, 141, 155, 156, 158 *inter alia.*), they take issue with my approach to extrapolate these data to the larger region. They claim that ‘household incomes in Takamanda are significantly higher than they are in other remote areas elsewhere in Central Africa and, as such, are not representative of the wider region’ (Curran *et al.* 2009: 17/18). It would be interesting to know how they came to this conclusion as they state later that ‘the evidence necessary to answer the question as to how many people have been displaced or negatively affected by conservation is simply not there; it has not been collected either by those that criticize conservation, or by conservationists themselves’ (Curran *et al.* 2009: 24). As they do not even know how many people were affected, one can convincingly assume that they do not have detailed information on household incomes of these people, and therefore, are unable to judge whether household incomes in other regions are higher or lower. To suggest that this proves that my data are wrong is misleading and unsubstantiated.

Another example of the denial and reconfiguration of the truth by my critics is their critique of my study of the Dja Biosphere Reserve (Cameroon), which signaled the physical displacement of indigenous peoples and the economic displacement of additional rural populations, impacting, in total, 7,800 people. My fieldwork findings were confirmed by Abilogo *et al.* (2002) and Nguiffo (2003). Provided with more space, reference to the works of Joiris *et al.* (1995), Bahuchet & Leclerc (2000), Delvingt *et al.* (2002), and CED & FPP (2005) could have been added. My critics confirmed that there are ‘about 50 villages within a km of the reserve limits’ and indicated that ‘the population cited is the number of people living outside the reserve’ (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 77), thus there is not much difference between the two sets of data. The only discrepancy is that my critics’ (2007) one and only witness, Roger Fotso, is quoted to have said in a personal communication that ‘no people were resettled to create the park’ (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 77). For my critics, the word of the WCS country director (an ecologist) seems to be sufficient evidence against the findings of a large number of independent and well-known social scientists. From a scientific perspective, such information is merely anecdote and not able to say anything about the quality of scientifically obtained data.

In the revised article, they try to support their claims with a study conducted by the Forest Peoples Project, which notes that 'there has never been (an) official resettlement of indigenous peoples' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 9). I have difficulties understanding how this statement supports their argument. I agree that there was never an official resettlement program for indigenous peoples, but this is in fact, part of the problem as an official resettlement program would have allocated compensations for the losses forced on those physically and economically displaced from this and other protected areas. Similarly, the fact that some Baka illegally enter the reserve in order to access natural resources traditionally belonging to them (Curran *et al.* 2009: 9–10) can hardly be considered as evidence that nobody has been economically or physically evicted. On the contrary, the fact that this access is now illegal and might soon be stopped is evidence of unmitigated economic displacement and further supports my findings.

The creation of the Lake Lobeke and Boumba Bek National Parks (Cameroon) led to the physical displacement of Baka communities and the economic displacement of around 8,000 people. I indicated that my fieldwork data had been confirmed by the GIS database of the GTZ managed *Projet de Protection des Forêts Naturelles dans le Sud-Est du Cameroun* (PROFORNAT), which not only provides village level census data, but also information on the various land use zones. I referred further to a case study by Benoit Ndameu (2003) and a background article by Bryan Curran (now WCS Gabon) and Richard Tshombe (now WCS country director DRC). It is astonishing to see that the critics tirelessly press on with their doubtful suggestions that 'the population estimates provided by Schmidt-Soltau appear to come from national level census figures for southeastern Cameroon, which includes people who live many km away from the park, and are probably not even aware of its existence, let alone impacted by it' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 80). As they indicate that during their 1995 fieldwork they found just over 5,000 people living in nine villages (and the associated Ba'aka camps) closest to today's Lake Lobeke Park (Curran *et al.* 2009: 11), there is not much difference to my data as I have added people from further away using the area for hunting, additional Baka utilizing the area for their Molongo [Molongos are long-term foraging expeditions by Ba'aka communities, which mostly follows annual patterns, covers hundreds of kilometers, and can last up to five months (Yasuoka 2006)] and those people from the settlements along the border rivers, which indicated that they depend to some extent on the forests inside the park. If my critics were to add up these data on population not covered under their own study and consider demographic dynamics, it would become very clear that both data sets are very similar.

In 2007, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF)—certainly not an organization known for an anticonservation agenda—conducted a Country Portfolio Evaluation in Cameroon (GEF-EO 2009), which focused among other regions on the Lake Lobeke and the Boumba-Bek National Parks as their creation was supported with GEF funds. The report concludes that the two parks 'led to the physical displacement of several Baka

communities and economic displacement of around 8,000 people who depend on the parklands for more than 50 percent of their livelihoods. Communities near Lobéké National Park reported some losses of customary rights over the forest, and livelihoods have been affected by crop-raiding. There are currently no mechanisms for managing human-wildlife conflict. Although WWF and other stakeholders are working to put in place mechanisms to create incentives for community support for conservation, some local communities view the park and projects as providing little benefits to alleviate impoverishment or mitigate restrictions in access' (GEF-EO 2009: 39). While my critics claim that they 'have been promoting integration and participation of Baka pygmy communities in overall natural resource management processes in southeast Cameroon' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 10), the findings on the ground are different: The GEF highlights that 'communities had little awareness of the park management plan or its implementation' and that 'many of the local communities, particularly the indigenous Baka pygmies and Bangandos perceive the project—and the (Lake Lobeke National) Park—as negative because it restricts them from subsistence hunting, and alternative resource extraction opportunities are lacking (although there are ongoing initiatives to zone areas of the park where Baka can extract resources)' (GEF-EO 2009: 49). To prevent that my critics again try to suggest that the findings from GEF are 'based on cursory survey methods and are, as such, unreliable' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 4), it should be noted that the findings were discussed at two workshops with active participation from WCS and WWF and other conservation groups. Further the government made a public declaration that 'we globally agree with the conclusions and recommendations of this report' (GEF-EO 2009: 113); thus acknowledging the fact that people have been displaced and impoverished in the process of national park creation.

My critics suggest that 'many of the area residents have indicated that they would be willing to support total protection of a core area (even if their own activities were limited there) if an adequate amount of forest were also set aside for traditional subsistence and economic activities' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 11). This contradicts the WCS statement that 'with the exception of some dry season fishing spots, they had no need to go to the proposed protected area' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 11) as it seems illogical that they ask for 'forests', if they lose 'fishing spots'. The critique indicates that compensation has been provided in the form of community forests and community hunting zones (ZICGC). Unfortunately, these areas are too small to sustain traditional subsistence and economic activities. Logo *et al.* (2007) documented that the 15 ZICGCs in the region generated an average income of USD 0.78 per person per annum. This cannot be considered 'adequate' compensation. Another case of inadequate compensation exists in the critique's argument that 'user rights of the local populations were not prohibited' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 81). The authors should have added that this provision is limited to those cases where user rights are considered to be of no threat to the park. If my critics would have checked, they would have seen that on the ground, this quite progressive option was never employed and that

nearly any use is prohibited. Therefore, it is quite difficult to accept nonrealized management options and nonfunctional compensation measures as proof that nobody faced any physical or economical displacement. In contrast, the very existence of these measures suggests that GEF and BMZ, which funded these conservation initiatives, understood that the creation of the two parks caused indeed the physical and economic displacement of local populations.

Once more, in light of the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park (Central African Republic) which displaced 350 Aka and economically displaced additional rural populations, the critique claims that ‘no people or settlements were moved when the protected area complex was created, and two-thirds of the area was left open for people to continue to hunt, fish and collect forest products using legal methods’ (Curran *et al.* 2009: 13). I have problems following this argument. Why does the fact that two-thirds of the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Special Reserve (3,159 sq. km) is not fully protected, suggest that nobody was displaced from the remaining one-third, i.e., the fully protected Dzanga-Ndoki National Park (1,120 sq. km)? Further, my critics could have consulted a WCS sponsored book—quoted in my article—which clearly confirms my fieldwork findings and highlights that the ‘park simultaneously restricts Aka hunting activities in particular by virtually eliminating the Mossapoula forest camping range’ (Noss 2001, 329), i.e., displacing the indigenous Aka from their land. It is highly likely that more people have been evicted from the region. In 2004, I was asked whether I could facilitate the resettlement of 12 villages along the Sangha, which forms the border between the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park (CAR) and the Lake Lobeke National Park (Cameroon). This consultancy never materialized after the project officials obtained access to an earlier version of my publications. My critics acknowledge that in 2008 the population of the fishing camp Nyangoute has been displaced on the notion that it had been established after the creation of the park and that it therefore has been an ‘illegal settlement’. They claim further that ‘the displacement has been voluntary, involving two families (about 20 people) who were compensated with housing, fields and funds for small livestock breeding’ (Curran *et al.* 2009: 14). I have not been there, so cannot judge this, but one might want to ask, whether to compensate fisher folk with farms and livestock leads to sustainable results and it certainly shows that my critics’ claim that ‘resettlement has not happened, nor is it planned’ (Curran *et al.* 2009: 4) is not factual.

Regarding the Odzala National Park (Congo), the critique refers to publications by the Yale-based Sangha River Network (Eves *et al.* 1998) and suggests that displacement took place only when the park was created in 1935 and not when it was enlarged from 2,800 sq. km to 13,500 sq. km in 2001. If my critics would have read Eves *et al.* (1998) more carefully, they would have seen that ‘the ECOFAC [Conservation et utilisation rationnelle des ECOSystèmes Forestiers d’Afrique Centrale] program plans to extend the buffer zone to include customary lands. In fact, gathering and fishing zones are now only available to those individuals holding high-priced licenses. (...) Customary lands extend beyond the present

demarcation of “village exploitation zones.” Consequently, the local people are deprived of access to their traditional lands, and must purchase licenses to exploit resources that they believe are theirs by customary right’ (Joiris 1998: 137). Even one of my critics indicated in a study for the EU ‘that the areas used by inhabitants of Lebango, Olemé and Mbandza extend far into the Odzala National Park. ... These expeditions have stopped since the arrival of ECOFAC has provided the resources to control entry by people without permits into the protected area’. Consequently, Ms. Maisels documented that the villagers requested that ‘ECOFAC should compensate the people for loss of revenue previously gained by commerce of bushmeat/products of cuillette’ (Maisels 1996: 93). This request is made in response to economic displacement and confirms my fieldwork findings. Therefore, this is another example where the critique’s allegations were unsubstantiated and proven to be wrong by their own work.

My critics assert with reference to their studies about the Nouabale-Ndoki National Park (Congo), that ‘there are no signs of recent human habitation within the area of the park’ (Curran *et al.* 2009: 14). Jerome Lewis, a well-known scholar on indigenous peoples from the School of Oriental and African Studies, provides in his PhD thesis an insight into these areas. He encountered that the ‘experienced conservationists mapping out local land use and traditional territories, completely ignore[ed] Mbendjele’ land use and traditional areas. When I asked, an American conservationist told me, “Aaa, but they are everywhere in the forest” (Lewis 2002: 262). Lewis further documents in detail that every inch of the park is used and owned by specific Mbendjele’ communities (Lewis 2002: 50, 72) and questions why ‘conservationists justify the draconic repression of local peoples’ traditional rights, in addition to their exclusion from huge areas of forests’ (Lewis 2002: 257). Indeed, a very valid question. My critics again ignore the findings of this detailed and very relevant study to their work. While they claim that there is ‘no recent human habitation within the area of the park’, their WCS colleague Mike Fay reported in his Congo Trek Diary: ‘When we traveled up the upper Mokola River we found camp after camp after camp. These camps have mostly been abandoned because park authorities from Nouabalé-Ndoki have made sweeps’ (National Geographic October 24, 1999). These are forced evictions which are considered by the United Nations as violation of fundamental human rights. While the United Nations has ‘urged governments to undertake immediate measures, at all levels, aimed at eliminating the practices or forced evictions’ (Resolution 1993/77), WCS, supported by the U.S. tax payers, seems fully in support of such action and satisfied with its outcomes.

For the five parks in the larger Sangha region (Nouabale-Ndoki, Odzala, Dzanga-Ndoki, Lake Lobeke, and Boumba Bek), the critics may also wish to consult the Yale-supported studies of the Sangha region network (Eves *et al.* 1998) kindly suggested by the WCS for my further reference: ‘Recent linguistic, archeological, ethnohistorical, and anthropological studies have shown that the Sangha River region ... has long been an area of migration due to economic, political, and social

contact. ... The arrival of concession companies ... also marked the migration of populations toward the forests of the south' (Mogba & Freudenberg 1998: 107). 'Thus the upper-Sangha was not virgin territory when contemporary conservationists began to set up camp for the inventory and monitoring of the area's rich wildlife resources. It has not been protected from the world by its "impenetrable" forests. ... Local communities were severely affected by systematically violent practices that were in part clandestine, and were often covered up by a small but particularly pernicious group' (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1998: 83). This scathing penetration continues today under the bold flag of biodiversity conservation and my critics sail proudly aside attacking all, who question the still persistently sloppy standards of park-induced resettlement.

The main critique on my research findings on displacements from the Altos de Nsok National Park (Equatorial Guinea) seems to be 'that no research permission to undertake any assessment ... was secured' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 14). It might be useful to add that Equatorial Guinea has one of the worst human rights records in Africa and that the country was and is out of bounce for open research on human rights violations. One certainly can discuss the detailed figures on this park as my research has been undertaken in 1998, but how can my critics quote the data from Jaime Pérez de Val, which suggest that 'the human population within the park is small, but probably exceeds 5,000 in the surrounding villages' (Pérez de Val 2001: 271) and then summarize that 'resettlement has not happened, nor is it planned' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 4).

In view of the 13 national parks in Gabon, the authors dare to go one step further, claiming that 'not a single individual has been displaced by the creation of any of the parks' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 83). This is a rather bold statement, which stands in *clear* contradiction to my publications, which emphasized that people have been physically and economically displaced from at least three parks: Loando, Ivindo (both managed by WCS), and Moukalaba-Doudou (managed by WWF). That my fieldwork findings are correct has been confirmed by studies conducted by WCS and WWF themselves: Blaney *et al.* (1998), Blaney & Thibault (2001), and Mboulou (2005), in view of the Loando and Moukalaba-Doudou National Parks and Angoué *et al.* (2002) and in view of the Ivindo National Park. It is worth noting that Angoué's figure (1,568 people) for Ivindo is far higher than the one I used. There is further a growing corpus of independent studies on displacements from parks in Gabon: A recent case study by CIFOR focuses on the economic displacement of populations from the Ivindo National Park (Sassen and Wan 2006) and a book by Mark Dowie (2009) discusses the issue in general. Considering the absence of a *single* study in support of the critique's claims, the authors' argumentation becomes increasingly bizarre. They indicate that 'a recent unpublished study by Kramkimel *et al.* (2005) made demonstrably erroneous claims that 14,000 people were displaced by the creation of parks in Gabon, a figure which has been completely discredited by the Gabonese National Park Service' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 83). This is rather surprising, since the study by Kramkimel *et al.* (MEFEPEPN

2005) was not only elaborated together with the former WWF country director (Prosper Obame Ondo), based on a large number of baseline studies including those quoted above, discussed publicly with all stakeholders and finally endorsed by the Ministère de l'économie forestière, des eaux, de la pêche et de l'environnement charge de la protection de la nature and the Conseil National des Parcs Nationaux. It also triggered the allocation of USD 2 million of national funds to implement the social and environmental management plan, including compensation measures for those displaced from national parks. The report and its detailed resettlement policy framework, resettlement process framework, and indigenous peoples plan has been further reviewed and deemed satisfactory by the World Bank and the GEF and disclosed at local level and the World Bank Webpage. It seems unlikely that the National Park Service, as my critics claim 'discredited' these documents, as they have formally endorsed them as part of the loan agreement with the World Bank, provided funds for their implementation and started to put them into practice. It seems rather strange that my critics continue to claim that 'there is no resettlement policy or compensation plan in place' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 17) while these studies have been officially been endorsed by the government and are publically available through the World Bank webpage (MEFEPEPN 2005).

Even their own officials contradict the unsubstantiated claims of my critics such as that 'to date, not a single individual has been physically displaced by the creation of any of the Parks' in Gabon (Curran *et al.* 2009: 17). The director of WCS's Africa Program (email message Deutsch 2007) as well as Lee White, the former WCS country director and present advisor to the Gabonese president (pers. comm. White 2008), indicated that the creation of the parks had physically displaced fewer than 200 individuals. Based on our surveys, we know that this figure is significantly too low; nevertheless, their statements confirm that it is not zero as claimed by my critics. In the end, the picture in view of Gabon is the same as those outlined above. The claim by my critics that I used 'incorrect or inappropriate data or at least data, which have been interpreted incorrectly' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 75) is proven wrong and the statement that 'not a single individual has been displaced by the creating of any of the parks' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 17) is obviously false and unfounded.

Let me sum up:

1. The critique was first published rather late at an obscure place and without offering me a chance to respond. This suggests that it is not a desire to enhance the quality of data which drives my critics, but to use the question of the quality to attack the argument. As they can no longer openly defend their practice of forced evictions for the sake of animals and trees, they attempt to defend ongoing human rights violations by discrediting those who document their wrong doing. This will not work as there is a growing corpus of independent case studies, which all document that the creation of protected areas in nearly all cases result in the physical and/or economic displacement of rural populations. Therefore, my critics' claim that creating more

and more parks with millions of hectares has no serious social impacts is increasingly worrying and sufficient grounds for excluding them from access to public funding.

2. They claim that they 'can find no unequivocal evidence of people having been forcibly or involuntarily displaced from the protected areas' (Maisels *et al.* 2007: 75) managed by them. This is rather perplexing, as in response to their allegations, I have documented beyond doubt not only that their claim is incorrect, but that they know very well that large numbers of people have been displaced from these and other parks as documented in their own studies. This suggests that their critique is not undertaken in good faith, but as a strategy to camouflage ongoing violations of fundamental human rights. This strategy will not work out for reasons I have outlined above.
3. My critics conclude that 'if indeed there were hundreds of thousands of 'conservation refugees' in Central Africa, with the impending prospect of many more, then there would be a clear moral case to be made against conservation' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 22). This shows that they have not understood the debate and the overarching concept of sustainable development and human rights. Whatever the numbers are, they need to acknowledge that they have violated fundamental human rights and that not everybody who tries to enhance the situation by identifying the issues is an enemy of conservation. This signals that they are still in their trenches and not yet prepared to engage in an open dialog while claiming so (Curran *et al.* 2009: 24). Similarly, they claim that 'most conservation organizations are committed to operating in a socially responsible fashion and in collaboration with local communities' (Curran *et al.* 2009: 24), and consequently one would assume that WWF and WCS have joined other conservation organizations all around the world and adopted policies to rule out physical and economic displacements from protected areas. Unfortunately, they have not done so and one might ask why, if indeed good science, do-no-harm conservation and human rights are valid objectives for my critics. It is not too late and any move in that direction is a laudable effort. Besides stopping their support for forced evictions, my critics should comply with international human rights standards and 'provide immediate restitution (...) to persons and communities which have been forcibly evicted' (UN Resolution 1993/77).
4. Finally, it cannot be denied that there is a ubiquitously growing, progressive interest in putting an end to the business of human disenfranchisement. Closed minded, one-sided critiques like the one discussed in this article will not have a place in this movement for improvement. Those conservationists who routinely practice unethical population displacements, despite all of the commonly accepted standards in place, will soon fall extinct. Mahatma Gandhi once said that 'first they ignore you; then they laugh at you; then they fight you; then you win!' Perhaps the critique discussed here indicates that reform is on the brink of victory.

Biographical note

Schmidt-Soltau, Kai (PhD Sociology Münster/Germany 1996) served as senior lecturer for sociology and anthropology at the University of Buea and as independent social scientist for the World Bank, EU, GEF, KfW, GTZ, etc., while being based in Cameroon from 1996 to 2007. In 2007 and 2008, he was responsible for compliance assurance with ADB's Policies on Involuntary Resettlement and Indigenous Peoples. Since then he is director of his own company 'Social Science Solutions' based in Zug/Switzerland and serves as senior advisor to the African Task Force of the Prince of Wales' Rainforest Project and director of the Environmental and Social Department of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline.

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