Sustaining the multi-functionality of the Zamfara reserve in semi-arid Nigeria: what is the role of co-management?

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Introduction Unhealthy competition and conflicts among the diverse users (herders, farmers, fishermen, etc.) of the natural resources (pasture, water, land, etc.) in the Zamfara reserve, Nigeria have undermined the reserve's capacity to serve its intended multi-functional roles. The reserve (3, 650 km^2), which was established in 1919 with 4 enclave villages where farmers live and cultivate crops, was meant also to provide pasture and water for Fulani herdsmen. Vast numbers of people are, however, becoming landless or near landless in the reserve. Powerful non-local actors are forcing their way into the reserve area and are extracting resources with no respect to traditional customs and rules. Umar (2004), for example, has shown how politicians and traditional rulers, with the support of the Zamfara state government, have converted over 100 ha of common grazing land in the reserve to private farms. This paper offers a model for co-management of the shrinking natural resources in the reserve, which the paper assumes, may help in maintaining the reserve's multi-functional nature. Co-management is a pluralist approach to managing natural resources, incorporating a variety of partners in a variety of roles, generally to the end goals of environmental conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and the equitable sharing of resource-related benefits and responsibilities (Viswanathan, undated).

Materials and methods Experience gained through participation in the EU-sponsored INCO-DC project, which has been conducting research on how to revitalise the Zamfara reserve, was used as the basis for designing the co-management model. This paper assumes that if co-management is adopted it will provide a situation in which all social actors in the reserve will negotiate, define and guarantee amongst themselves a fair sharing of the reserve's management functions, entitlements and responsibilities.

Results The paper suggests mechanisms for involving all major stakeholders in establishing co-management institutions in the reserve. Some of the mechanisms include 1) a participatory, bottom-up approach, 2) building on existing popular local institutions such as the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Associations, farmers' clubs, etc., 3) making the process flexible and adaptable to fit local contexts, complexities and needs, 4) allowing co-management groups to determine their own boundaries and membership, their management structures and procedures, and their constitutions, bye-laws, rules, sanctions, and natural resources management plans and 5) providing training and sensitisation for the stakeholders. The paper has further identified 1) roles the stakeholders should play in co-management of the reserve, 2) ways for strengthening and sustaining the co-management institutions if established, and 3) the need for incorporating participatory monitoring and evaluation in the co-management institutions as a tool for ensuring and sustaining success.

Conclusions The paper concludes that if co-management is adopted in running the affairs of the Zamfara reserve it will provide a situation in which all stakeholders will negotiate, define and guarantee amongst themselves a fair sharing of the reserve's management functions, entitlements and responsibilities. Using the approach in the reserve may thus not only ensure sustaining its multi-functionality but may also help in ensuring peaceful coexistence among its multiple users.

References

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